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Deft Punk

‘Coolest office in America?’ Contrasting color temperatures help a Chicago tech company make its case

BY PAUL TARRICONE

Steampunk

Noun

A subgenre of science fiction that has a historical setting and typically features 19th century steam-powered machinery rather than advanced technology.

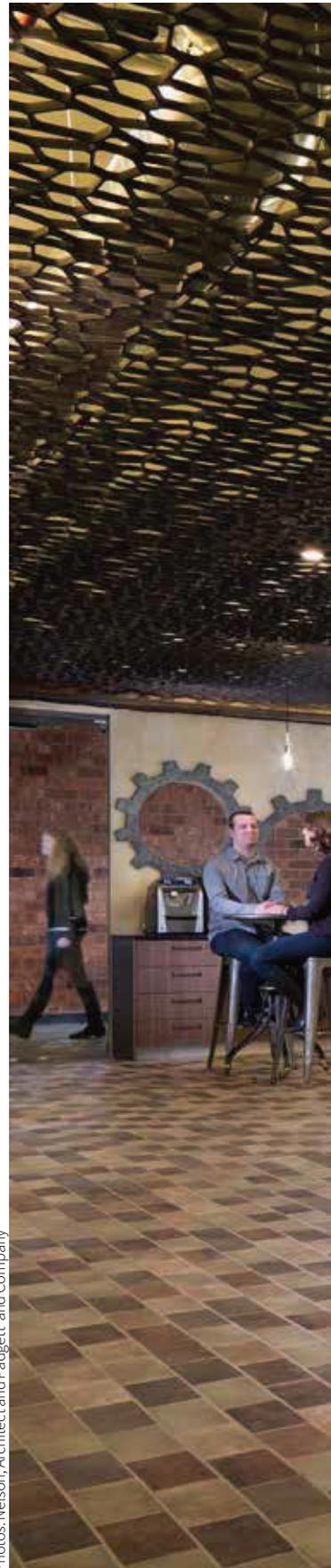
The setting for Steampunk, it turns out, is also a downtown Chicago office in the 21st century. Tech company SAP Fieldglass, a maker of workplace management software, has integrated the motif across its 60,000-sq ft space. But Steampunk is just the start; the office also features porch swings, large garage doors, a cobblestone alley lined with streetlights, a faux tattoo shop and a hammock room. Oh, and there are work areas, too—a combination of open office and collaborative spaces with just a few private offices. “We have the coolest offices in Chicago for sure,” company president Rob Brimm told online publisher *ChicagoInno*. “I’ll even go on record; they might be the coolest offices in America.”

Much of that hip quotient can be attributed to the work of architect/design firm Nelson and Gwen Grossman Lighting Design, Chicago, which received a 2016 IES Illumination Award of Merit for the project. The client’s objective, says Gwen Grossman, was to “create a space to help it retain its young talent. A space that makes them want to come to work. In a lot of our projects, we’re seeing that Millennials expect a cool, fun office environment.”

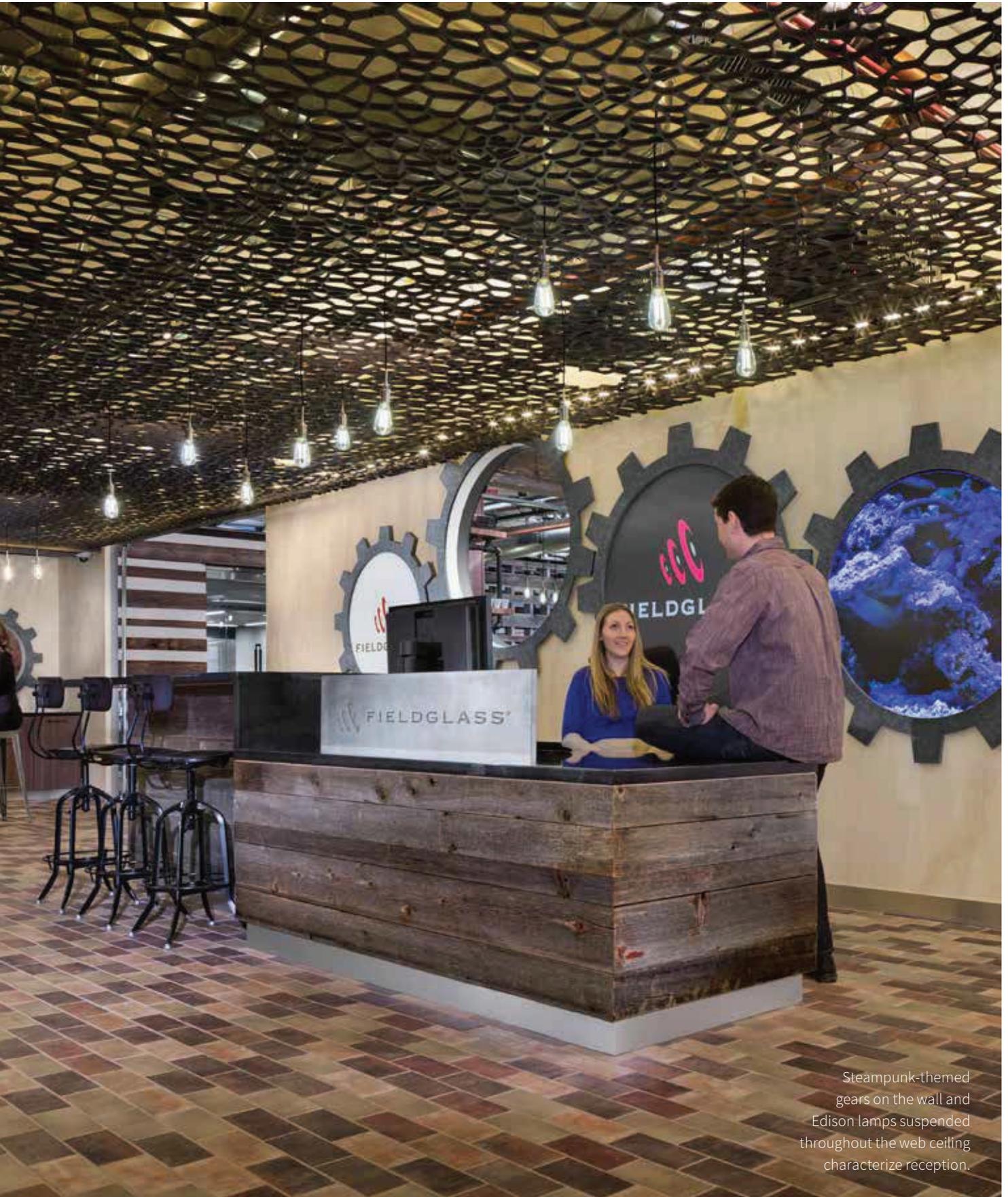
Architect Nelson’s idea of fun was Steampunk—“a raw, industrial, dark, gothic feel,” says Grossman, which would brand SAP Fieldglass as cutting edge. The question then became, *how do we translate Steampunk into a lighting plan?* “Luckily I was able to meet with the client, and we talked a lot about color temperature and comfort. They were coming from fluorescent in their previous office with no dimming or adjustability,” says Grossman. “My idea was to take 2200K—a beautiful color temperature—and juxtapose it against 3500K.” Selling that concept to SAP Fieldglass came next. “We definitely had to educate the client. We used a ‘look book’ with images of other projects that showed contrasting color temperatures, and a Kelvin chart to show the idea of warm-to-cool.”

