

Splendid Showroom.

Wood Elements Sparkle in WorkLife and WorkCafe in Merchandise Mart.



Steelcase is a global company based in Grand Rapids, Michigan, that offers a range of architecture, furniture, technology, products and services that provide solutions and insights for the global workplace and create places that provoke thought but are also comfortable, evocative and smart.

Steelcase



at a glance

AWI MANUFACTURING
MEMBER:

**Bernhard Woodwork
Ltd.**

LOCATION:

Northbrook, Illinois

ESTABLISHED:

1965

**Licensed
QCP Manufacturer**



When Steelcase wanted to create a memorable 30,000 square foot WorkLife and WorkCafe showroom within Chicago's Merchandise Mart, the company worked closely with Shimoda Design Group of Los Angeles and the architectural woodworking firm Bernhard Woodwork Ltd, an AWI firm from Northbrook, Illinois.

According to Joey Shimoda FAIA, FIIDA, the objective was "to create a showroom experience that celebrated the ideas that workplace should express freedom of choice in where and how one could work, spatial elements that are sculptural and architecture that imbued a 'hand-made' quality. Perhaps most importantly, the space needed to feel more like a home than a commercial workspace or showroom."

One of our primary objectives of this project was to create an authentic space, explains Steelcase's Cherie Johnson. "The project was centered around the use of natural materials. Wood was a logical choice in that it provided great structural properties but also possessed a natural beauty."

There were a number of challenges in terms of the physical environment of the Merchandise Mart, adds Shimoda. "The Mart is nearly 100 years old so the elements of physical access, environmental controls and schedule were all thoroughly considered in the implementation of the project which ran from March 2017 through June 2018. Natural colors of the materials were a common thread among all items. Many of the existing materials of the base building were left uncovered to illustrate the way that the building was built, but also to reflect a patina that has been built up over time."



Wood Elements

Explains woodworker Mark Bernhard, the project consisted of two main elements. The first was a sculptural element hanging from the entry ceiling that was affectionately referred to as "Woody". It essentially was an upside down bird's nest fabricated of Ash running a serpentine length of 100+ feet at its center line and covering an area of over 80 feet by 30 feet. The ceiling element was bent to split either side of the main entry glazing of the Steelcase showroom. Second was the nutrition bar which included Sho Shugi Ban planking with full kitchen and storage area featuring copper cladding and full height curved and pocketing doors, plus radiator enclosures with sills.

