

JACKPOT

SCB WINS BIG WITH GAMING FIRM'S INTERIORS

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SCB'S RIVERSIDE PROJECT RACKS UP POINTS FOR GAMING FIRM

By Pamela Dittmer McKuen

FIRST OF ALL, THE NEW TECHNOLOGY CENTER FOR WMS GAMING HAD TO BE A 'WOW.' The company competes against global tech giants for top talent to design and build slot machines. They are on the lookout for programmers, game designers, operating system and hardware engineers, mathematicians, artists and more. To attract the people they want to work for them, rather than for the likes of Google and Yahoo, they needed an eye-popping environment and a robust amenities package, not to mention more space for the expanding company.

"Our goal was to create an environment that inspires energy, innovation and collaboration while preserving environmental resources," says Scott Schweinfurth, WMS' senior vice president, chief financial officer and treasurer.

To meet that goal, the company placed a winning bet on Solomon Cordwell Buenz.

The new five-story tower at 2718 W. Roscoe St. anchors WMS Gaming's Chicago Technology Campus of mostly one-story, vintage brick industrial buildings in the city's Avondale neighborhood. The 14-acre tech campus is where 600 employees develop gaming machines and digital gaming

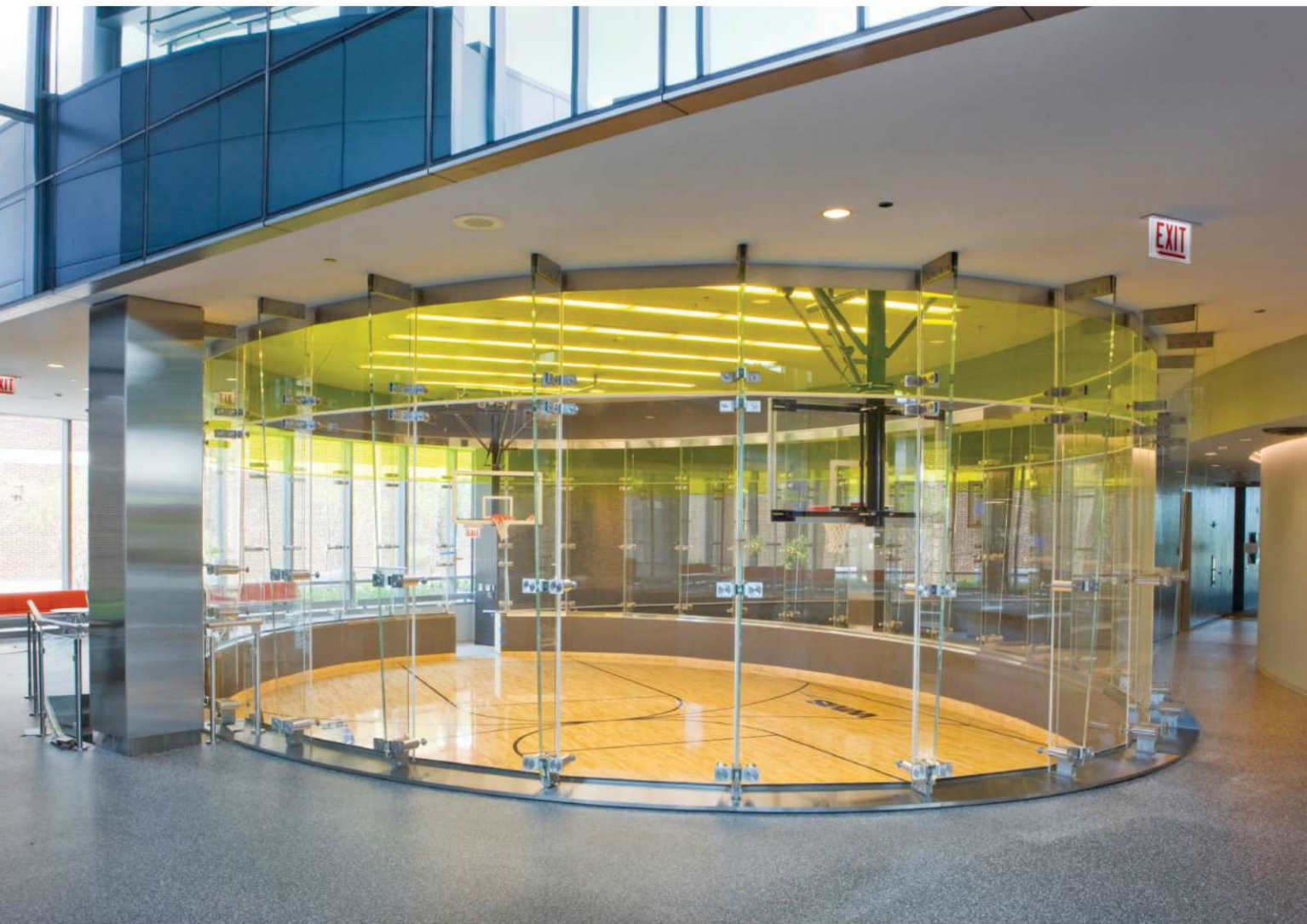


Photo by Brian M. Palm Photography

LEVEL



Upon entering the front door of the WMS Gaming building, visitors find a light-filled lobby atrium and contemporary seating. Wood paneling warms modern furnishings and stainless steel accents.



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content for the international casino industry. The private campus has a public complement immediately across the North Branch of the Chicago River: a striking new Chicago Park District boathouse designed by Studio Gang and funded in part by WMS. The 70-year-old company, whose earliest products were pinball and arcade machines, is headquartered in Waukegan. It was acquired in October 2013 by New York-based Scientific Games.

The exterior of the 120,000-square-foot tower is swathed in reflective glass. Above the front entrance is a canopy of folded glass reminiscent of the sharp lines of the WMS logo. The doors lead to a light-filled, two-story atrium that softens the stark contrast between the gleaming tower on one side and the industrial building on the other.

