

Designers of the Year

Nina Etnier and Brad Sherman

Float Studio

*40th Annual
Interiors Awards*

**Legend
Clive
Wilkinson**





Fifty-one years after architect Buckminster Fuller's geodesic dome—covered in a thin acrylic membrane—at Expo 67 in Montreal gained worldwide attention, and three years after construction crews first broke ground in Seattle, The Spheres, a trio of glass domes that are part of Amazon's new three-block, six-building downtown headquarters, has become an instant icon.

"As soon as The Spheres started to be built, you'd see people out there with their cameras taking photos," recalls Tara Schneider, an interior designer for Seattle architecture firm NBBJ, which designed the project. "You still see that buzz."

Yet the purpose was not to give the city another work of postcard-worthy architecture like the Space Needle. Rather, Schneider explains, the idea was "to give people a workplace where they can think and work differently."

The domes are comprised of pentagonal hexecontahedron-shaped glass panels, inside of which the design team created four floors of space (while also retaining some multi-story volumes). The first two levels include a cafeteria and coffee bar, while the upper two floors are flexible lounge and work spaces, all connected by a series of meandering paths and walkways. While there are no closed-door conference rooms, a particularly popular spot is what's known as The Birdcage, a circular, wood lattice-enclosed enclave cantilevered off an upper-floor walkway, offering nearly 360-degree views to the outside and room for three to four employees. "There's places for more focused head-down work, to dine, to walk, or to simply sit contemplatively and be inspired," Schneider says.

Interspersed throughout The Spheres are more than 40,000 plants. Many are clustered in two main garden spaces housed by the Sixth and Seventh Avenue-facing Spheres, but plants are also dotted throughout the spaces, fed by flowing water features including a creek and a small waterfall. Grown at a site in nearby Redmond over a three-year period, the plants come from the forest regions of more than 30 countries and were chosen for conduciveness to interior temperatures in the low 70s. Among nearly 50 trees in The Spheres, the largest is a mature *Ficus rubiginosa* tree (native to Australia and also known as the Port Jackson fig) some 55 feet tall. Nicknamed "Rubi," it had to be lifted into The Spheres by crane.

The greenery is far more than novelty. A 2015 joint study by Harvard University and Stanford University found that nationally, work-related stress costs employers up to \$190 billion annually. But numerous studies have also documented how access to nature can reduce stress. The Spheres are a machine for enhancing the productivity and well-being of employees. "You feel like you're really in an amazing outdoor space: it smells different, it feels different, and you can hear the waterfall," Schneider says.

Because this is a high-humidity interior environment, the designers selected only outdoor furniture. And though it feels almost like being outside, ultimately these spaces are alternatives to the outdoors that can help employees and visitors (when The Spheres are open to public tours) thrive during winter. "In Seattle we have some long, rainy, cold times," Schneider says. "It's kind of a refuge. It rekindles your spirit."

Indeed, attests Amazon spokesperson Ana Rigby, "The Spheres offers a unique environment to work, eat, relax, and be creative in. The response from employees has been outstanding." ■

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Project Credits

Architect and interior designer NBBJ
NBBJ architecture project team
 John Savo; Dale Alberda; David Sadinsky;
 Nate Holland
NBBJ interior design project team
 Tara Schneider
Contractor Sellen Construction
Lighting WSP, NY
Engineering Magnusson Klemencic
 Associates (structural); WSP, Seattle
 (environmental)
Landscape SiteWorkshop
Graphics NBBJ
Acoustician Stantec
Mechanical contracting University
 Mechanical
Electrical contracting Cochran

Selected Sources

Wallcoverings Daltile; Statements Tile;
 Ann Sacks
Interior paint Sherwin Williams
Facade paint Tnemec
Portland cement plaster Variance
Laminate Formica; Nevamar
Countertops Pental Quartz
Metals McKinstry Metals; Carl Stahl
 DecorCable; Forms and Surfaces
Wood JS Parrot
Hard flooring J.S. Perrott; Daltile
Resilient flooring Bolon
Walk-off carpet tile J&J Invision
Ceilings Armstrong World Industries;
 Snaptex
Interior Rocks Johnston Stone
 & Marenakos
Aquarium/paludarium Tenji
Recessed/semi-recessed lighting
 USAI; Deltalight
Track lighting Light Services Inc.
Ceiling surface mounted lighting
 Louis Poulsen; Eureka; i2 Systems; ALW

Surface mounted lighting BK Lighting;
 Tempo; Lumascope; Meteor Lighting
Pendants/chandeliers Bega; Bover
 Sconces, wall-recessed lighting,
 pathlights Bega
Specialty Photosynthetic Lights;
 Ephesus & Meteor
Underwater lighting Lumascope
Landscape bench lighting LED Waves
Door hardware Assa Abloy
Doors Kawneer
Architectural glass/glazing Enclos
 & PPG
Decorative glass panels/partitions
 McGroly Glass
Lounge seating JANUS et Cie
Cafeteria/dining seating Coalesse;
 Fermob; JANUS et Cie
Other seating Atelier Vierkant
Upholstery Carnegie Textiles;
 Momentum Textiles
Conference tables custom design;
 built by Dale Alberda, NBBJ

Cafeteria/dining tables West Coast
 Industries; Fermob
Reception desk JS Parrot
Side and coffee tables Jane Hamley
 Wells
Accent tables JANUS et Cie
Architectural/custom woodworking
 JS Parrot
Planters, accessories Custom
Signage (fabricator) TubeArt