

Studio O+A: McDonald's Innovation Center

Every MBA knows the value of a detailed business plan, but a successful business profits, as well, from its detours. The discovery you wouldn't have made if you hadn't left the main road is of special value to companies that have been on that road for decades. Many years ago McDonald's built a detour into its creative infrastructure. This special facility for experimentation became a source of new products, new processes, new thinking that have kept the company at the top of its industry through a period of epochal change. After O+A partnered with McDonald's on a new corporate headquarters in Chicago's West Loop, it turned to the Innovation Center for a similarly fresh look at the spaces where fresh looking is the workday's principal activity.

New Space for a Shop Where “New” Gets Hatched

Wherefore Art Thou, Romeoville?

Romeoville, Illinois is a suburb of Chicago known principally as a shipping and warehousing hub. Since 2001 it has also been home to McDonald's Innovation Center, a sprawling complex that serves as the company's operational test facility. New equipment gets put through its paces here. New kitchen processes are rehearsed and fine-tuned. It's a space dedicated to keeping McDonald's at the forefront of innovation, but the center itself hadn't had a refresh in almost 20 years.

Breaking Down Barriers

O+A's first challenge was to pull out the improvised panels and black foam core that had turned the space into “a maze” and create the clear sightlines and uncluttered contexts that visionary work demands. But the barriers removed were not just physical. Over the years it had become the Center's custom to keep kitchen and office operations separate and their respective staffs apart. The new Center encourages interaction in a shared café, gallery space and phone mezzanine and projects a welcoming brightness everywhere.

The Country Room

When McDonald's teams from other countries come to the Innovation Center to test drive a new menu, logistics technology or kitchen configuration they need a temporary Central Command. In the old space that was a conference room in a corner far-removed from the kitchen. O+A's design repositioned it to an area directly adjacent to the action and equipped it with custom pivot doors that allow visiting innovators to run back and forth. Despite the noise of a busy professional kitchen, those doors are almost always open.

Lightbulb Moments

For all the ingenuity the Innovation Center has brought to McDonald's global operation, until now it has never had its own brand logo. O+A graphic designer Paulina McFarland devised a symbol that answered the client's preference for “a lightbulb,” while suggesting illumination specific to McDonald's. Surely one of the most remarkable things about this Innovation Center is how successfully, over many years of practice, it has steered creative thinking through the golden arches, how it has made McDonald's a consistent source of invention and an always relevant leader in its industry.

DESIGN DRIVER

McDonald's tailors a workplace to its specialty: innovation.



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McDonald's Innovation Center uses playful, utilitarian graphics, clear sightlines and industrial grade materials to convey a sense of wide-open possibility that is the starting point for all innovation.

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+ Here's one thing design can do. Working far from the downtown office, the IC staff took this custom logo as a symbol of their work's importance, an indication that their light shines brightly all the way to the West Loop HQ.

+ The walkway to the kitchen is a gallery of invention—breakthroughs in equipment, packaging and graphic design that have made McDonald's renowned for its innovative work culture.



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O+A designed the café to be a mingling place for kitchen and office staff. It proved instantly successful in bringing these separated departments together.



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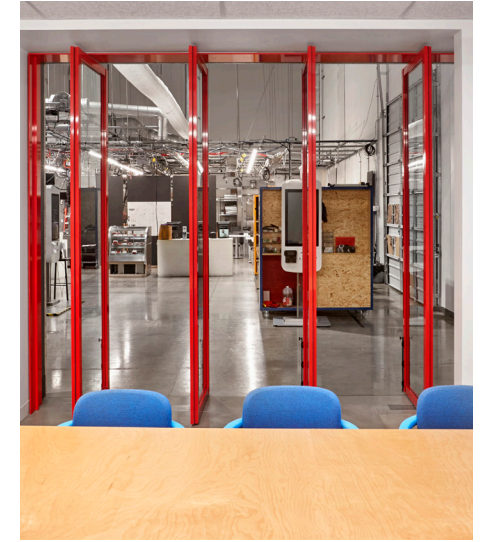
Establishing connections between the mix of spaces and making it all transparent was a key goal of the IC project. Here full-height pivot doors keep a meeting room accessible to reception, a pantry and the stairway that connects them.