The entire first floor is designed as a community space, where employees from all over this campus and beyond are encouraged to meet and mingle. The atrium runs the full length of the building footprint. Along one long wall are the reception area, security force and cafeteria counters. Along the opposite wall is a band of seven enormous video screens in continuous, synchronized play. Within the expanse between the two are clusters of leather club chairs and winged pedestal chairs,

separated by glass and wood cocktail tables.

At the far end of the atrium is a glass-enclosed basketball court, convertible for volleyball games. And overlooking the Chicago River are a fitness center, dining room with outdoor patio, conversation areas and a game lounge equipped with pingpong and pool tables, and the latest in video game consoles. There also is a fully-wired auditorium with 120 desk seats for staging live meetings between any of the company's six U.S. and 10 international offices.

"These employees tend to work long hours and late into the evening," says Devon Patterson, principal at Solomon Cordwell Buenz and design lead on the WMS project. "They come to [this community level to] get food, take a break and relax for a while. Where they work becomes a second home to them, and we approached it almost like a luxury residential project."

About half of the campus employees work in the new building, which opened in August 2012. To mitigate any potential rivalries or hard feelings among the half who don't work in the building, steps were taken to be inclusive. Older buildings were remodeled, and the former basketball court was transformed into a yoga and Zumba studio. All employees are invited to enjoy the amenities,



Photo by Dave Burk © Hedrich Blessing 2012

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1. Transparent panels wrap the indoor basketball court; it converts to a volleyball court when needed.

2&3: The folded canopy entrance (seen in both photos) connects the tower and an existing vintage brick building. The canopy is a stylized translation of the WMS logo. The floating roof above the fifth-floor Skyline Terrace is visible at right in photo 2.

