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A formerly under-utilized building in Toronto's Corso Italia neighbourhood is transformed into a mixed-use creative hub, reinvigorating the surrounding community.

With the acquisition of a century-old, three-storey brick building in which to house their own studio, Dubbeldam Architecture + Design embarked on a major renovation, providing an opportunity to not only custom design their own workspace but to develop a creative and entrepreneurial community, integrating complementary businesses under the same roof. It also presented an opportunity for the firm to demonstrate one of their beliefs about urban renewal – that well-designed architecture can catalyse change and have a positive impact on a community.

Occupying a corner site on St. Clair West at the edge of Corso Italia, the under-utilized building was in decline and disrepair from more than a decade of neglect before the studio began the process of transformation. Dubbeldam's studio occupies the top floor of the building. To strengthen a community purpose within the building, principal Heather Dubbeldam and her partner Kevin McIntosh established Lokaal, a collegial and inclusive coworking space for creatives on the second floor. On the ground floor, a marketing agency is joined by an indie coffee shop to form the critical retail anchor that not only serves the building's inhabitants, but the surrounding community as well. In the raised basement, a residential unit provides a much-needed opportunity for rental accommodation.

Before the renovation, the building façades were a patchwork of decades-old neglect: mismatched bricks, delaminated stucco and undersized, randomly positioned windows. Newly enlarged openings look out onto St. Clair Avenue and the adjacent neighbourhood bringing in abundant natural light and increasing the transparency of the building to establish a more open and inviting presence on the corner. Suggestive of the creative inhabitants working within, the two public-facing elevations activate the streetscape with a bold and playful graphic presence; painted drop shadows surrounding the windows create a three-dimensional trompe l'oeil effect to passersby. The striking exterior graphics continue throughout the project, from the distinctive and eye-catching signage at the building's entrance to the materially rich wayfinding on all three floors of the interior. A custom Baltic birch pegboard panel on the first-floor landing not

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only provides a directory for the businesses in the building, but doubles as a thriving green wall populated with lush plants in fragrant cedar boxes. Lipstick pink and terra cotta paint are applied to the underside of the stair to add colour and energy.

Essential to Dubbeldam's vision, the design of her studio must be reflective of her firm's philosophy, working methodology, and commitment to sustainability. A champion of design excellence and innovation herself, she ensured that the studio and coworking workspaces were designed to embody this ethos. The design provides opportunities for staff, clients and visitors to exchange ideas around architecture and design while demonstrating principles of sustainability and adaptive reuse. Collaboration is key to the firm's working methodology, so open workstations occupy most of the office to reinforce collaboration along with a breakout space equipped with a large table for group work and discussion. This space doubles as a library of reference books and material samples on shelving around the perimeter with natural daylight pouring in from the expansive corner window cut out of the north and east façades. The boardroom and light-filled kitchen/lunchroom create additional spaces for discussion while high ceilings and sliding walls in the studio provide ample room for pinup, essential for sharing and exchanging ideas.

Interior details are as considered as the building exterior. A Scandinavian-inspired natural material palette of exposed brick, maple floors, Baltic birch slats and millwork is timeless, textured and warm, contrasting with darker accents such as charcoal-grey doors and furniture. A white Corian waterfall panel greets visitors with an inscribed "hello" at the reception desk, and the wall and ceiling-mounted eco-felt panels provide acoustical benefits. The work of local designers and fabricators was incorporated into the project as much as possible: light fixtures, furniture, workstations and textiles were sourced locally. Thinking more broadly about sustainable approaches and supporting local independent businesses, 80% of materials came from retailers and suppliers in the area; even wood from the lumber yard was obtained a mere five-minute drive away. A number of the consultants and tradespeople—including the structural engineer, millworkers, carpenters and metalworkers—lived or worked within walking distance to the job site.

The building has established itself as a landmark and has become a creative hub and kick-starter of local business and a catalyst for other neighbouring renewal. A prime example of urban revitalization, it has dramatically improved the local urban fabric, bringing a new kind vibrancy and diversity to the neighbourhood.

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Views of the angular Baltic birch staircase upon entry. A gradient of reddish hues provides a colourful journey to the building's upper floors, transforming an economic material and setting the tone for the building's interior character.

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A custom Baltic birch pegboard panel on the first-floor landing not only provides a directory for the businesses in the building, but doubles as a thriving green wall populated with lush plants in fragrant cedar boxes - welcome therapy, especially during the cold winter months.

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Pops of colour add a playful vibrancy to the soft material palette of wood, greys and whites.

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The Baltic Birch stairs ascend past the second-floor home of Lokaal, a coworking space for creative minds. A pleated felt wall by local artist Kathryn Walter of Felt Studio provides a unique welcome to a creative space.