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Wall graphics continue the schematic drawing theme, here with details of a burner and a patented bolt.



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The brain center of the IC is the country room, where operators from across the world come to run test simulations on the lab floor. Custom pivot doors with full height glazing allow teams to move seamlessly from the whiteboard to the front lines.

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Super graphics composed of exploded patent drawings capture the spirit of invention that has kept the Center going for almost 20 years.

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Color at the Innovation Center tends to leap out from a backdrop of industrial beige, gray and white. This is a phone room.



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A frame of wood and writeable surfaces gives the engineering team a better place to meet than the bunker of improvised partitions it replaced.

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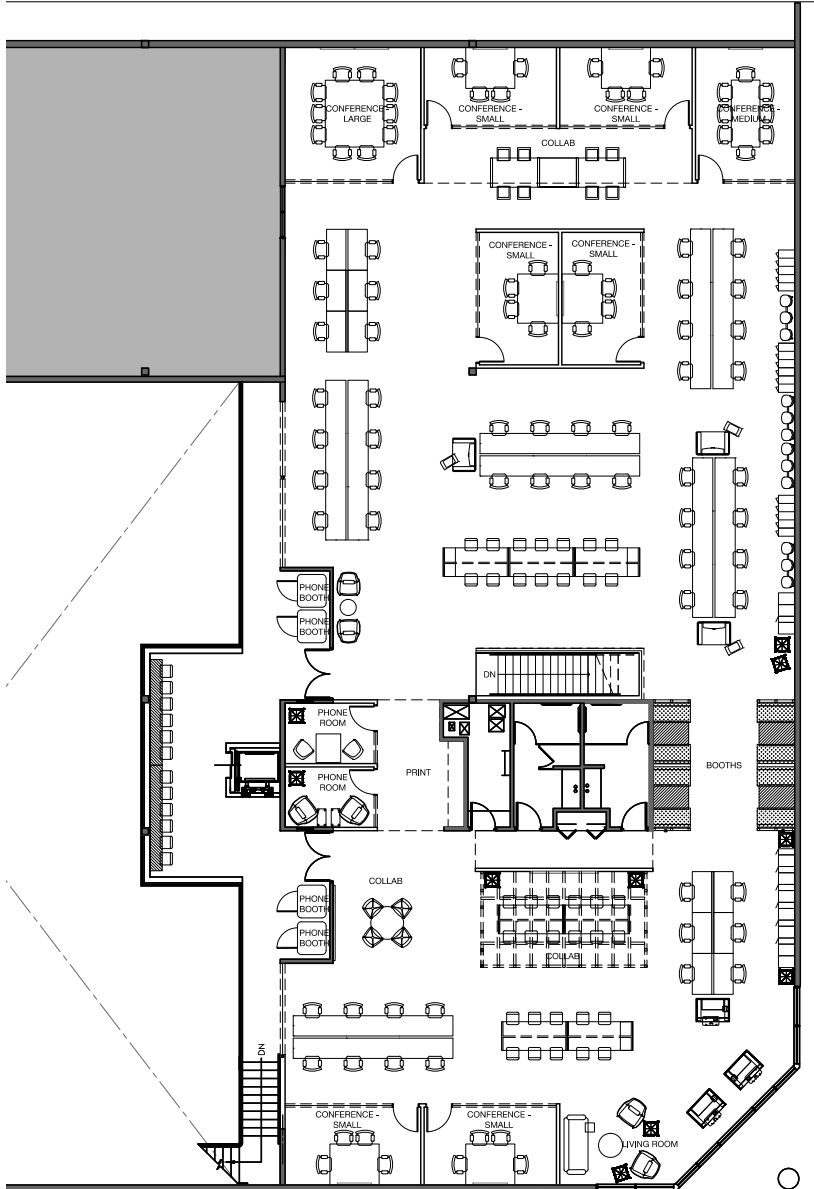
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Phone rooms on the mezzanine provide another shared space for all Innovation Center staff as well as a visual between office and kitchen.

