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# Cleveland Business

Originally Published: October 27, 2016 3:14 PM Modified: October 28, 2016 5:53 PM

## Quicken Loans adapts two floors of Higbee Building for a new-breed business

By Stan Bullard

Moving to the Higbee Building did more for the Cleveland office of **Quicken Loans** than give it room to expand.

The move also won space to add features reflecting the culture of the online mortgage banking firm, one of Cavaliers owner Dan Gilbert's many business ventures.

The culture at Detroit-based Quicken is unique and a significant part of working there, said Dima Daimi, lead designer for the \$7 million space, on a Tuesday, Oct. 25, tour of the new office with Jeff Perry, Quicken Loans vice president and Cleveland site leader. The culture, and design, are intended to support collaboration, communication and the personal well-being of Quicken workers.

### Guiding principles

"We wanted a feeling of openness," Perry said, and the added space allowed the lender to include features crucial to Quicken that it did not have at the firm's former office at Post Office Plaza, 1500 W. Third St. That meant adding a game room, complete with pingpong and shuffleboard, a fitness area, eating areas dedicated to employees and more places to hold impromptu meetings. More than 20 conference rooms went in, compared to a handful before.

Daimi, an interior architect at the Detroit-based **dPOP** design firm, had to convert to an open office two former retail floors festooned with far more columns than a typical open office would have, one spanning more than an acre. Quicken also wanted to be respectful of the 1931-vintage building's history as a huge department store that spawned a local retail empire.

"It was beautiful," Daimi said. "There were things here we could not rebuild."

That meant ceilings 12 to 14 feet high stayed in place, and heating and ventilating equipment were added in plain sight typical of industrial-style design. That gives it the feeling of being in a startup or an old warehouse loft. Beams in the space were half covered in plaster, the bottom four feet showing red terracotta tiles that were unfinished because display cases, since removed, surrounded them. They stayed the same way as the designers found them. Besides contemporary work stations, carpet that looks like old concrete or a 1930s-era home went in.

The space also includes small wellness rooms, which also serve nursing mothers. Reflecting the spiritual side of life, prayer/reflection rooms also are in the mix.



Photo by STAN BULLARD **Quicken Loans at Higbee**

Dima Daimi, the Detroit-based lead designer on the new Quicken Loans office, said different leather covers on chairs in a conference room recall the bygone store's luggage department.

**New life for old features, such as those huge chandeliers**

Simultaneously, the design celebrates elements of Higbee's history as a store, such as original display cases with period merchandise and massive chandeliers from the main floor that were mothballed during earlier renovations. The gleaming crystal fixtures now grace a huge dining area that resembles an old-time restaurant with tufted upholstery chairs. An actual bar, like those in old drinking holes or diners, serves as the buffet or food preparation table. A huge makeover challenge was the west side of the building, which is windowless.

That became "Fashion Avenue," housing conference rooms with storefront-style glass entrances on a huge hallway. The rooms have themes similar to Higbee departments. One is called "Twigbee," recalling a room where children could buy inexpensive gifts for their parents. Another is "The Cleveland Woman," which has a feature wall papered with images of ads of swanky women's clothes of the '30s. That room also has a display case filled with period accessories that Daimi said Quicken bought at Cleveland antique

shops. Other conference rooms also have items associated with that store department.

Fun, yes. Historic, yes. But to a purpose. Daimi said psychological studies show different meeting room environments may change the disposition of people gathering in them and aid creativity.

All told, Quicken occupies 115,000 square feet on two floors of the Higbee Building, which is owned by affiliates of Gilbert. Its lower levels houses the JACK Cleveland Casino.

Perry said that with the move, Quicken gained room to continue to hire people here, with enough work stations to add 250 people to its staff of 450. Perry opened the Cleveland operation in 2006 with a staff of 50. He noted 99% of the staff is from here.

About 90% of the staffers are mortgage bankers, Perry said. The remainder includes underwriters, human resources, technology, administrative and site-specific personnel. The location is one of three that serves callers seeking home loans; the others are at its Detroit headquarters and in Scottsdale, Ariz.

The Cleveland office generates about 400 new mortgage applications daily, Perry said, and it supports web queries and calls from across the country. But he added that not all Cleveland staffers are based downtown. "There are more than 30 of our 'triple crown' mortgage bankers," Perry said, who may work from home or wherever the top producers choose.

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