

TRAVEL WEEKLY

THE NATIONAL NEWSPAPER OF THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY/VOLUME 53, NUMBER 45/FOCUS/SECTION 3/JUNE 9, 1994

Best Office Design, Sales of More Than \$5 Million

Arrington Travel Center

If Mike Arrington is proud, it's with good reason. When he opened Arrington Travel Center in Chicago 25 years ago, the agency required just a 1,000-square-foot office. Today, Arrington Travel's headquarters office (one of 140 Arrington locations) occupies 21,000 square feet on the 38th floor of the Xerox Centre in the heart of Chicago's Loop.

Arrington's pride, not to mention his success, is clearly reflected in his surroundings. For his agency's quarters are not only spacious, they sport a look that is exceptionally tasteful and sophisticated, a look that cost Arrington's landlord \$1 million to create.

But Arrington, who is president and founder of what has become one of the top agencies in the country, would argue that it's far more than the look that makes the design of the agency's headquarters first class. Asked to discuss the principles that guided the design of the agency's headquarters, Arrington focuses first on functionality. "One was to design an environment that would be conducive for optimum

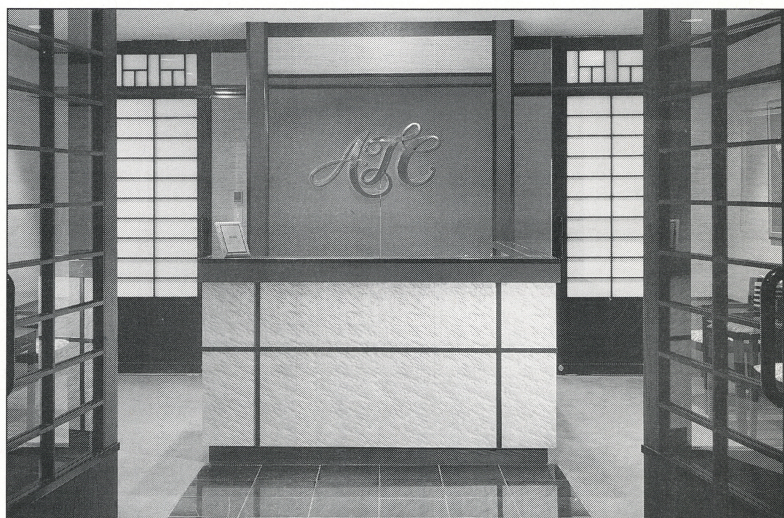


Mike Arrington says Asian design elements give Arrington's headquarters (at right) a distinctive look.

tion on the entire floor.) "It's a very open, airy space with a lot of windows, and we're one of the taller buildings in the area," Arrington says. Plus, with the exception of a handful of executives, most managers occupy interior quarters, "which means that the majority of employees have access to beautiful views of the city and of Lake Michigan, so it's a very uplifting environment."

The convenient location of the agency's automation, printing devices and storage space is also critical to its functionality, Arrington says. In addition, the use of acoustic panels muffles the sounds of the office, which has a fairly dense layout. "We don't have a huge square footage per employee, but when you walk through this facility, you can't hear a pin drop. It's absolutely the quietest office I've ever been in."

"In our business, one of the key things is to not only find talent, but to keep talent," Arrington says. "We



look at our space as a place that people look forward to coming to. If you're in a bad neighborhood or an ugly environment, it does affect how you feel emotionally." Moreover, he says, "If you're in a dark room with no windows, it has been proven scientifically to lower productivity."

One look around Arrington Travel confirms that more than productivity guided the design process. For though the aesthetics of the travel agents' work spaces are simple and straightforward (employees sit in relatively nondescript cubicles separated by low partitions), the public face of Arrington Travel features a distinctive Asian design, prominent artwork and stylish contemporary furniture.

"We felt image was very important," Arrington says.

The reception area, executive board room and executive offices feature high-quality wall coverings, furnishings and artwork in a handsome Asian design with clean, simple lines. Blond, grainy wood surfaces are accented by dark wood highlights. Dark wood doors with clear or smoked glass panels are fashioned after Japanese-style screens, and plain blond wallpaper is distinguished by its natural textured fiber.

In Arrington's own office, a large decorative folding screen sits behind his distinctive wood-and-chrome semicircular desk. These elements are complemented by artwork that includes Japanese calligraphy, a large Asian statue and other decorative pieces.

Arrington says the decor of the office imparts a sense of timelessness. "The typical contemporary design is very faddish. One color is in for several years then gone. And we felt that the traditional law office atmosphere, with wood paneling and traditional furniture, was tired. The Oriental design gives the classic appearance of tradition."

That appearance is vital, Arrington suggests, because all potential clients tour Arrington's headquarters before hearing the agency's presentation in the boardroom. "When the office looks outstanding, it is a plus in terms of how we are viewed against the competition. We serve a lot of law firms, a lot of blue-chip, Fortune 500 companies. All of their offices are well-maintained. They exude a sophisticated atmosphere. We wanted to make sure we did the same thing."

WINNER

**Arrington Travel Center
Chicago**

AGENCY'S GROSS SALES

\$130 million

BUSINESS MIX

95% corporate; 5% leisure

productivity by all employees. Because the type of work we're involved with is high stress, you need to design an environment that is the healthiest possible."

Several features ensure that Arrington Travel's office promotes productivity, Arrington says. Not least among them is its location on the 38th floor. (The agency also occupies part of the 37th floor and has an op-