

## SPECIAL REPORT: BOLD NEW OFFICES



At Nokia Mobile Phones, you can work, meet or simply stride along a gallery designed as an airy, comfortable blend of Finnish and California design and attitude. This connecting gallery runs the length of the building, like an urban street, but nature — revered in both cultures — is always part of the picture, and just a step or two away. Nokia's architecture and interior design has received several design awards, including an Orchid in the 2000 Orchids & Onions community awareness program. *David Hewitt and Anne Garrison photos*

By Ann Jarmusch  
ARCHITECTURE CRITIC

**F**or many people, work has become more than a necessity. It's a way of life.

No longer are office workers bound to ironclad 9-to-5 shifts spent in a windowless cubicle. Social and technological changes and freeway frenzy are affecting how, when and where work is accomplished.

**DUO DUTY:**  
Home office solutions for working couples. In Homescape

The brave new world of office design is now as wide and deep as cyberspace, as mobile as a cell phone, as flexible as fiber optics and as iconoclastic as an iMac.

San Diego firms, especially the burgeon-



# Working TO PLEASE

Firms  
look  
outside  
the box  
for  
designs

iMac.

San Diego firms, especially the burgeoning crop of high technology, new media and biotech ventures, are taking cues from a young, new work force that's unencumbered and e-connected. As a result, office walls are coming down, corner offices are giving way to democratic meeting rooms-with-a-view and the hours in a work day flow more freely to accommodate personal time, exercise and fun.

Whether housed in new suburban technology parks or reclaimed historic buildings, San Diego companies are opting to use unconventional, stimulating office design and the comforts of home to recruit and retain employees. They're betting that workers who are encouraged to play a game of pool in the company lounge or spin away miles and cares on bikes in an on-site fitness center will be more productive, innovative and loyal.

Instead of relying on exterior architectural

SEE Office, I-2



This western tip of Nokia's site, which overlooks Interstate 15, would have become a sea of parked cars if it weren't for Davis/Davis Architects, the San Diego firm that designed the building's exterior with McGraw Baldwin Architects. They suggested using this promontory with sweeping views as a dramatic work-dining setting, with indoor and outdoor tables and an amphitheater nearby. In addition, the jutting, multifaceted building perched atop a mesa is now familiar to thousands of freeway travelers.

Dashes of whimsy and color help distinguish the second of Nokia's buildings from the first, which is more serene and subdued. The contrast is intentional, offering employees a variety of environments for lunching or working. In one window-lined corner lies a surprise: Park Cafe, where European cafe society meets Southern California patio living. This flower-sprigged retreat with floating "clouds" and picket fence helps even the most work-focused engineer lighten up and relax.





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CONTINUED FROM PAGE I-1

appearances to make a statement, companies are turning inward with gusto. They're using interior architecture and design as an effective means to communicate an image and then some: their mission and values.

They're also intent on capitalizing on San Diego's balmy climate, creating work spaces indoors and out. Brainstorming crackles at shaded patio tables, business lunches take place amid native boulders a stone's throw from desktops, night owls take in the moon from a balcony.

Significantly, most of these offices are being created by seasoned San Diego design firms who know and love this region. They have a knack for creating workplaces that resonate with the area's health-oriented lifestyle, luminous sunshine and casual atmosphere.

Here's a glimpse inside the new offices of several San Diego businesses that have adopted a balance of dynamic and quiet design to attract and inspire employees and customers. Business leaders say they've also noticed that what's good for people pays off on the bottom line.

