


The Business of Furniture | October 23, 2019

# BOF



**Embracing Technology Can  
Unlock Process Innovation**



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October 23, 2019

## HIGHLIGHTS

### **08**UPFRONT: Room & Board Launches Business Interiors and Claims it is Reimagining the Contract Furniture Model with a Consumer-Centric Approach

As the company's commercial arm, Business Interiors was launched to meet the demands of commercial interiors and businesses.

### **18**Successful Launch of OM Chats: Design Discussion for Thinking Professionals

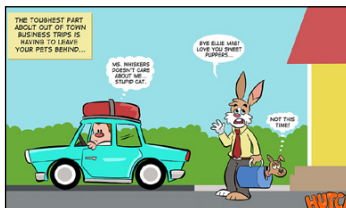
The role of empathy in the design of space and products was explored at the inaugural OM Chats: Design Discussions for Thinking Professionals at the Helms Design Center in Culver City.

### **38**Delivering Excellence—Winslow Spares No Details in New Office Design

Winslow Capital Management  
<p38

# BoF The Business of Furniture

October 23, 2019



7 | Hutch Industry Cartoon



8 | Upfront



9 | The Stream

## COLUMNS

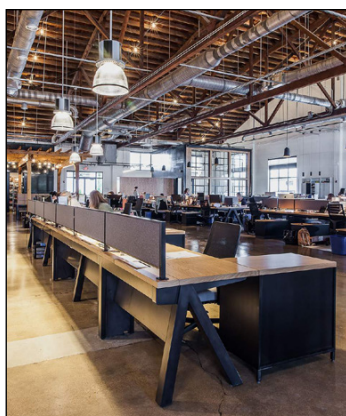
Stephen Says 26  
Training & Development 28

## FINANCIAL

Industry Shares/Graphs 24

## CALENDAR & MORE

Regional News 22  
Upcoming Events 30  
Marketplace & Classifieds 54



## 10 | Steelcase Expanding Relationship with Furniture Design Firm Uhuru

This relationship complements the extensive Steelcase portfolio that gives customers easy access to more choices with delivery by the largest dealer network in the industry.



## 12 | CET Experience Connects Users of Configura Software in Orlando

The CET Experience wasn't about the company. It was about the companies and the people that use CET Designer.



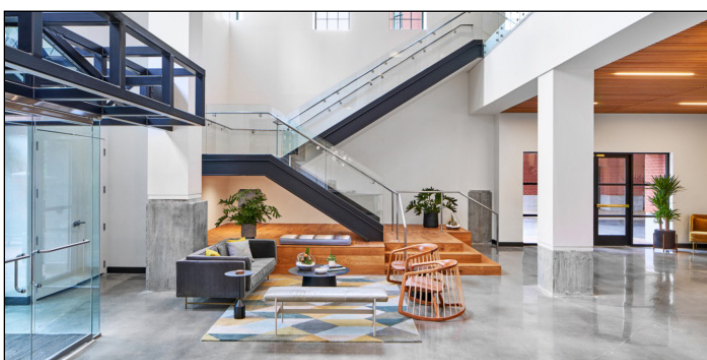
## 34 | Embracing Technology Can Unlock Process Innovation

It's been said again and again — the biggest change coming to the A&D industry will be in the form of process innovation, not product innovation.



## 38 | Delivering Excellence — Winslow Spares No Details in New Office Design That Embodies Its Brand

Typically, a horseshoe symbolizes good luck, but in the case of Winslow Capital Management, that shape wasn't so lucky.



32 PLACES The Martin Agency Offices – Richmond



42 FIRST LOOKS The latest product introductions



48 PULSE The latest industry happenings



# The Business of Furniture



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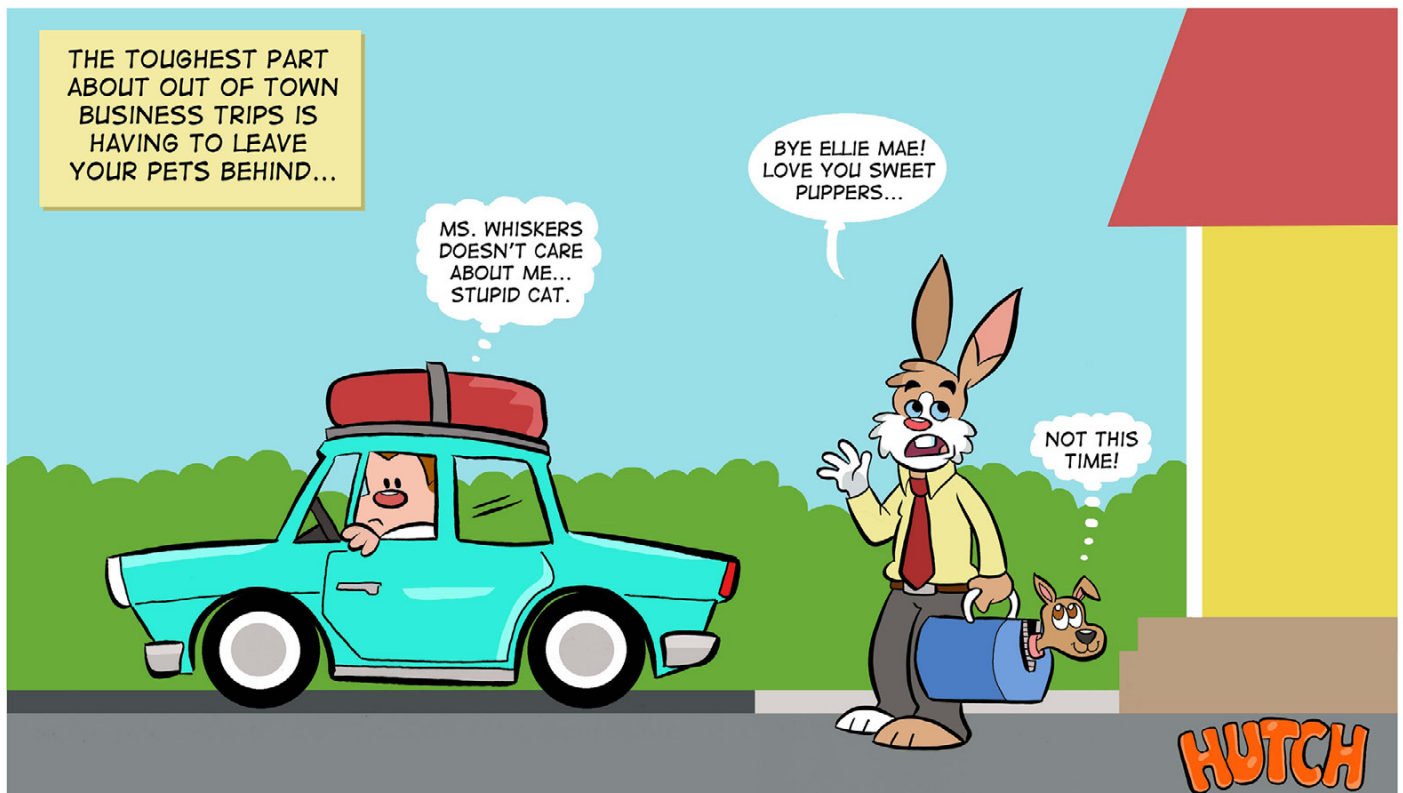
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**ROB KIRKBRIDE, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**