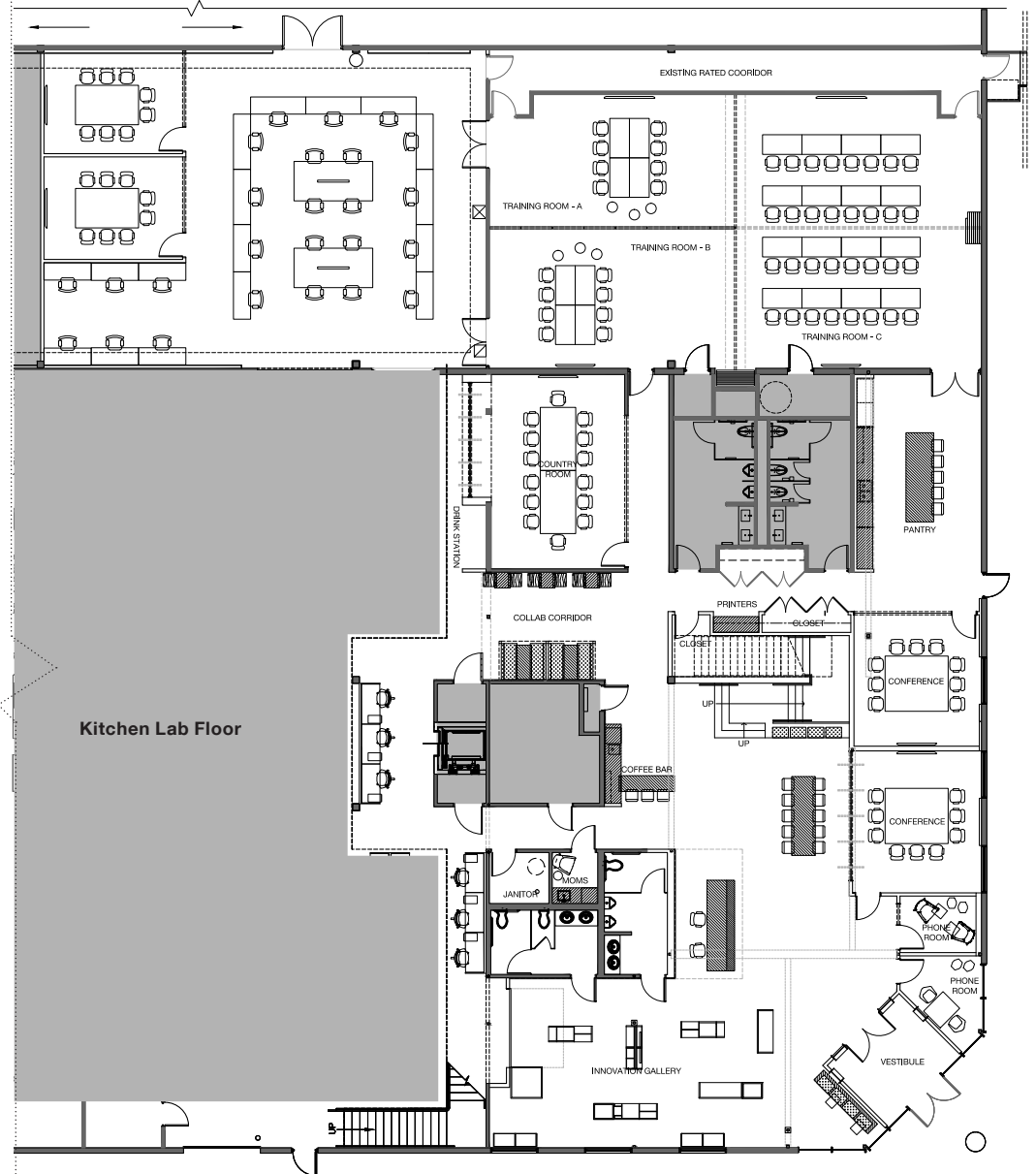
Innovation Center Floorplans



Floor 2



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Floor 1

McDonald's: Innovation Center Fact Sheet

Type of space	Office
Client Name	McDonald's
Interior Design by	Studio O+A
O+A team	Primo Orpilla, Mindi Weichman, Alex Bautista, Elizabeth Vereker, Paulina McFarland, Kaylen Parker
AOR	Antunovich Associates
General Contractor	Bulley & Andrews
Project Location	Romeoville, IL
Date of occupancy	July 2019
Square Footage	16,410
Floors	2 Floors
Specified Manufacturers	Kimball Office, Vitra
Photographer credit	Garrett Rowland

Thank you.

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