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With the goal of providing an appealing and engaging shared space for entrepreneurs, Lokaal's interior combines the building's original features, such as the existing red brick walls, with a distinctive Scandinavian aesthetic.

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While the crisp white walls and charcoal grey door frames and partitions introduce a bolder graphic quality to the building's interior, brightly coloured light fixtures introduce a degree of playfulness to the Lokaal workspace.

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The chalkboard wall in Lokaal's collaboration space allows members to leave messages or brainstorm ideas away from a computer screen.

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The central staircase thematically connects all floors in the building with Baltic birch slats and graphic floor numbers that lead to Dubbeldam's top floor studio.

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The carefully crafted stair railing accentuates the dramatic shape of the steps, while the curved ceiling with Baltic birch slats and integrated lighting creates a spatial flow to the third floor.

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Elegant and playful graphics in the Dubbeldam studio. A white Corian waterfall panel greets visitors with an inscribed "hello" at the reception desk.

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High ceilings and eco-felt sliding walls in the studio provide a dual purpose of acoustic attenuation and ample room for pinup, essential for sharing and exchanging ideas during the design process.

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The well-tempered environment for collaboration and production in the revived mixed-use building has been established by the flood of natural light and passive ventilation offered by the many operable windows in the open workspace.

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A collaboration space doubles as a library of reference books and material samples on perimeter shelving with natural light pouring in from the expansive corner window cut out of the north and east façades. Transparency in both directions speaks of a connection with the community, with seemingly limitless views east down St. Clair Avenue.

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The matte black cabinets in the kitchen is the ideal backdrop to team lunches and group meetings, punctuated by The Meridian light by Propeller, hanging above.

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Dubbeldam's affinity for honesty of materials and artful elements can be seen in the approach to meticulous detailing and continuity of materials throughout.

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During the day, the plentiful windows reflect an ever-changing Toronto sky. At night, the inner workings of the building are put on full display, offering passersby a glimpse into the creative hub as a beacon of change.

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SUPPLIERS

Millwork

Wood Slats & CNC work – Kobi's Cabinets; CNC Cutting
Library Cabinets - Kobi's Cabinets
Custom Desks - LaFabrika
Kitchen Cabinets - O'Sullivan Millwork

Countertops

Corian installed by Surfacing Solutions

Light Fixtures

Library pendant – Kuzco Vega Linear Pendant
Workstations task lighting – Tundo & Co Vasteras
Minimalist Pendant Light
Kitchen pendant – Propellor Meridian in birch
Display wall - Ikea Nymane
Corridor – Kuzco Falco LED Downlight
Track Lighting & potlights – Litaline

Furniture

Boardroom table – Steelcase Potrero415 Light
Task chairs – Knoll Chadwick chair
Kitchen & library chairs – Ikea Odger Dining Chair and Herman Miller Eames Eiffel Chair
Custom kitchen table – YJ Interiors

Stairs & Stair Flooring

Stairs & guards – Berman Stairs
Rubber flooring & treads – Johnsonite by Tarket

Windows & Exterior Entry Doors

Just Aluminum and Glass

Glass Partitions

PC350

Blinds

Legrand Solarfective

Flooring

Solid maple strip flooring – South Bruce Flooring
installed by Edwards Flooring
Flor carpet tiles - Interface

Acoustic Panels

Ecofelt installed by Pro Acoustics

Green Wall

Dubbeldam Architecture + Design (DIY)

