

**You might have received this** offer in the mail: Choose seven free albums today, buy one more in the next year, and get another four free. It practically sounds like a gift. But the giver, BMG Columbia House—which recently changed its name to Direct Group North America—unfortunately did not receive equally generous treatment from the real-estate gods when president and chief executive Stuart Goldfarb went shopping for New York office space. Searching for the perfect downtown location, he was offered instead the equivalent of a football field and a half in an undistinguished tower in a seedy part of Midtown. Not exactly what he had in mind.

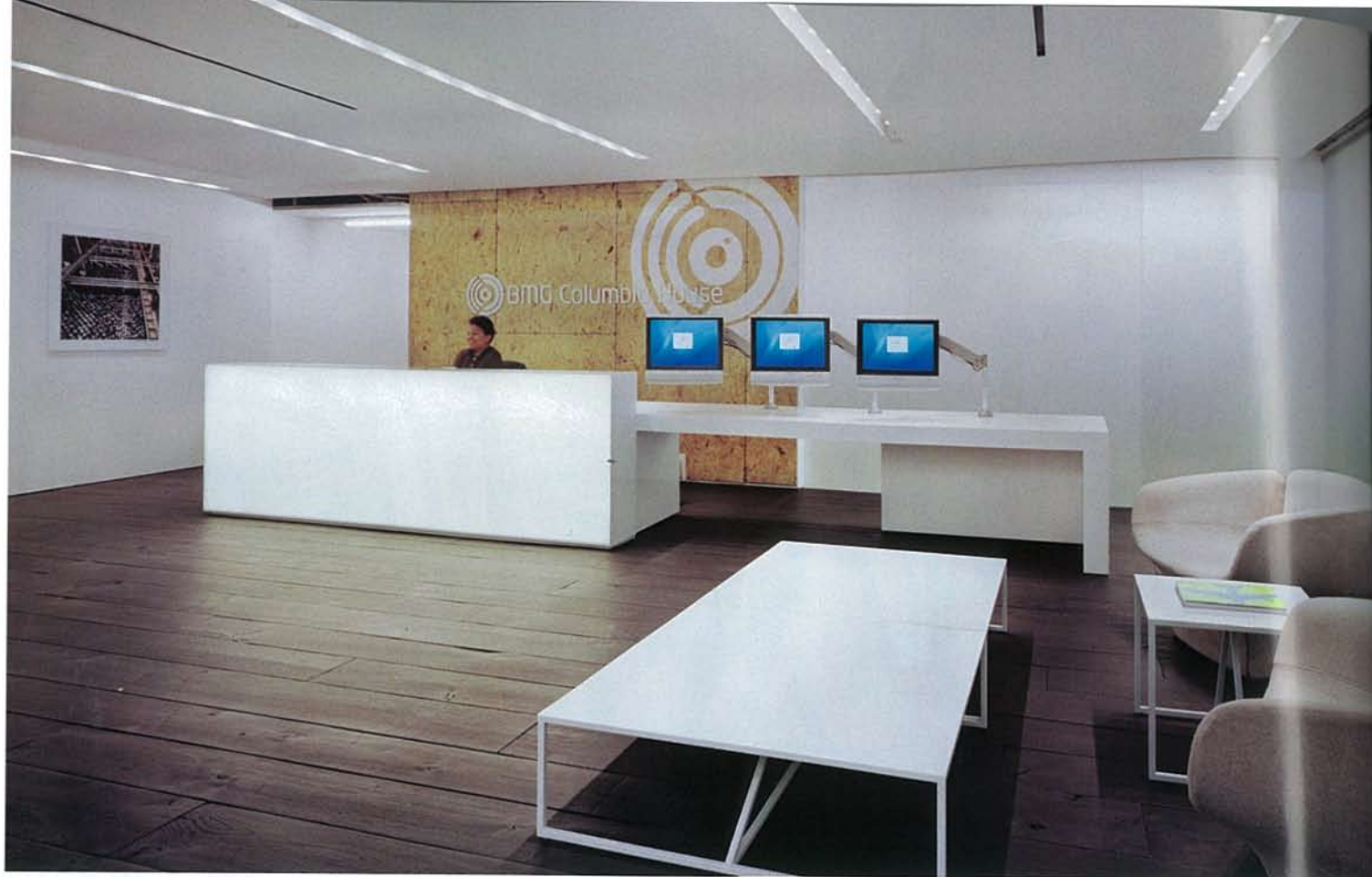
With no other options, Goldfarb nevertheless rented the 105,000-square-foot →  
*Site-specific paintings by Doze Green and other giants of street art enliven the oriented strand-board lining two 450-foot-long hallways.*