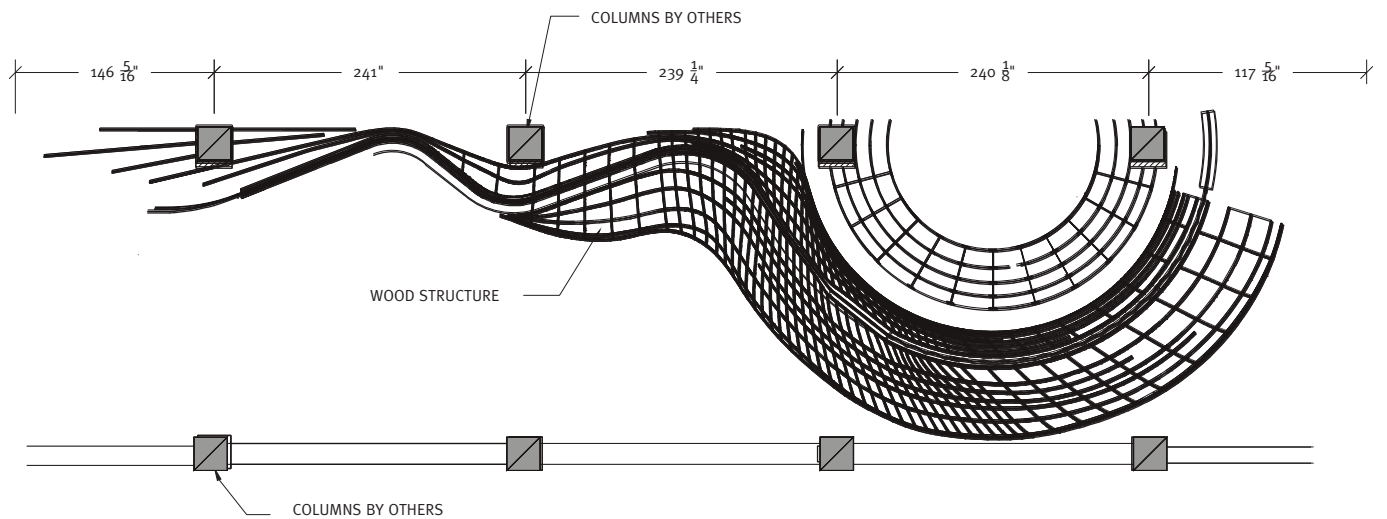
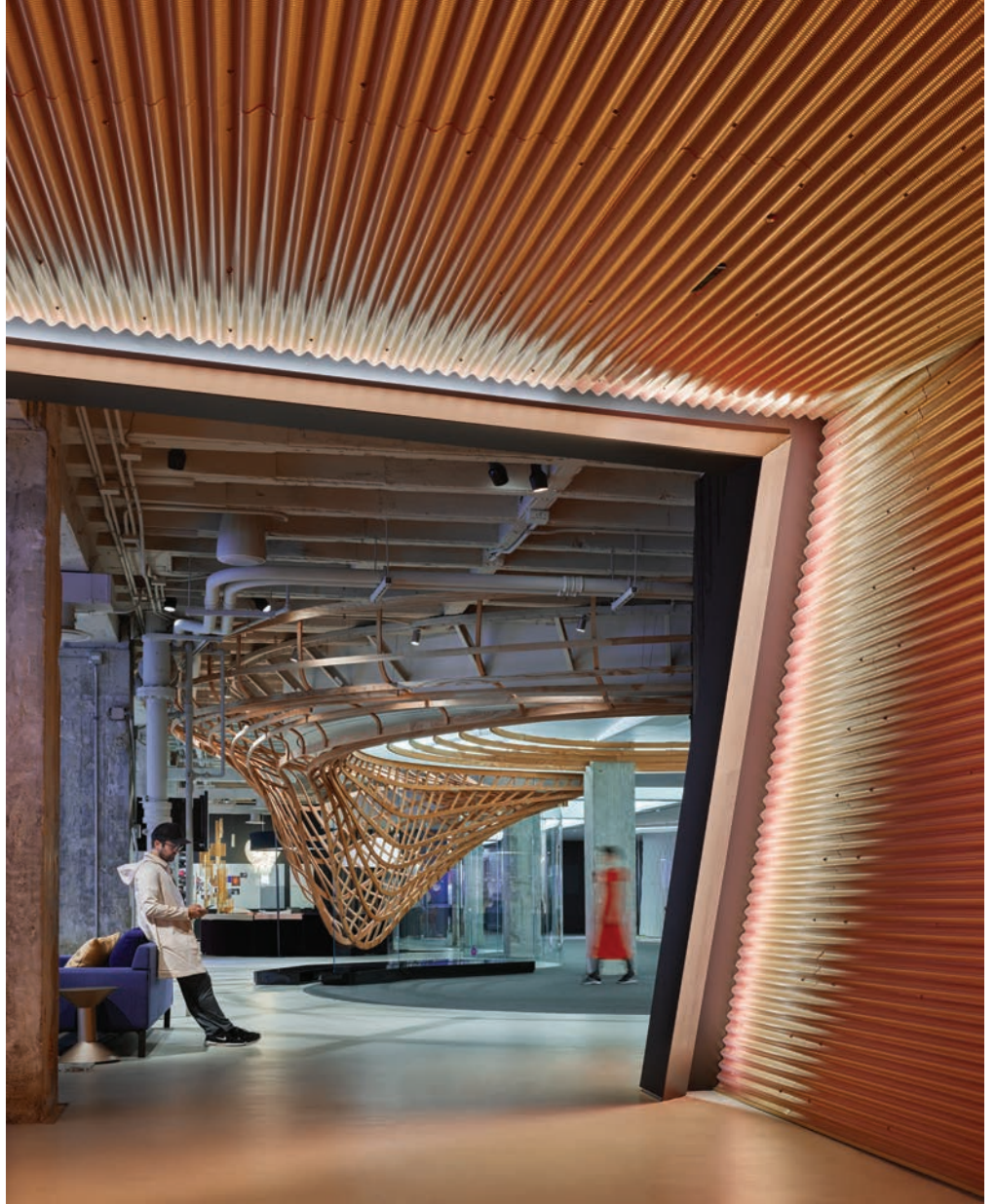