GEARING UP

Visitors get their first glimpse of Steampunk at reception. Mounted to the wall behind the reception desk are oversized “gears,” the middle one displaying the company’s logo. Above is an expansive web ceiling that has been uplit along the perimeter with what Grossman calls “buttery



Photos: Nelson, Architect and Padgett, and Company



Steampunk-themed gears on the wall and Edison lamps suspended throughout the web ceiling characterize reception.



2200K.” Additional sparkle comes from LED Edison lamps randomly suspended throughout the web ceiling. Topping off reception is a linear LED strip mounted to the wall that uplifts the ceiling and provides ambient light to the space.

Two of the gears on the reception wall are actually portals that offer a view into the café, where Grossman opted for 2700K LED direct/indirect luminaires to create a hospitality feel. These fixtures, strategically pocketed to avoid the mechanics of the three garage doors, are supplemented by the raw, exposed Edison lamps to continue the Steampunk theme.

Tying the one-floor space together is “Main Street.” Inspired by the cobblestone alleys of London, Main Street essentially bisects the floor plan with open offices on one side and themed huddle rooms on the other. Grossman’s goal of contrasting color temperature is evident here.





Main Street and the huddle rooms have that 2200K candlelight warmth, while the open offices are 3500K.

The huddle rooms include the tattoo parlor and hammock room, among others. The objective was to graze the back walls of these rooms in 2200K, ensuring “the walls would pop, for people walking down Main Street,” says Grossman. To carry through the Steampunk motif, one huddle room was fitted with caged fixtures over a work table. Conference rooms are adorned with clean gypsum ceilings equipped with 2-in. trimless recessed LED linear fixtures and downlights for a minimalistic approach that allows many different scene options. Suspended LED wall-wash fixtures highlight the stainless steel writeable finish walls. As opposed to the more typical whiteboard walls, the stainless steel offers another nod to Steampunk.

The back walls in these huddle rooms are grazed with light to ensure they will pop for people walking down the cobblestone Main Street.

Rather than whiteboard, a stainless steel writing wall offers an unusual conference room flourish.



The living wall is washed with 4100K light to keep the plants growing in the enclosed environment.



FAST FACTS

- Steampunk is displayed through dark colors, streetlights, bare bulbs and caged fixtures.
- Color temperatures include 2200K, 3500K and limited use of 4100K.
- All fixtures and bulbs are LED.

A TOUCH OF GREEN

Main Street also features two living walls that the green-wall supplier recommended be lighted at 4100K and 100 footcandles. In this case, the walls are lit to that level only at night, to preserve the color temperature scheme established for the daytime hours.

However, CCT deviates in workstation areas. The majority of employees are in open offices where 3500K indirect/direct LED pendants create a “lively juxtaposing atmosphere for the team,” says Grossman. “The idea was to maintain a consistent workplace lighting level and contrast

it with the unique huddle spaces through drastic color temperature shifts.”

For SAP Fieldglass staffers strolling down Main Street, visiting the café and brainstorming in huddle rooms, the new office is not science fiction. This Steampunk setting is very much for real. □

THE DESIGNER



Gwen Grossman, IALD, LC, Member IES (2004), is the founding designer of GGLD, certified in Cook County, IL, as a WBE (Women Owned Business Enterprise).