

# Lever House, LLC

For a New York hedge fund, Slade Architecture bet on modernist pedigree and contemporary art

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## The glass towers lining New

York's Park Avenue are awash in hedge-fund managers, all flush with cash positively begging to be spent at auction houses and Chelsea galleries. When the art collector also happens to be the boss, one of the most aggressive and successful in the business, his first-rate contemporary paintings, photography, and sculpture naturally require a showplace of an office. Slade Architecture's husband-wife principals, James and Hayes Slade, were no strangers to that scenario—or to the tastes of this particular CEO, who'd previously hired the Slades to design an apartment in Miami Beach as well as the company's first New York headquarters.

Reception for the new office, 20,000 square feet split between two levels at Skidmore, Owings & Merrill's Lever House, is all about that showcase effect. Blue-chip

contemporary sculpture and paintings surround a desk that rises, on a terrazzo pedestal, directly from the gleaming floor. A massive sculpture will soon be suspended in the center of the space.

"Lever House has relatively low ceilings—except where we punched through to accommodate that large suspended piece. But the building also has amazing wraparound windows," James Slade explains. "A lot of what we did plays off the verticals and horizontals of the low-ceiling-great-view combination."

On the ceiling along the window walls, for example, a 12-foot-wide swath of reflective white membrane doubles the perceptual height of the interior. The Slades used the same →

**Opposite:** A staircase with terrazzo steps and a balustrade of custom-shaped low-iron tempered glass connects the two levels.

**Above:** Glass walls and doors allow analysts sitting at internal workstations to see clearly across Park Avenue.





high-gloss ceiling membrane to flank the 120-foot-long diffuser that extends across the center of this level. The translucent PVC conceals not only fluorescent tubes but also all the office's mechanicals.

To connect the two levels, the Slades conceived a stunning spiral staircase directly off reception. "It's an important experience for visitors, plus it allows analysts to interact," Hayes Slade notes. "But it was far and away the hardest part of the job." The architects created the shape in AutoCAD, then sent the render-

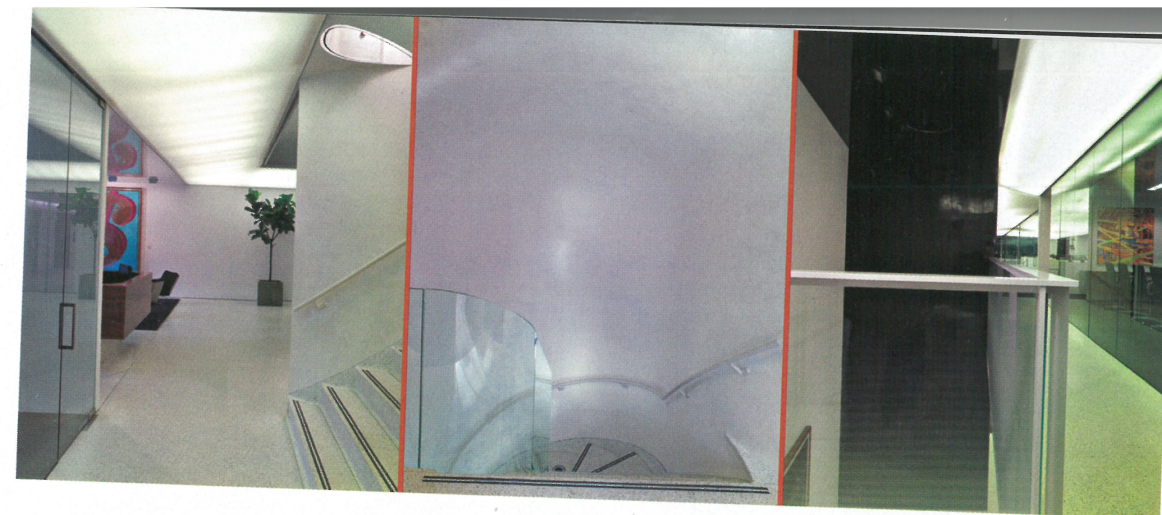
ings to the contractors, who built the plywood frame on-site and then poured the terrazzo. "We were originally going for opaque glass for the balustrade, but that requires a laborious sequence of baking and painting, which curved glass just wouldn't tolerate," she adds. Plus the opacity would have masked the stair's spiral form.