Paving & Planters

Design – Dubbeldam Architecture + Design
Construction – Oriole Landscaping

Exit Signs & Emergency Lighting

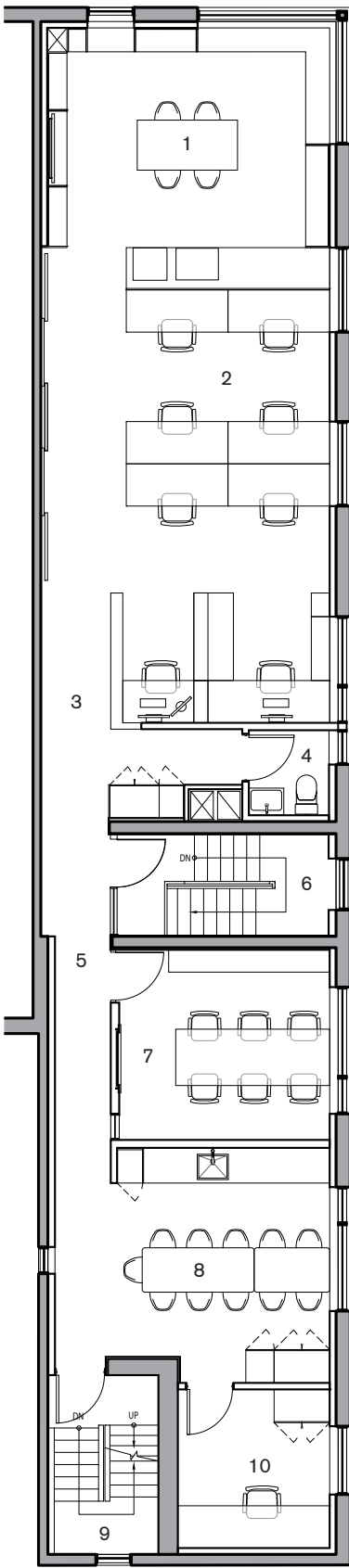
Beghelli

Graphics & Signage

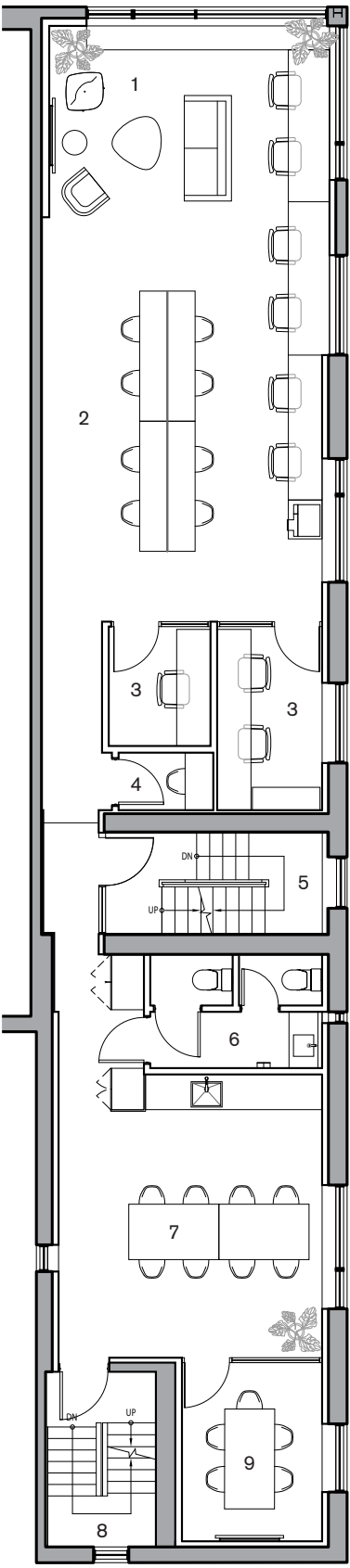
Seastar

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FLOOR PLANS



- Level 3**
Dubbeldam Architecture + Design
- 1 MEETING ROOM/SAMPLE LIBRARY
 - 2 OPEN WORKSPACE
 - 3 RECEPTION AREA
 - 4 WASHROOM
 - 5 CORRIDOR
 - 6 CENTRAL STAIRWELL
 - 7 BOARDROOM
 - 8 KITCHEN/LUNCHROOM
 - 9 EXISTING EXIT STAIRWELL
 - 10 PRIVATE OFFICE



- Level 2**
Lokaal
- 1 LOUNGE
 - 2 SHARED WORKSPACE
 - 3 PRIVATE OFFICE
 - 4 PHONE BOOTH
 - 5 CENTRAL STAIRWELL
 - 6 WASHROOM
 - 7 KITCHEN/WORKSPACE
 - 8 EXISTING EXIT STAIRWELL
 - 9 MEETING ROOM

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PROJECT CREDITS

Location: Toronto, Ontario (Corso Italia / St. Clair West)

Size: 6,800 s.ft. | 630 s.m. (1,700 s.ft. per floor)

Architecture/Interior Design: Dubbeldam Architecture + Design

Project Team: Heather Dubbeldam, Scott Sampson, Andrew Snow, Joseph Villahermosa, Gigi Presentey, Kelsey Wilkinson, Kevin McIntosh

Photography: Scott Norsworthy

Contractor: DDF Contracting Ltd.

Consultants: Blackwell, Contact Engineering (Structural), Quasar (M&E)

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Photos from this press kit are available for download on
Dropbox: <https://tinyurl.com/ydgfxe9d>

Dubbeldam Architecture + Design is a multi-disciplinary design studio committed to creating thoughtful projects that embody sustainable approaches. The studio's portfolio includes a diverse range of projects in many sectors including commercial, institutional, hospitality, mixed-use and residential, as well as landscape design, product design, and architectural installations.

Along with over 80 design awards and wide recognition in national and international publications, Dubbeldam is the recipient of the Professional Prix de Rome in Architecture, one of the oldest and most prestigious prizes for outstanding achievement in Canadian architecture. With a commitment to design excellence and a focus on sustainability and wellness in architecture, Dubbeldam is recognized for creating innovative, unique and environmentally responsible design solutions for live, work and play.

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