### Nokia Mobile Phones

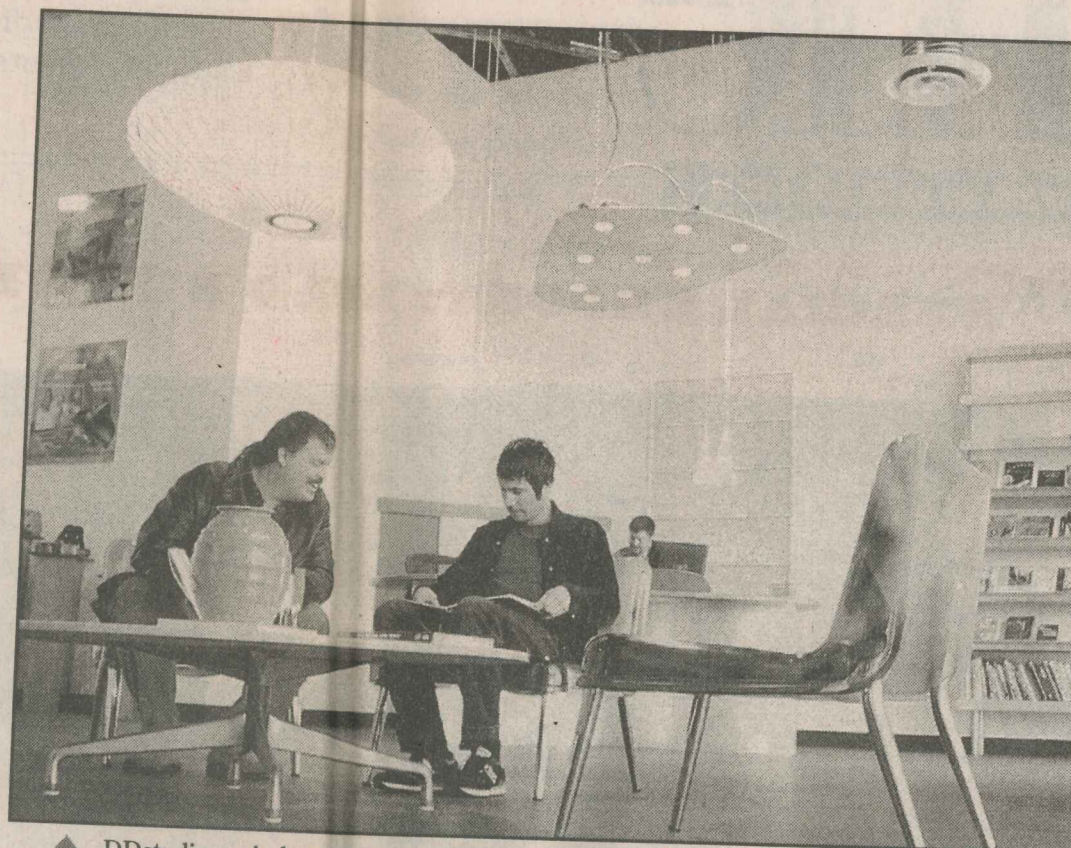
The first thing you notice when visiting Nokia's two new buildings perched above I-15 in Sabre Springs is the sumptuous yet quiet combination of interior design and furnishings in mostly muted colors. Natural textures and materials — from ceremonial birch branches held upright in containers to sisal underfoot, leaf-patterned fabrics and rough, paper-clad walls — echo the company's 150-year-old Finnish roots.

So does the streamlined simplicity of Nokia's sleek, modernist interior architecture and furnishings inspired or designed by Alvar Aalto, the great 20th-century Finnish architect. Shimmering, silvery metal elements, warm wood paneling and boldly striped chairs blend into a sophisticated, serene whole for confidential meetings and research and development.

"Finns are very humble people who prefer understated elegance," said Jamie Leary-Erickson, Nokia's San Diego facilities manager. The first building, completed 14 months ago, includes a full-service cafe with indoor and outdoor dining areas (plus boulders to sit on), a fitness center and a high-tech learning center for employees, in addition to offices and a warren of conference rooms.

By design, the newer, second building is by turns more introverted so engineers can focus on their work without interruption and more colorful and playful. Here is where colleagues can shoot pool or play pingpong to build camaraderie, or settle into a comfortable chair to relax or check their e-mail on a laptop.

In a departure from Finnish minimalism, a fanciful little dining room called Park Cafe is a visual kick, with its picket fence, lampshades smothered in rosebuds and cloud-shaped mirrors hung from the ceiling. Divan + Studio, the La Jolla design firm responsible for both Nokia building interiors, de-



DDstudio, an industrial design firm, wastes no time in letting visitors know they've stepped into a working studio, where a classic modern George Nelson light fixture (top left) and low Eames table are daily inspirations. Charles Curbun, who heads the firm, designed the office interior and some furnishings, such as the hovering UFO-style light. The spacious, adventurous environment is meant to engage clients and stimulate the staff. *Charles Curbun*

### Take a virtual tour

Getting past the front door of some of San Diego's trendiest new offices may be difficult if you aren't an employee or customer. Few are open to the public and many in the high-tech arena take elaborate security precautions. But if you have access to a computer, you can take an expanded visual tour of some of the offices reported on here. For a virtual walk-through, sign on to our Web site [www.uniontrib.com](http://www.uniontrib.com).

**SignOn**  
SAN DIEGO

signed this refreshing room in response to the spirit of Nokia's stylish collection of cell phone covers.

### DDstudio

Designer Charles Curbun took a leap when he decided to move DDstudio, his industrial design firm, into a nondescript new building for lease amid others like it in a Carlsbad office park. Instead of impressing clients with a signature building, Curbun counts on wow-ing them as soon as they enter the high-style office and studio he created within a glass-lined shell with soaring 25-foot ceilings.

Curbun carved undulating spaces, including a kitchen with a pool table, out of the shell's vast emptiness, creating

an unforgettable calling card for his creative abilities. He took delight in making a design statement he would live with and stand by.

Curbun designed and built unique tables and a chest of drawers, refinished a modernist credenza he bought on eBay and hauled treasures, such as an early, Jetson-style TV set, from Arizona shops. It cost him quite a bit more to incorporate some recycled materials, but his environmental conscience drove the decision to use fuzzy, striped floor covering made from tires and color-flecked translucent wall screens that began life as milk containers with bright-colored lids.

Products and other DDstudio designs are displayed on the way to a large conference room or into the studio, where designers work out in the open at individual desks. The open-plan arrangement aids team-