

Show and Tell

The Lighting Agency transforms a simple cinder block building into a community laboratory for its growing staff and diverse clientele

BY SAMANTHA SCHWIRCK

By nature, a lighting agency has its finger in every pie of the profession—from design to sales to construction. Denver-based The Lighting Agency, for one, collaborates most often with specifiers, contractors and distributors, but the company's list of client types doesn't stop there.

"We consider anyone involved in the construction or retrofit industry a client of ours," says Sam Koerbel, a sales project engineer for The Lighting Agency. "The process includes everything from educating the community about new products in the marketplace to following a job through the contract administration phase, providing customer service to our contractors and ultimately commissioning jobs to meet the needs of the owner."

When The Lighting Agency outgrew its former office space, management decided that the next home base should not only support employees, but also this diverse clientele and community. The result is a "lighting



A moveable "cloud" ceiling enables the mock up of fixtures at various heights. Interactive touch screens provide educational information, as well as a directory of the agency's products.



Photos: Sam Koerbel

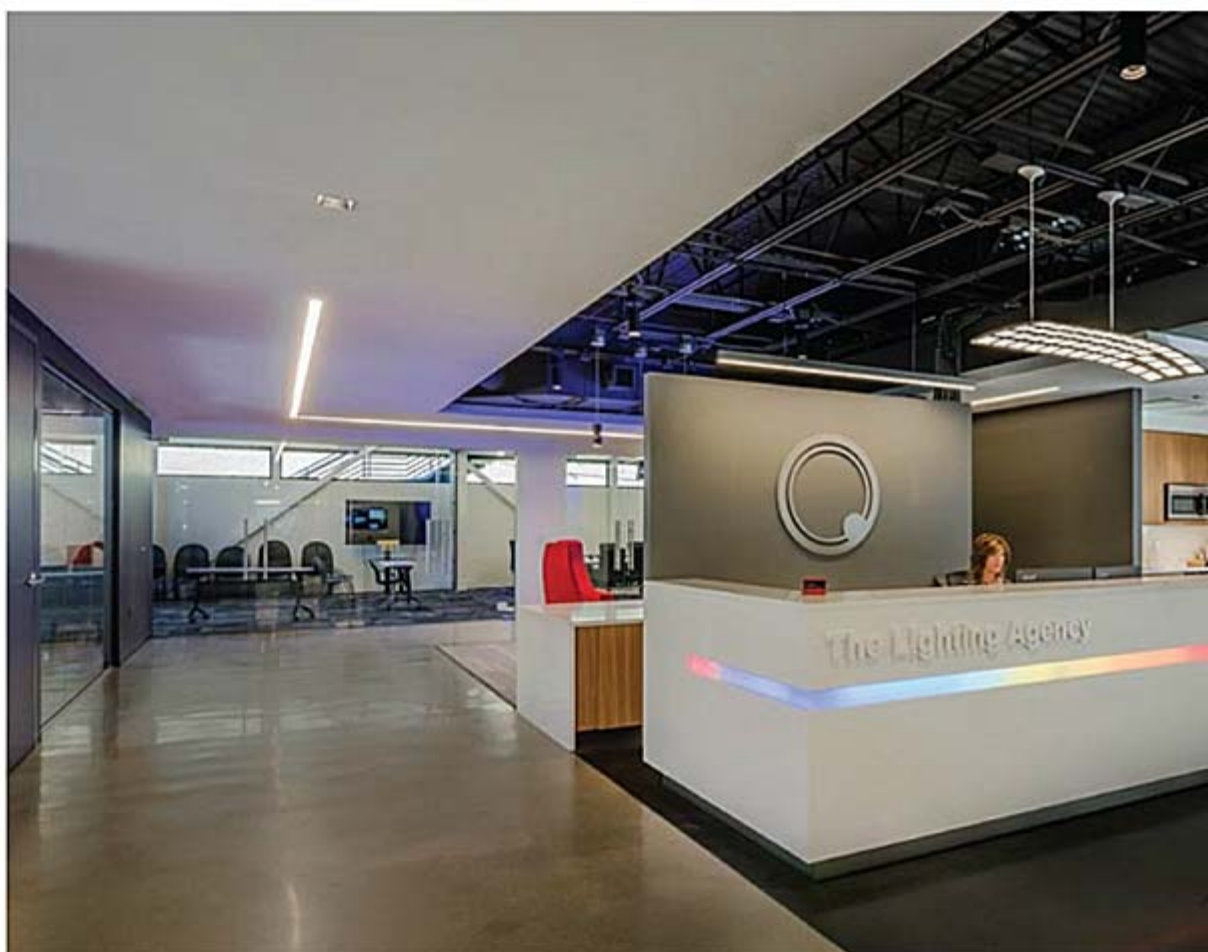
laboratory”—a combination office and showroom in Denver’s burgeoning Highlands neighborhood—designed to meet the needs of the staff, showcase products and mock-ups for clients, and act as a hub for the local lighting community.

