

Blue chip*

The art collection seals the deal at Bear Stearns, New York, by Gerner Kronick + Valcarcel

By Jen Renzi -- *Interior Design*, August 1, 2003

Forget the corner office—major deals are usually sealed on the 18th hole or over lunch at the Four Seasons. For managing directors at the New York headquarters of financial giant Bear Stearns, however, there's no need to leave the premises, because Gerner Kronick + Valcarcel, Architects, has provided a clubby dining and conference center right on-site. This meeting facility, slipped between cacophonous trading floors and frenetic investment-banking offices, occupies levels 12 and 13 of the company's new 45-story tower by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.

Although GKV used painting, prints, photography, and sculpture throughout the building's 1.2 million square feet, this meeting facility is where artwork features most prominently—from elevator lobbies to corridors and conference rooms. "The design completely shifts your mood, taking you out of high-stress business mode," says GKV principal Randy Gerner, who took charge of the 12th and 13th floors.

Graceful mission-inspired millwork, mahogany venetian blinds, and luxe silk wall coverings impart a gentleman's-club vibe. It's the contemporary art—Claes Oldenburg prints, Sol LeWitt silk screens, April Gornik lithographs—that juice up the otherwise restrained setting. "Bear Stearns taste leans to the traditional, yet it's a high-tech, of-the-minute business," Gerner points out. "The art bridges that divide."

Except for a few sentimental favorites from the old downtown office—a beloved oil painting of the New York Stock Exchange comes to mind—artworks are all newly acquired. Betty Levin of Corporate Art Directions and Lorinda Ash of Ash Fine Art have curated a collection that numbers 1,500 pieces (and growing). As Gerner relates, "We'd describe the mood we were looking for in a particular space, and Betty and Lorinda would bring a selection for us to choose from. Then, in lengthy sessions with the client, we'd review hundreds of pieces at once. If we all liked a work, it was a go." Consensus was more visceral than scientific. "A lot had to do with color and feel," he allows.

Strolling the meeting facility's corridors is an experience akin to gallery hopping. The 12th-floor hallways, illuminated by brushed-bronze picture lights, feature maple wainscoting as well as mahogany chair rails and picture rails. (Much of the artwork is actually wall-mounted, though.) "With up to 15 pieces in a row, it was important to consider how everything would work together," says Gerner, who assembled groupings by artist, color, or subject matter. Hallways on the 13th floor—conference-room central—showcase framed black-and-white photographs from the New York Times collection. Sculpture animates dead ends and vestibule corners. "The pieces read almost as shadows, rather than three-dimensional objects," says Gerner.

Perhaps the best places to linger over art are the dozen executive dining rooms clustered on the 12th floor. Ranging in size from 180 to 500 square feet, all are appointed with silk wall coverings, maple and mahogany millwork, cast-glass pendant fixtures, and antique or antiques-inspired furniture. Artworks shift the vibe from room to room: One features Josef Albers's color-block prints, another Ed Ruscha's etchings of an empty glass. "Each dining room has its own character—from horses-and-hounds to sophisticated modern," says Gerner. And each managing director has a favorite. (There's a lot of superstition on Wall Street.)

Bear Stearns commissioned site-specific pieces not only for the meeting facility—Duncan Laurie created the 12th floor's craftsman-style doors with mica windows—but also on the second floor. Here, principal in charge Richard N. Kronick deployed Antonio Murado's four large-scale canvases, *The Seasons*, to create a sense of procession toward the company auditorium. Mark Sheinkman's 84-foot-long abstract mural, *One Thousand Lines*, energizes what the principals call a "nothing wall" near the cafeteria.

The one major space lacking paintings or sculpture is the domed, Buckminster Fuller-esque octagonal boardroom, whose custom ring-shape maple table seats 32. The room isn't devoid of all forms of art, however. "Here," says Gerner, "the art is in



At Bear Stearns's New York office, by Gerner Kronick + Valcarcel, Mark Sheinkman's oil mural *One Thousand Lines* extends 84 feet.



Robert Blood's steel *Variations on the Chinese Calligraph Ming (Destiny)*, 1995, stands in the 12th-floor elevator lobby, beneath custom ceiling fixtures made of Imago panels.



the deal."



Eric Freeman's untitled 2000 oil on linen hangs near the second floor's mahogany-paneled elevator lobby.



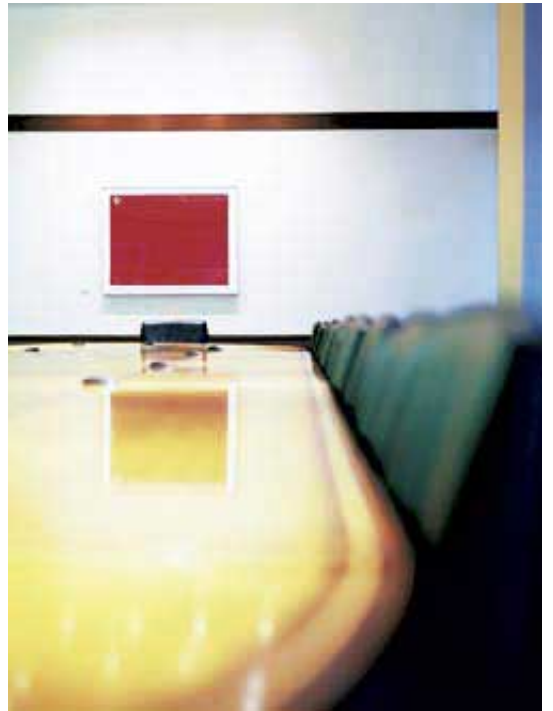
A 13th-floor conference room features Male/Female, a pair of Jonathan Borofsky prints, 2000.



The 12th-floor boardroom seats 32 in leather-covered chairs; a section of the custom maple table can be removed to serve as a lectern.



A framed poster of Andy Warhol's Marilyn enlivens a human-resources training room on the 13th floor.



Peter Halley's 1994 silk screen Exploding Cell hangs beyond the main conference room's custom table.



A chesterfield sofa sits below an April Gornik lithograph, French Waterway, State II, on the 12th floor.



Also on 12, Robert Mangold's intaglio print Four Figures (B), 1998, joins Arthur Gibbons's painted-steel PM, 2002.



Josef Albers's 1966 White Lines Square lithographs play off a dining room's silk wall covering.



A dining room's cherry-wood tabletop reflects Elyn Zimmerman's encaustic on wood Anatolian Idols, 1997.

SOURCES: Imago (12th-floor elevator lobby, boardroom, corridor): Knoll. Marble flooring (elevator lobbies): Port Morris Tile & Marble. Chairs (13th-floor conference room): Geiger. Ceiling tile: USG. Custom table (boardroom), millwork, custom lighting: Island Millwork. Chairs (boardroom): Zographos. Sofa (12th floor): Poltrona Frau. Picture lights (12th-floor corridor): Nessen. Chairs, fabric, tables (dining rooms): Baker Furniture. Wall covering: Vescom. Carpet: Durkan. Construction Manager: F.J. Sciame.