The outside of the stairwell is finished in glossy black plaster, as is the ceiling above. A striking contrast with the surrounding whiteness, the black adds depth and ambiguity. Meanwhile, the

stairwell's interior is an iridescent plaster that subtly changes, in the light, from buttery yellow to pearlescent pink.

In the work zone, lightness and openness prevail. Accessibility was critical. Thus perimeter of-fices are fronted by extra-clear low-iron tempered glass.

Understated furnishings radiate good taste. In analysts' offices, the Slades modified desk units with custom veneers and vertical storage drawers. In the conference room, Arne Jacobsen's slim black leather-covered chairs line a long rectangular table, its →



*"A striking contrast with the surrounding whiteness, the stairwell's black adds depth and ambiguity"*

**Opposite:** Reception's terrazzo floor rises to form the base of the walnut-faced desk. The ceiling membrane is PVC.

**Top, from left:** A 20-foot-wide fluorescent strip runs the 120-foot length of the ceiling on the first level. Plasterwork lends sheen to the stairwell's interior. The upper level's corridor passes the main conference room.

**Bottom:** The stairwell's exterior is finished in high-gloss trowelled plaster.







walnut top detailed with matching black leather. At the far end sits a vintage Swiss credenza.

The CEO's office is furnished with a Gio Ponti sofa and a vintage table and chairs from the firm's previous headquarters, designed by William T. Georgis Architect. New to this space is an Osvaldo Borsani walnut desk from the 1950's. James Slade had taken a shine to it years ago. After seeing a few photos, the CEO fell in love with it, too—and ultimately offered the right price to the desk's owner, *Interior Design* Hall of Fame member Lee Mindel.

James and Hayes Slade refinished the desk and customized it by adding a walnut L-shape cabinet that hugs the thoroughly CEO-worthy corner windows. On the cabinet's top sit the ultimate hedge-fund toys, models of two private jets and a helicopter.

PROJECT ARCHITECT: **DERVLA REILLY**. PROJECT TEAM: **EMILY ANDERSEN; ELIZABETH ARNAIZ**. GLASSWORK (STAIRWELL): **INFINITY ARCHITECTURAL SYSTEMS**. GLASS (OFFICES): **OLD CASTLE; MASS MERCHANDISE** (GLASSWORK). DESK UNITS (OFFICE AREA, ANALYST'S OFFICE): **KNOLL**. TASK CHAIRS (OFFICE AREA, ANALYST'S

OFFICE, CONFERENCE ROOM): **FRITZ HANSEN**. REFRIGERATORS, FREEZERS (KITCHEN): **SUB-ZERO FREEZER COMPANY**. COUNTER MATERIAL: **STONE SOURCE**. STOOLS: **EMECO**. CUSTOM CABINETS: **PATELLA WOODWORKING; LIRI INDUSTRIALE** (SURFACING). RECESSED CEILING FIXTURE: **MARK LIGHTING**. CARPET (ANALYST'S OFFICE, CONFERENCE ROOM): **EUROTEX**. CREDENZA (CONFERENCE ROOM): **THROUGH R20TH CENTURY**. CEILING MEMBRANE: **NEWMAT**. TERRAZZO: **PORT MORRIS TILE & MARBLE**. PLASTERWORK: **AMHI GROUP**. LIGHTING CONSULTANT: **ANN SCHIFFERS**. STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: **GILSANZ MURRAY STEFICEK**. MEP: **ROBERT DERECTOR ASSOCIATES**. ARCHITECT OF RECORD: **TPG ARCHITECTURE**. GENERAL CONTRACTOR: **LEHR CONSTRUCTION**.

**Left, from top:** The kitchen features a granite counter and Philippe Starck stools. An analyst's office contains leather-covered chairs by Arne Jacobsen and a desk unit by Jonathan Crinion, customized with rosewood veneer. In the main conference room, leather details the top of a custom walnut table; the Swiss 1959 credenza is rosewood. **Right:** All selected by William T. Georgis Architect for previous headquarters, a Gio Ponti sofa and other vintage pieces gather in the CEO's sitting area. Beyond is Slade Architecture's custom walnut credenza.

**Opposite:** The CEO works at an Osvaldo Borsani walnut desk from the 1950's, now customized with an L-shape walnut cabinet.