STARTING FROM SCRATCH

Meeting all of The Lighting Agency’s goals under one roof required starting with a blank can-

vas—in this case, a 16,000-sq ft “simple cinder block building,” according to Koerbel. Steve Peterson, senior lighting designer at ME Engineers, also based in Denver, was brought on board to spearhead the lighting design, which was a collaborative effort among Peterson, the agency’s in-house staff and Open Studio Architecture. Design work began in 2012 and the new building was completed in late 2014.

When not serving as a visual focal point, RGB fixtures in a freestanding reception wall can be adjusted to display direct, indirect or pixilated light.



Big-picture goals were accomplished via the building's core features—offices, conference rooms and a café, as well as a two-story gallery, showroom and large presentation space. “The space needed to accommodate a growing company,” Koerbel says. “But it also needed to be a space that could hold meetings, tours and mock-ups without disturbing the work of those who are here all day. The building is interactive—as people in the community come to visit the office, they can see different styles and applications of lighting, and also learn about the fundamentals of lighting.”

The entire space is lit by LEDs, and more than 70 fixture types were used to show as many lighting solutions as possible, while also doubling as general illumination for daily tasks. “For all lighting design choices, we took into account the creative aspect of illumination, while select-

ing fixtures from the stable of luminaires represented by the agency,” Peterson says. “To some extent, we tried to display the most salient manufacturers, but with the company representing 80-plus manufacturers, we couldn’t accommodate them all. I wanted a superior architectural lighting design, so when push came to shove, I selected what I wanted.”

KEEPING PACE

The layered design process was compounded by the rapid pace at which lighting technology is advancing. “We were designing with the knowledge that we needed to have the most current products in place when we were finished, but those products were not even in the marketplace yet,” Koerbel says.

This roadblock was particularly relevant be-



cause one of the building's main goals is to exhibit as many lighting solutions as possible. "Without going overboard, we've incorporated linear slots, recessed 2-by-2 ft troffers, suspended direct/indirect fixtures, white and RGB styles, grazing, wall washing, industrial high-bay lighting, task lighting, and decorative pendants," Koerbel says. "We spent a significant amount of time with our manufacturers to time the completion with their latest releases."

With these factors in mind, Peterson sought out solutions that would support each area's function. "In general, there were two distinct considerations: public space that would function as active working environment and also display the various lighting manufacturers being represented, and private areas where the real function is the business aspect of the firm."

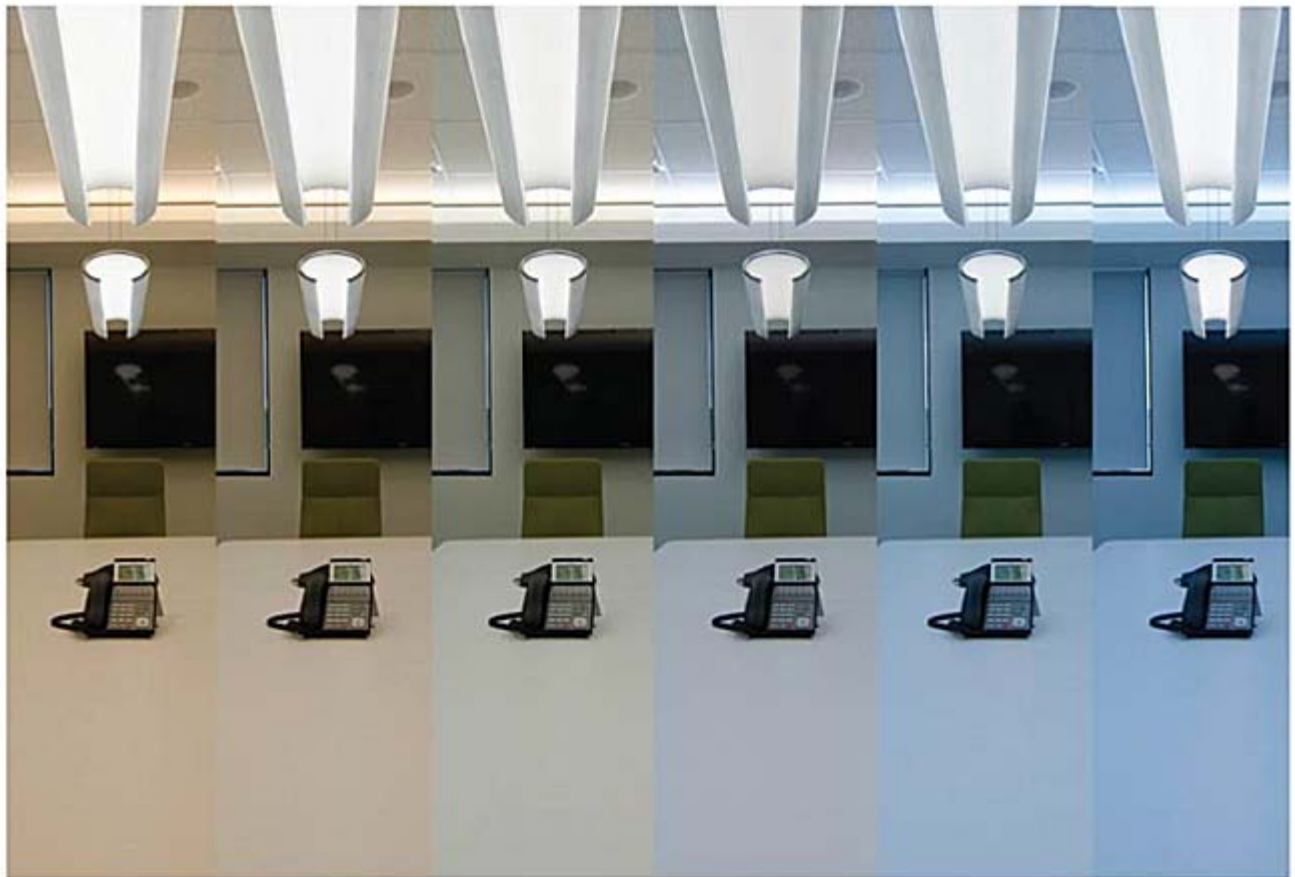
In addition, all locations were designed to enable a change-out in the near future when representative products change. "Pendants, for example, were attached to junction boxes with long whips to branch wiring," Peterson says. "We then could move the boxes around to allow for a different layout. Extra length whips were also used to move or add fixtures above acoustical ceiling tiles."