ASH

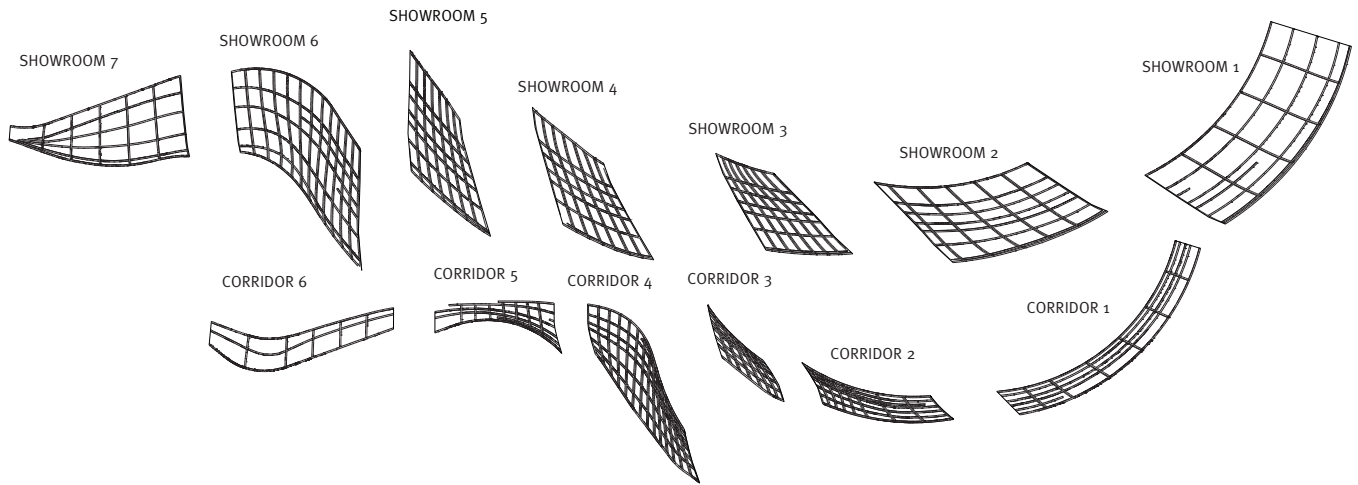
Bernhard Woodwork fabricated and installed the woodwork. Wood bending was done by Chris Mroz of Pure Timber LLC -the Extreme Wood Bending company, located in Gig Harbor, Washington.



The nourishment bar was made predominantly from rich and warm materials that are not commonly seen in workspaces, notes Shimoda. The wall cladding is Japanese burnt wood called Sho Sugi Ban and it was coupled with perforated copper colored metal panels. “These two materials exuded warmth and tactility, elements that are much more residential in nature. The use of the Japanese burnt wood was to evoke a sense of texture and touch through its cracked surface. The sense of smell is evoked as the charcoal scent makes one think about the aroma of scotch whiskey. The color of the copper creates a warm visual glow and creates a blanket of light around the people in this area. The perforated copper with an acoustic board above, helps to quiet the space down and allow for conversations to be more easily heard.”



REFLECTED CEILING PLAN
@ WOOD STRUCTURE



REFLECTED CEILING PLAN
@COMPONENT SECTIONS





Full height curved doors with charred planking over a steel framework needed to keep the weight down and swing on European hinges, points out Bernhard.

Woody Sculpture

The sculptural element Woody was created completely digitally but was made entirely by hand. “This piece is at the entrance of the space to greet people and provoke them to ponder the art and the architecture of the space. Once this moment is created, the visitor is then immersed in a number of environments, each with a different approach to furniture, lighting, and spatial experience,” Shimoda says. “The use of bent wood is a reference to the past where all furniture was created by the skill of the craftsman. The complexity that we created in this complex bentwood piece celebrates the ability for design processes to be virtual, but that the making of the work is analog and requires a human eye and hand.”

