

New Construction Awards 2004: A New Dimension

Private/Corporate Winner: ABN AMRO Plaza, Chicago

Reliability. Flexibility. Energy efficiency. It's a building goal often aspired to and seldom achieved. However, the ABN AMRO Plaza is proof that it can be done.

Adding new dimension to the Chicago skyline, the Phase One tower of the ABN AMRO Plaza was completed in early 2004. Read through a list of this 1.3-million-square-foot building's features and it sounds more like a letter to Santa than a realizable development. The building's owner, LaSalle Bank Corp., wisely selected a team of professionals with extensive experience, skill, and unyielding dedication. The owner, together with a team that included Hines' Chicago office as the development manager and Chicago-based DeStefano and Partners Ltd. as the architect of record, transformed a long list of needs into a sophisticated building plan. The outcome was a facility built with the infrastructure of an impenetrable fortress, but with the façade of a welcoming corporate building.

LaSalle Bank Corp. is a subsidiary of Netherlands-based ABN AMRO Bank NV, one of the world's largest banks. After undertaking extensive analysis of the company's facility needs, LaSalle Bank settled on a plan to develop a two-phased project in Chicago's West Loop. The first phase of the project consisted of constructing a 31-story tower and 6-story podium (which would serve as both the lobby for Tower One, as well as the yet-to-be-built, 1.2-million-square-foot second tower). Located at 540 West Madison, the newly completed facility supports 3,000 employees with office space, a LaSalle Bank retail branch, and an employee wellness center.

Location, location, location: Bank employees work better together.

With bank operations located in a variety of owned and leased buildings spread out across the City of Chicago, the owner felt strongly that a consolidation would be beneficial. The development of ABN AMRO Plaza enables the company to achieve that goal. "What we feel we have accomplished is [that] we have consolidated all of our technology processing and operations functions into one central location, whereby reducing our operational costs, our operational risks, and more importantly, retaining our jobs in the City of Chicago," explains David Stapleton, first vice president, administrative services, LaSalle Bank Corp., Chicago.

The close proximity of newly united employees is likely to increase efficiency and result in greater synergy. "Not only are the employees thrilled to be able to stay in the City of Chicago, but also, we have employees that typically did not work together because they were in disparate buildings," Stapleton explains. "[Now,] they're working together more as a cohesive team than they have in the past."



Private/Corporate Winner:
ABN AMRO Plaza, Chicago

Specialty Spaces Winner:
Randall's Island Fire Training Center, New York City

Public/Government Winner:
FedEx Institute of Technology, Memphis, TN

Addition to Existing Structure Winner:
Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse Annex, Wheeling, WV

Specialty Spaces Honorable Mention:
STAX Music Academy and Museum of American Soul Music, Memphis, TN

Private/Corporate Honorable Mention:
American Heart Association, Houston

Public/Government Honorable Mention:
Capitol Area East End Complex, Sacramento, CA

The company's commitment to the Windy City and its workforce is commendable. "ABN AMRO Plaza is a spectacular addition to the city skyline and it further reinforces our commitment to Chicago," says Ahsan Hafeez, group senior vice president, administrative services, LaSalle Bank Corp., Chicago. Even Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley hailed the project as a success during its opening, stating that the ABN AMRO Plaza is "a very visible sign that Chicago is weathering the slow economy better than many other cities."

There's no better insurance against downtime than redundancy.

Because the facility would include a data center and be used for check processing and other critical functions, it was important that the ABN AMRO Plaza be built to ensure system reliability and business continuity 24/7. "It was very essential that we have not only high-performance, state-of-the-art technology built into all floors, but also that we have a high level of redundancy in all of the power and utility systems," explains Raymond S. Clark, principal, DeStefano and Partners Ltd., Chicago.

The multiple levels of redundancy ensure that during various failure scenarios, power, air, and water remain available and uncompromised. "It was very vehemently intended to be a battleship. It is very heavily redundant and protected against utility and outside failure. There is on-site water storage. There is on-site power generation. There is UPS and generator back-up," explains John McDermott, vice president, Hines, Chicago. The plaza's sophisticated mechanical systems and electrical infrastructure are monitored by a high-tech control center.

