

# Airbnb-Headquarter: a showcase for being on holiday and at home

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**The new Airbnb headquarters in San Francisco plays with the feelings of being on holiday and at home. The heterogeneous design of the offices and conference rooms is designed to reflect the diversity of the Airbnb portfolio.**

A lot of light, an ambience like home, and every couple minutes a young employee comes by with a little designer trolley, as if one were in the middle of a railway station. “That’s exactly as it should be,” says Jenna Cushner, Head of Ground Control, “as ultimately we are all hosts and guests here at the same time, and this quality and hospitality should also be reflected in our new headquarters, right?”

Airbnb, established in 2007, manages private accommodations in 192 countries and over 34,000 cities. Despite increasing competition the trend of the private lodgings on holiday is snowballing like an unstoppable avalanche for what was then a start-up company. The Airbnb family is constantly

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growing. Hence the internet company – now with 400 employees – settled down a few months ago in an old, completely refurbished warehouse in SoMa (South of Market). Where formally paper products and later also batteries were manufactured, this is where the global administrative centre for accommodations outside of hotels, resorts and co is now located. “



Airbnb distinguishes itself in that no two private accommodations in the world are the same,” explains Bert deViterbo, project manager in the responsible, international architect firm, Gensler. “That is a feature that Airbnb customers appreciate very much. We therefore wanted to also transfer this phenomenon into the new centre in SoMa.” The result of this heterogeneous design premise: On the total of 7,200 square metres in the paper factory built in 1917 no room is precisely like the other. Every lounge, every workplace, every conference room is subordinate to a different concept.

In the 1970s apartment, the black & white pop apartment from the late 70s, pure Vitra culture, grandma’s knitting room, dad’s study and the airy conference room, which suggests in the best Playboy style that you’re not only in the middle of the sixties but also at a party pool in Palm Springs or Las Vegas. And with a bit of luck you can find yourself suddenly in Bali again. “The idea was to make a fictitious reconstruction of the entire Airbnb portfolio,” says deViterbo. “Everything that can be rented through Airbnb, should be qualitatively reflected in this somewhat unusual office building, as ultimately it is important to give employees an impression of the branch and the

ambience that they are working in on a day-to-day basis.”

And the planning was by no means only intuitive: In collaboration with the interior designer, Interior Design Fair (IDF), it was oriented to existing private landlords in California – the enormous Airbnb image database was thereby helpful – and out of this repertoire a wild, heterogeneous blend was recreated. The furniture for this came from classic furniture companies, second hand dealers and vintage stores. Many items were also bought on eBay, however. Other furniture was donated by well-wishers, of which Gensler and IDF are proud. “Planning something like this can’t simply be done by the book,” says deViterbo. “It’s only possible to realise such an office building with a great deal of time and a lot of love for the detail.”



Diffuse daylight streams through the roof from above. The square atrium, the five-storey centrepiece of the new Airbnb headquarters, makes one almost believe they’re already on holiday. It is impossible to imagine that you’re just a few metres from the restored paper plant on the corner of Brannan and 8th Street of the bustling San Francisco Bayshore Freeway. Thermally and acoustically the old industrial structure, which had been repurposed and renovated beyond recognition in the last decade, was perfectly insulated. Even the historic glass façade, which was in parts covered up and sealed in with bricks, was rebuilt once more. In the end, the planning and construction efforts were awarded the “Green Building Silver” by the US Green Building Council (USGBC).



A final view upwards: Young, slender silhouettes from the iPad generation flit back and forth in the galleries above like fragments of mobility. At noon the show grows denser in the airy heights. No wonder. A theatre, library and staff canteen are located on the uppermost storey of the “accommodation factory”. New York designer and illustrator Timothy Goodman has painted a total of 115 holiday “moments” on plywood here, which now dangle behind the dining tables in salon hang style. The whole thing is a bit reminiscent of Ikea. Of course this association is also quite welcome at Airbnb. “Ikea? That’s home, too!”