Studio O+A for Slack HQ

When Slack asked O+A to create its new multi-floor headquarters in San Francisco one design story presented itself immediately. Slack’s CEO Stewart Butterfield is an outdoorsman, a hiker who goes off grid every year and recharges in the various types of wilderness—desert, mountains, forest—that make up the Pacific Crest Trail. Because that trail forms a bridge between two of Slack’s offices in Vancouver and San Francisco it seemed a thematic link too rich to pass up. O+A’s concept was to create a floor-by-floor evocation of those landscapes—in effect to turn a trip up the elevator into a virtual trip from Baja to the Pacific Northwest. The idea was to suggest not just a variety of topographical and botanical contexts, but to capture, as well, the experiential links between hiking a wilderness trail—and work.
Navigating Work with an Assist from the Outdoors

Every Day at Work Is a New Path Taken
Slack’s team saw a value in having each floor reflect the variety and irregularity of nature. Just as wayfinding on a mountain trail, is often a matter of conferring with other hikers, every work day is an experience of collaborating with others to find your way to the next level. The unique configurations of each floor at Slack echo the mental stimulation—and need for community—that comes with taking a new path.

Cracked Earth to Walls of Moss
To replicate indoors the distinctly outdoor experience of the Pacific Crest Trail O+A chose a succession of finishes and palettes that subtly suggest changing landscapes. Each floor draws its look and feel from the characteristics of its natural inspiration. Floor 2’s baked earth colors and ubiquitous cacti, for example, evoke the Baja desert while Floor 5’s “quiet please” library captures the stillness of a mountain lake. This motif is sustained across 10 floors with wilderness cues as varied as old growth forests, mountain streams, volcanoes and glaciers. Every floor includes conference room wall graphics created from the wilderness photography of Slack employee Adam Torres and room names taken from the skies, the trails and the living things of the wilderness.

Turn a Corner and... Oh!
Central to O+A’s design concept was the idea that every work project, like every hike in the wilderness, is a process of discovery. Classic interior design frames large architectural moments to attract the most eyes at once. At Slack those moments come as “scenic surprises”—like an unexpected good idea. You turn a corner and there is a wall installation that replicates the topography of Lake Tahoe in a way that seems to float in space. You walk down a pathway and there is a “starry night” room like a stage set from a Sam Shepard play. You take your laptop to a lounge area and the light changes in a rhythm attuned to the time of day. In every instance the beauty is a reward for effort, a reinforcement of the idea that she who ventures away from her desk makes the most of her workday.

The Trail Never Ends
Hikers and campers know that a favorite trail or campsite is never the same place twice. At different times of year and as the years progress, it changes, offering new pleasures and new challenges every time. O+A’s design for Slack builds that capacity for change into the workspace. Every floor is equipped to adapt to the changing needs of a single work session or a months-long project. Like a natural setting, this setting inspired by nature welcomes what the day brings and reaches out to meet it.

DESIGN CONCEPT
All that’s necessary is everything you need.