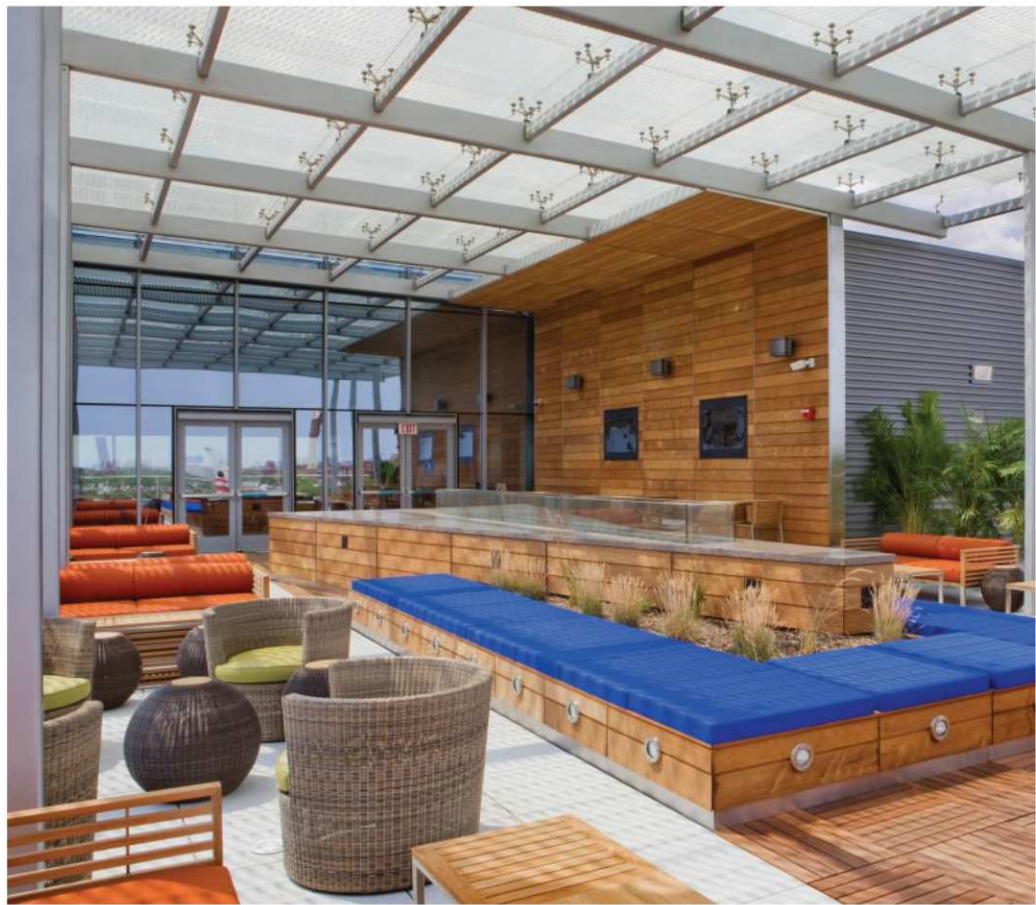


Photo by Dave Burk © Hedrich Blessing 2012

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wherever they are located, and to participate in programs like the annual company art show. An atrium wall serves as a gallery.

“We have a lot more special events now, just because we can,” Schweinfurth says.

Moving upward through the building, floors two and three are dedicated to game development. Employees are divided into work groups called “studios,” which are responsible for developing and testing new game themes. Each studio is made up of between 20 and 30 employees. At any given time a studio may be working on five to 15 different games. Collectively, the studios create about 100 new themes each year. As studio sizes expand and contract according to business needs, a raised floor design with electrical power running underneath allows workstations to easily be moved and rearranged.

The executive offices are located on the fourth floor, and the mechanical penthouse sits on the roof. That would have wrapped up the project if things had gone according to plan. But then someone noticed the fabulous, unobstructed view of the river that appears to merge into the downtown cityscape. That view just couldn’t be wasted. The architects went back to work and added the fifth-floor Skyline Terrace, a dramatic indoor and outdoor rooftop space. The terrace hosts formal and informal meetings, receptions and conferences.

The outdoor terrace is appointed with a linear fireplace, flat-screen television, cushioned wood and wicker seating, and grassy plants. The floating shaded-glass roof provides a sense of enclosure as well as protection from sun and rain. The indoor terrace is encased with glass walls on three sides for year-round use.

Throughout the project, sustainability was a key consideration. WMS in 2009 had launched a commitment to “go green.” The tower, its first new construction effort since then, aimed for and earned LEED Platinum certification from the U.S. Green Building Council. The rating was no small achievement in light of the significant amount of power needed to run the vast number of computers and games and to keep them temperature-controlled.

Meeting the certification requirements was an added expense, but today’s workforce values companies that make the effort, Schweinfurth says.

“We had to look at everything to get the points they needed,” says Patterson.

The team selected materials that would heat and condition air more effectively and minimized the need for those functions in the first place by implementing a high-performance building envelope, he says.

Among the sustainability measures that were employed:

- An underfloor air distribution system that maximizes the

Photo by Brian M. Palm Photography



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1&2: The outdoor terrace hosts both casual and formal meetings and events. Although not in the architects' original plan, the terrace was added to the design in order to capitalize on the downtown view.