## Genster Rocks

Street art gives New York music marketer Direct Group North America the edge

*text: craig kellogg photography: david joseph*





space—that 450-foot-long swath, plus part of the floor below. In deference to his downtown dream, Gensler design principal Peter Wang and design director Stefanie Shunk left the space as unfinished as possible. "Raw was his flavor," Wang explains, frowning just a little at the memory of ceilings shaggy with gray spray-on fireproofing. Painting would only add weight and pull the fluff down, so the designers resorted to camouflage. They fixed gypsum-board squares between beams, allowing just a telltale smidge of the furry fireproofing to show.

The better to contrast with the roughness, a new gypsum-board ceiling and walls are painted smooth, bright Decorator's White—Shunk's old favorite shade of dove white "looks dirty

**Top:** Patricia Urquiola's Bloomy chairs and a set of painted steel tables furnish reception. Flooring is ebonized French white oak. **Bottom:** The elevator lobby's ceiling is outfitted with acrylic acoustical panels.

**Opposite top:** Fluorescent fixtures intersect a mural by Green. **Opposite center:** A painting by David Ellis depicts dancing stereo speakers. **Opposite bottom:** Framed photography by the likes of Henry Diltz is lit by industrial halogen Par-20 floodlights.



to me now," she admits. Meticulous minimalism sets off carefully considered industrial details, such as exposed fluorescent tubes surface-mounted to avoid conflicts with the structure and services always lurking above ceilings. (And a great convenience compared with recessed cans.)

Avoiding further obstacles, Gensler performed three full rounds of review on the ductwork running overhead. Areas of acoustic-tile ceiling are now edged in gypsum-board, sealing off space that would otherwise need fire sprinklers.

You'd think that such a large, open office for 340 people in the music business would reverberate with thumping bass lines, even considering the aforementioned islands of acoustical ceiling. Shunk credits the floor with

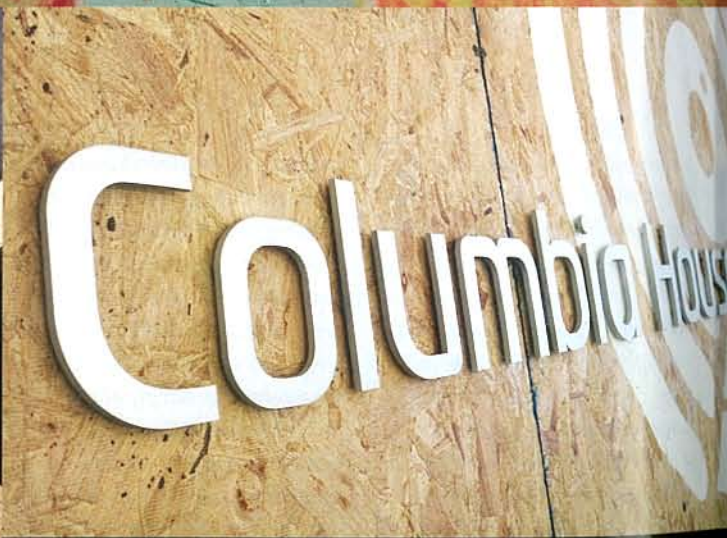
maintaining the overall hush. Her team gave up on scrubbing the existing concrete slab when a contractor's liquid cleaner began leaking onto the downstairs neighbors. Instead, adhesive left over from carpet and floor tile, long gone, was simply encapsulated beneath poured resin—cement-colored, of course, and resilient, to tone down the clicky-clack of high heels.