Because of the mission-critical nature of functions performed in the building, tight security was another requirement. Proving to be an additional challenge during the design stage was the consideration of how ground-floor retail (mandated by the City of Chicago) and public access could be incorporated without compromising the strict and necessary security. This issue was resolved by designing a double-level lobby. The lower level accommodates public circulation, access to retail, and connects two major east-west streets at ground level. The mezzanine level of the lobby serves bank personnel and provides adequate security and access control. "The building was designed as [quite] a high-security building prior to 9/11," says McDermott. Following 9/11 and an extensive review, it was found that no redesign was necessary. The security that was designed into the building originally remained adequate.

ABN AMRO Plaza is a facility built with the future in mind.

Flexibility was a big priority for the bank. Analysis revealed the cost and frequency of reconfigurations. Systems and strategies to increase flexibility and adaptability were extremely desirable. Recognizing that groups would need to reorganize and reconfigure spaces to adapt to new business practices, the project team selected modular furniture and a raised floor system. "With the raised floor, and with the self-contained systems and [air] distribution below the floor that are part of this building, you can isolate and reconfigure a portion of the floor or an entire floor – or a group of floors – without any disturbance to adjacent spaces," explains Clark. The building's large floorplates and use of this technology will enable it to maintain functionality well into the future.

PHOTO: HEDRICH BLESSING

The Project Team

Architect (entry submitter): DeStefano and Partners Ltd.

Owner: ABN AMRO North America Inc.

Development Manager: Hines

Interior Architect (general office): VOA

Interior Architect (mission-critical spaces): Griswold, Heckel & Kelly Associates Inc.

MEP/FP Engineer: Environmental Systems Design Inc.

Structural Engineer: Thornton-Tomasetti Engineers

Products Used

Ceilings: Armstrong

Doors/Storefronts: Albany Door; Ceco Door; Crane Revolving Door; Dawson Doors; Doralco

Elevators/Escalators: H&B Elevators; Otis

Façade: Outsulation MD

Floorcoverings: Shaw

Furniture: Geiger; Knoll

Hardware: Corbin Russwin; LCN

HVAC: Baltimore Aircoil; Data Aire; Nailor; Trane; WEBCO

Interior Doors: Algoma Hardwoods

Landscaping: Campolonghi Italia

Life Safety/Security: Grace; NTC

Electronics; SimplexGrinnell

Lighting: Focal Point Other

The ABN AMRO Plaza is only the second building to be built in Chicago with an underfloor plenum air distribution system. By taking advantage of the natural convection process (providing fresh air through floor diffusers and drawing out return air through ceiling diffusers), the system requires less energy. While it promotes energy efficiency and long-term operational savings, the system presented a challenge as well. "There were ongoing challenges with the building department and the regulatory authorities in enabling them to understand the technology, how the systems worked, what the safeguards were, and how they compared to more traditional [HVAC] systems," says Clark. "It took a lot of time, a lot of presentations, and a lot of discussion and review in order to assure the city that we had the right system."

While getting buy-in from everyone may have been an uphill battle, it's no doubt that it was well worth the work. "The average move costs probably went from over \$1,000 [per] person down to \$100 [per person]," says McDermott. The amount of individual control – users can adjust the amount of air from floor diffusers – has building occupants smiling. The amount of cost savings and flexibility the system offers has made the bank just as happy.

Underfloor air distribution isn't the only means by which the company achieved increased efficiency. "We also have what I would call a high-performance exterior wall, in that it uses a lot of energy-efficient materials, [including a] high-performance glazing system," explains Clark. Higher-than-normal floor-to-floor heights (9 feet, 6 inches) and floor-to-ceiling, low-E glass perimeter walls allow daylight to penetrate deeper into the open-plan interior. A rooftop garden above the 6-story podium provides an ideal spot for employees to relax. Fifty percent of this podium is covered with the green roof; the other half contains light-colored pavers to reflect light and heat from the sun's rays. "We challenged our architectural and engineering team to provide us with a flexible design that was environmentally friendly," explains Stapleton. Mission accomplished.

The ABN AMRO Plaza was a 5-year project that melded high-tech with sustainability in a way that will provide building occupants and the owner with flexibility and comfort well into the future. It seems some buildings really *can* have it all.

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Electrical/Mechanical Materials: ASCO; Caterpillar; Elkay; General Electric; MGE UPS Systems
Other Exterior Materials: Elston Block; Mero
Plumbing: Accurate Partitions; Crane Plumbing; Grohe
Roofing: Barrett Roofing; Firestone
Walls/Partitions: Oldcastle Glass

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