“...There’s the intention that you have going into it and then there’s what actually happens.”
– Stewart Butterfield, Slack
Slack’s 10-story building is located at 500 Howard Street in San Francisco—a distinctly urban address for a “wilderness trail.”
Slack’s lobby is the “base camp” for the whole building. Tent-like structures allow for short meetings—or meditation—before ascending to the floors above.
The IT Help Desk and Lounge on the second floor captures the stillness and focus of the Baja Desert. Terracotta meets sunsets, while cacti frame views to the street outside.
Here in one image is the spirit of Slack: the IT Help Desk is housed in a classic Southwestern structure of terracotta breeze block walls.
Custom light fixtures and a cut-vinyl graphic of the Milky Way enhance the illusion of night in the desert.
The Sunset Lounge provides circadian rhythm lighting and white noise to neutralize open office distractions. One of the CEO's favorite places to focus.
On the Rocky Desert Floor the elevator lobby is inspired by centuries of stratified sediment. Plaster artists used a special technique.
O+A collaborated with plaster artists to create unique experiences in the elevator lobby of each floor. Visitors step instantly into the hues and textures of each new environment.
The second floor breakroom has a variety of seating opportunities to allow for meetings—whether one-on-ones or refueling stops.
Wall seating evokes the sharp geometry of mountain peaks in contrast to the soft textures and sound-absorbing warmth of its upholstery.
Like a clearing on a mountain trail this impromptu seating area uses plants and abstract “rock formations” to lure employees from their workday routines.
Room dividers raised to a higher level—here it’s a screen with mountain imagery enveloping plants that will grow dense with time.
Slack’s library draws inspiration from the bridge structures that cross mountain lakes and streams along the trail. Private cubbies, study carrels, as well as bookshelves that are lined with custom art work—and books!
Kitchen access through a server's window means barista-brewed coffee is never far away.
A truss structure envelopes an informal meeting place for people on their way to lunch. Custom paint depicts the morning mist on a mountain lake.
A flexible space for the entire office to meet and eat was extremely important to Slack's culture. Here Studio O+A imagined a layered space with multiple viewing angles and seating options.
The barista window is open for typical dining experiences, but can be closed during private team presentations.
There's no telling what lies around the bend on a wilderness trail. One of the "scenic surprises" at Slack is a vertical topography of Lake Tahoe.
On the 6th floor elevated platforms and custom ceiling treatments combine with lighting design to replicate the dappled effect of hiking behind a waterfall.
A green wall and multi-level meeting enclosure echoes the experience of arriving at a clearing or a natural place to pause. But the trail never ends.
Every O+A space offers options for working away from your desk. Here a comfortable corner takes you inside the opening of a rockface.
Taking inspiration from Fairy Rings, the natural growth pattern of the large redwoods on the Pacific Crest Trail, communal lounges are both semi-private and inviting.
O+A’s replication of forest light gives lounge areas a special intimacy.
The proper matching of plant species and geological features is key to creating an effective sequence of ecotones.
Even in a conference room the woods are never far away thanks to wall graphics created from one of Slack’s own photographers.
The Volcano Tea Lounge is one of many destinations throughout the building that invites users from other floors. Glazed brick and copper evoke Vulcan fires, but the real attraction here is Boba Tea.
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The greens and herbs in this garden are edible. Employees are encouraged to pick them and use in food preparation.
Dichroic glass panels shift color as you pass, mimicking the light in the cracks of a glacier.
This design center for Slack’s creative team comes with pinnable walls, mobile whiteboards and a custom table and paper roll for when the ideas just won’t stop.
At Slack the juxtaposition of colors, textures and light is often as complex as in a natural environment—and the result is almost as harmonious.
A seating nook could be carved from a glacier, though it's warmer and softer than ancient ice.
An executive reception lounge combines the soft impact of foggy glass with the hard edges of concrete molded to replicate natural rock.
It’s a measure of Slack’s communal culture that the executive refreshment bar keeps beer on tap for company-wide Happy Hours.
Steel arches frame a stairway to the highest point of Slack’s interior as if this last ascension is the steepest climb to the mountain’s summit.
The steepest climb leads to a comfy space amidst the clouds! The mezzanine is Slack's executive briefing center.
### Fact Sheet

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<td>O+A team</td>
<td>Primo Orpilla, Dan Kretchmer, Dani Canepa, Millie Kwong, Brianna Bernstein, Amy Kwok, Nikki Hall, Marbel Padilla, Amy Young, Chase Lunt, Elizabeth Vereker, George Craigmyle, Emily Cano, Samantha Calabrese, Alex Bautista</td>
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## Fact Sheet

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SLACK

Floor plan

1 | Lobby
Floor plan
4 | Mountains
FLOOR 05 SPACE PLAN - DINING

Convenient Kitchen Seating 5
Open Meeting to Headcount 1:17
Open Collaborative Seating 6
Double / Quad / 1:1 6
Phone Room 12
Small Conference Room 5
Large Conference Room (12) 1
30 X 60 Workstation 100
Enclosed Meeting to Headcount 1:4
Library 1 (38 Seats)
Storage Room

29,768 SF

STORAGE
5

Studio O+A

Mountain Lakes
Thank you

For more info, call (415) 908-1880 or email us: melanie@o-plus-a.com