In reception, the three staff coffee bars, and the lunchroom, flooring is distressed oak tongue-and-groove wide planks with an ebonized finish that's wearing beautifully. "You don't look at them and say, 'This floor's taken a beating,'" Shunk notes, pausing near an espresso machine. "Stuart is addicted to espresso."

LEDs accent the break areas, furnished with a mix of Tulip →



*"If you're hip to urban culture, you totally know these guys"*



*Top: Rich Jacobs painted this hallway mural. Bottom, from left: This painting is by Rostarr. The original aluminum logo, cut by water jet, stands out against the OSB paneling in reception.*



*Top, from left: Employees have customized Robert Reuter and Charles Rozier's AutoStrada workstations. Maya Hayuk's mural brightens a hallway. Bottom, from left: Rostarr painted the tribal design in a coffee bar. Part of the Green piece can be seen from the filing area.*



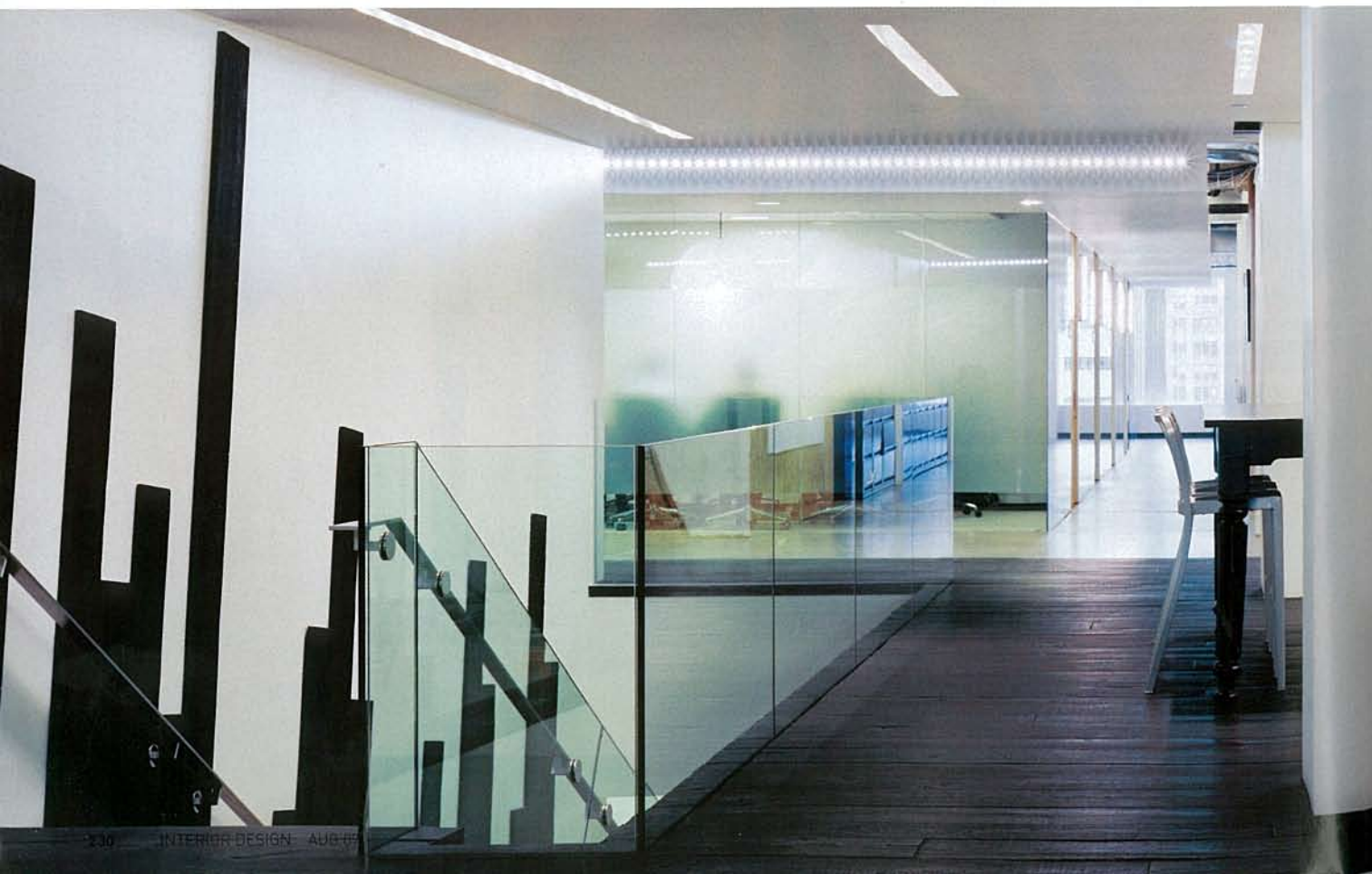
tables, French country tables, and Philippe Starck's versions of the classic aluminum 1006 Navy chair. Similar seating appears in a conference room, while Patricia Urquiola's pastoral-mod Bloomy chairs, in two sizes, furnish reception. Elsewhere, Florence Knoll pieces were recycled from the more formal former BMG Columbia House office and reupholstered in natural fibers.