3. In the lobby is a cafeteria with pedestal seating (avocado green) in conversation groupings.

4. One piece of the lobby level features flat-panel video screens for gaming and tournaments, and conversation-pit-style seating.

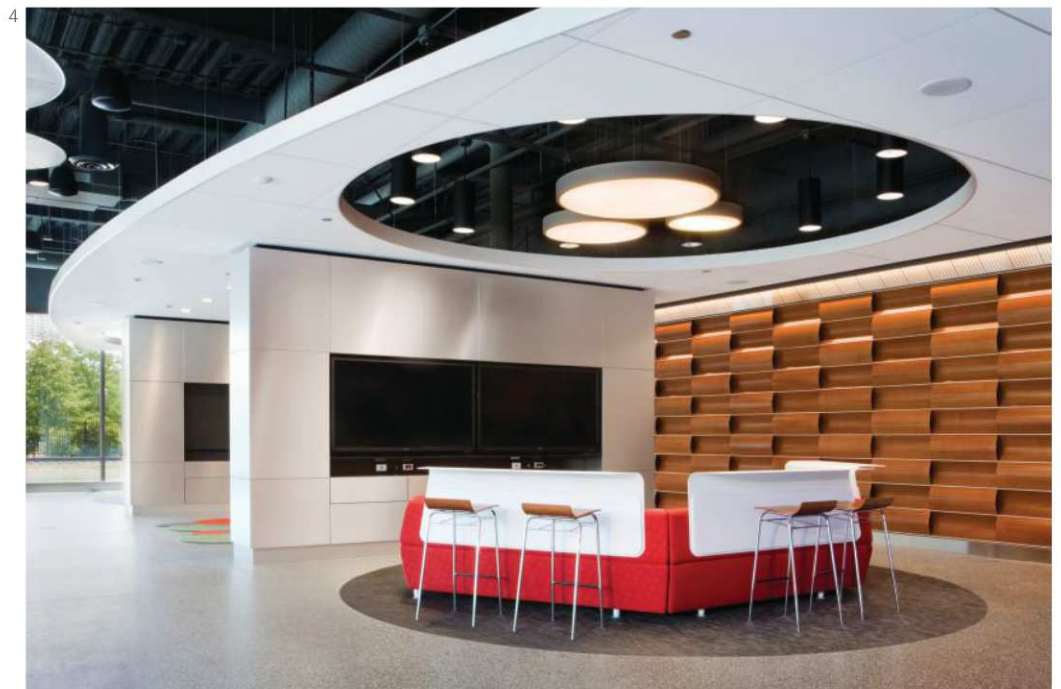


Photo by Brian M. Palm Photography



On one side of the first-floor lobby atrium, opposite the existing vintage brick building, is a large room with a glass wall that overlooks the Chicago River. The room is broken up into functions, delineated not by walls but by the different types of lighting, furniture and floor colors, as seen above. Spaces within the room include a dining area, game area and meeting areas.

ventilation's effectiveness. Air is delivered in a bottom-to-top direction, which minimizes mixing and promotes the continuous removal of contaminants away from occupants;

- A computer-controlled system that links sunlight and temperature to automatic window shades and lighting; and
- A green roof to absorb sunlight and improve insulation.

SCB also designed an innovative system that harvests rainwater to flush toilets. It works by directing runoff from the roof through drain pipes into a ground-level cistern, where it is purified and sent to the restrooms. The water is not potable, but it is suitable for flushing.

"It was challenging to get the plan through [state and city officials] because there is no provision for something like this," Patterson says. "We had to show how we were protecting the

health of the occupants. Once we did that, they were able to approve it."

From an aesthetic standpoint, the décor is simultaneously hard and soft, and bright and neutral. Brick walls contrast with stainless steel support columns. Citrus-colored upholstery fabric pops against gray carpeting and exposed black ceilings. A repeating element is the displays of wood paneling punctuated with rectangles of cobalt glass.

The designers found inspiration in the bright colors and flashing lights common to slot machines, Patterson says. "Those machines have a real beauty to them," he says. "When you look at them when they are lit up, they glow."

WMS got the 'wow' it was looking for. "The excitement hasn't worn off," Schweinfurth says. "It turned out to be everything we hoped it would be." **CA**