Woody is solid Ash with a clear finish. The unit was suspended from the ceiling on Unistrut with aircraft cable, says Bernhard. “This project was unique and one of the more challenging engineering endeavors we have faced. Woody was meant to be a fluid weightless sculptural element. Bending the wood was a challenge but so was the scale of the piece and the need to break it into sections to bring into the building up an elevator, then make it look like a single homogenous piece even though it was split in two.”

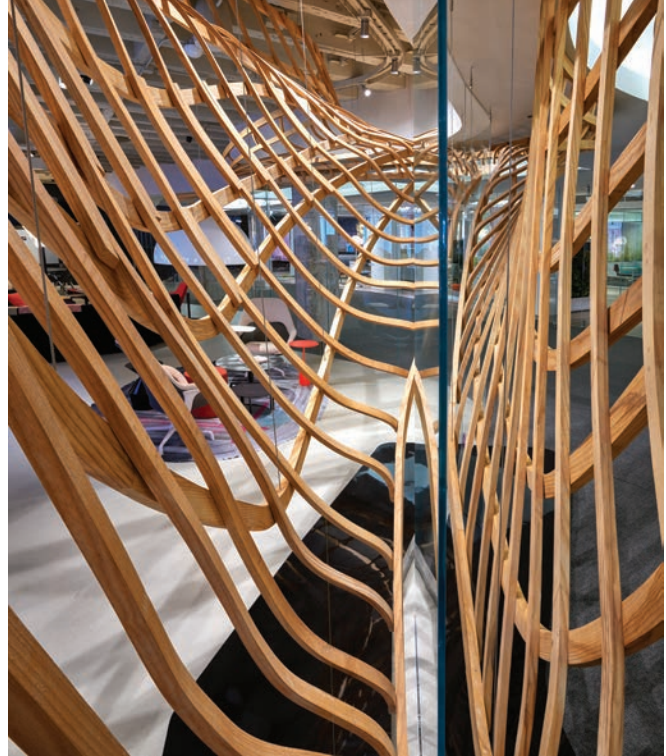
Through weekly meetings with Shimoda Design and Pure Timber, we developed the 3D model and game plan to fabricate and install, he continues. “The Merchandise Mart is an old building with little environmental control and large fluctuations in humidity from summer to winter. Attaching and hanging the sculpture to the ceiling to multiple materials on several planes was a difficult challenge as was allowing it room to move over 100 feet.”

Showroom Team

“The complexity and expectation of high-quality work required the skill and vigilance of the woodworking firm, the client, the contractor, the fabricator and the architect. The teamwork was exceptional in this project,” summarizes Shimoda.

“ At Bernhard, architectural woodwork goes far beyond manufacturing. Rather, it’s a time-honored craft, practiced by craftsmen, with its roots in Europe.”

– Mark Bernhard



Bernhard Woodwork drove the design of both Woody and the nourishment bar, says Bernhard. “We fabricated templates for the field to lay out and hang and attach Woody. This project was a tight deadline from the start for such a complex piece. We had to simplify the original design to meet budget requirements. We were able to trim the number of pieces in the design to reduce cost but still maintain the look of the elements.”

We had an excellent team, he adds. “Sometimes daily updates were needed to drive a very tight deadline. Joey Shimoda was engaged in the process throughout the whole project, driving the design forward while maintaining a practical/buildable approach. Mroz and his team were invaluable in developing the design for ease of production and installation.”

Johnson agrees. “The project was extremely successful. The wood elements in the project are constantly being complimented by the people who work there and the many guests that come to experience the space and the workplace solutions Steelcase creates.”

PROJECT:
WorkLife and WorkCafe Showroom
Chicago, IL

PROJECT OWNER:
Steelcase, Inc.
Grand Rapids, MI

WOODWORKER:
Bernhard Woodwork Ltd.
Northbrook, IL

WOOD BENDING:
Pure Timber LLC
Gig Harbor, WA

ARCHITECT:
Shimoda Design Group
Los Angeles, CA

GENERAL CONTRACTOR:
Bushman Construction Management
Chicago, IL

PHOTOGRAPHER:
Steelcase, Inc.
Grand Rapids, MI