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## Successful Launch of OM Chats: Design Discussion for Thinking Professionals

WHILE ALL AGREED THE INTEREST IN EMPATHY IS A NATURAL OFFSPRING OF SEISMIC RUMBLINGS IN THE CULTURE AT LARGE, CHALLENGES ABOUND — FOREMOST AMONG THEM BEING BUDGET, OF COURSE, AS WELL AS AWARENESS BIAS.

**T**he role of empathy in the design of space and products was explored at the inaugural OM Chats: Design Discussions for Thinking Professionals at the Helms Design Center in Culver City.

“How Empathy Creates Extraordinary Experiences,” was

the theme for the event, which asked OM architects and designers how they explained the burgeoning interest in empathy as a design tenet, how they imagine the practice evolving and what challenges they face bringing empathy into play in project solutions.

While all agreed the interest in empathy is a natural offspring of seismic rumblings in the culture at large, challenges abound — foremost among them being budget, of course, as well as awareness bias.

Awareness bias was explained as the habit of seeing only what

you need to look for and explaining how it is — for example, seeing that an overhead walkway could be designed with a glass floor. These misses can be so obvious as to leave us shaking our heads, but they also serve to remind us we are all biased in our own ways. The practice of empathy is the invitation to consciously and thoughtfully consider experience, space and object through the eyes of others.

The presentations used case studies, anecdotes and visuals to support theories of how we understand the nature of place and the people and communities affected by design interventions; approaches to the design process and accountability; and creating

an expanded practice of universal design to include mental, physical and emotional well-being.

“We’re grateful for the opportunity to invite so much talent into one room to share their experience with an idea that resonates with so many of us,” said Wilson Chow, president of OM, a mid-market seating company. “Almost 100 architects and designers from firms throughout Los Angeles showed up to listen, to talk and to share their own knowledge and stories with each other. Today’s chat was the first of many opportunities we are planning to bring smart and even offbeat themes into a casual environment and encourage thoughtful conversation.”

Architects, interior designers and product designers from leading firms who spoke at the event included Adaeze Cadet, vice president at HKS; Julie Smith-Clementi of the newly formed Smith-Clementi; and Sarah Barnard, principal of Sarah Barnard Design.

Smith-Clementi shared thoughts about her practice, including visual and textual diagrams that illustrated how she defines the design process. She segued into concrete examples, beginning with how working on a child care center prompted deep thinking about how one could design for an audience that cannot read or write. Her findings proved relevant to a host of sub-





sequent challenges, each in some way influenced by the awareness that an audience encompasses a breadth of needs, abilities and preferences that are distinct from the designer's and possibly distinct within a specific context. For Smith-Clementi, empathy is a critical starting point for every project.

Cadet spoke about understanding the nature of place. Her prac-

tice, as expressed through HKS's Responsible Design process, focuses on developing awareness of the systems already at play in the places her projects are nested within. This awareness stems from learning about the people and communities affected by her architectural interventions, then using that understanding to define project goals that enhance the human experience.

Barnard talked about an interiors-oriented approach, offering a how-to on creating inclusive environments for highly sensitive people. Her tenets included a reminder that it's the job of designers and advocates of good design to consider the intersections and overlaps of all people and to create spaces that meet the highest possible need across categories. She challenges herself to con-



sider how she can combine elements of known design strategies to create an expanded practice of universal design that includes mental, physical and emotional well-being. Her hope is that we practice a state of mindfulness in creating varied experiences and environments that allow for personal choice and work cross-discipline and cross-ability to design with empathy, making all

built environments inclusive, restorative spaces.

In a closing remark, the audience was offered an impassioned reminder that, “When you have a seat at the table, speak up. You’re there for a reason — use it. Be a champion for empathy.”

OM has a reputation for smart conversation about the ideas and practices that inform the spaces where people work and

create community. Its goal for the event was to explore ideas of interest to the architecture and design industries with a program of multiple speakers that build a community of curious, engaged professionals. OM Chats marks the beginning of a more active and in-depth involvement in supporting these conversations in a public forum. **BoF**