To add texture and scale, Wang and Shunk pushed for the two full-length hallways to be lined with murals painted on (removable) sheets of inexpensive oriented strand-board. When the OSB remained a blank canvas for weeks after move-in, some in the accounting department

began to ask Goldfarb when the walls would be finished. The answer came with the arrival of a group of street artists.

"If you're hip to urban culture, you totally know these guys," Wang says. Among the chosen five—Rostarr, David Ellis, Rich Jacobs, Maya Hayuk, and Doze Green—the latter cut his teeth tagging subway cars in the 1970's. Here, the group had free rein. Shunk marvels, "There were no sketches to say, 'This is what I am doing on the wall.'"

Fast-forward to a Friday night as the artists gathered with brushes and spray cans in hand. "It was a big, wild party," Wang recalls. "Stuart was totally down with the vibe." At around 3:00 AM





the next day, one of the artists' friends, lounging in Goldfarb's office, took a look at its oversize OSB barn-style sliders and announced, "I want to paint your doors, too." And that was one offer too good to refuse. ▮

PROJECT TEAM: ROBERT CATALDO; STEVEN ZAWESKI; LARRY TAORMINA; JOSEPH BRANCATO. CHAIRS (RECEPTION): MOROSO. TABLES: BLU DOT. FLOORING: THROUGH BOIS CHAMOIS. CEILING PANELS (LOBBY): EFFECT. GLASSWORK (LOBBY, STAIRWELL): METROLIGHT. TASK CHAIRS (OFFICE AREA): HERMAN MILLER. WORKSTATIONS, PEDESTAL CHAIR: KNOLL. PENDANT FIXTURE (CONFERENCE ROOM): MOOOI THROUGH DESIGN WITHIN REACH. SEATING (CONFERENCE ROOM, COFFEE BAR): EMECO. TABLES: THROUGH EL PASO IMPORT COMPANY. CHAIR (OFFICE): FRITZ HANSEN. MILLWORK: NORDIC INTERIOR. LIGHTING CONSULTANT: HDLC ARCHITECTURAL LIGHTING DESIGN. STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: R. SHATARAH CONSULTING ENGINEERS. MEP: RDA. GENERAL CONTRACTOR: ICON INTERIORS.

**Opposite top:** In a conference room, Bertjan Pot's pendant fixture hangs above Philippe Starck's chairs. **Opposite center:** Workstations cluster in "studios," framed by blocks of private offices. **Opposite bottom:** Stair treads fold up the wall to form an abstract skyline.

**Top:** The stair's balustrade of structural glass supports a stainless-steel handrail. **Bottom:** Doors with cutout pulls, lined in plastic laminate, slide back to reveal Arne Jacobsen's Swan chair in the office of the president and chief executive.