THE MAIN ACT

Upon entering the building, visitors are greeted by an 8-ft high freestanding light box with RGB fixtures and frosted glass. The light box doubles as a reception wall, and serves as both a focal point and educational introduction to the concepts of back lighting and color blending.

"The end opens up so we can adjust the aim for

An adjustable wall-graze system demonstrates techniques such as wall washing and floodlighting.



In the executive conference room, a dynamic white solution displays color tuning capabilities.

linear or spot fixtures, as well as move them forward and back to simulate different depth conditions—direct view onto the glass, or bouncing off of the back wall,” Peterson explains. “Using RGB fixtures, we can show any diode pixilation—a bad thing.”

Public areas surrounding the lobby include the main showroom and two-story gallery space, replete with interactive touch screens that host micro-websites providing information about the fundamentals of lighting—from history to current styles and controls—as well as a directory of the manufacturers represented by the agency.

Solutions explained on-screen then come to life in various pockets of the space. An adjustable wall-graze system by Prudential Lighting, for example, displays wall washing, grazing and floodlighting. Meanwhile, a moveable ceiling enables simulations of various mounting heights for fixtures from manufacturers such as Birchwood

Lighting, V2 Lighting and Focal Point. While luminaires showcase particular brands, “at no time was the space to look or feel like a retail lighting showroom,” Peterson says.

Additional solutions are integrated into breakout spaces, beginning with an executive conference room that focuses on color tuning capabilities. “A tunable white solution [WAC Lighting] can move from 2700K to 6000K using a combination of downlights and a cove system,” Koerbel explains. “It is all controlled with a dynamic touch screen that uses the DMX protocol to communicate with the luminaires.” The room is helpful for clients working on commercial lighting applications, Koerbel adds. “It’s very beneficial as the industry moves toward tunable white applications for healthcare and education, and it also allows people to understand what materials in their building would look like under one color temperature versus another.”



Colorful interior features are visible from outside, where low-level wall washers and in-grade LEDs forge a nighttime identity for the building.

FINISHING TOUCHES

To illuminate private office spaces, Peterson collaborated with The Lighting Agency's principals. "The fixtures were selected so the environments would be unique but still highlight different manufacturers," Peterson says. In one office, a flush-mount indirect wall solution was specified alongside a direct LED pendant by Artemide. "We mixed metaphors to show the effect of various directional illumination in one space."

"Being a space used to educate consumers, spaces are intentionally bright but equipped with dimming so that we can show a range of light levels—from 100 footcandles down to 1 fc," Koerbel adds. "When turned on, luminaires are pre-programmed to a dim level that shows light in line with the Recommended Practice for that space, but we also wanted the ability to brighten the space and demonstrate that option for clients."

Though the bulk of solutions are located in-

side The Lighting Agency's walls, the building's façade was not overlooked. "The exterior needed to capture the eye during the evening and allow people to see a 'lighting agency,'" Peterson says. Color-changing interior spaces, wall grazing solutions by B-K Lighting and Lumenpulse, and LED marker lights separating parking spaces "capture some of this feeling," Peterson adds. Consider it the canvas's frame. □

THE DESIGNER



Steve Peterson, LC, is a senior lighting designer at Illume, ME Engineers' architectural lighting studio.

FAST FACTS

- The Lighting Agency's new "laboratory" is a combination office, showroom and education center.
- Applications showcase typical lighting solutions, as well as undesirable features such as diode pixilation.
- All sources are LED; 74 fixture types were used throughout.