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Continues  
to Excavate  
Office Ideas**





# Wolf-Gordon Continues to Excavate Office Ideas

Office\_Excavate is Wolf-Gordon's interpretation of the evolution of the office — an erosion of the office grid that is transformed into a lounge-like collaborative environment.

Words by Rob Kirkbride







For several years, Wolf-Gordon built fantastic sculptures above the escalators that link the floors at the Merchandise Mart during NeoCon. They were abstract representations of the company and its wallcovering and textile capabilities.

But in 2016, because of ongoing construction projects at the Mart, Wolf-Gordon had to come up with a different idea to wow show-goers. The company and its design partners came up with Office\_Excavate, an 18-foot-long sculptural work grotto using asymmetrical forms to display more than 100 of its textiles and create a sitting area for NeoCon attendees. Recently, Wolf-Gordon brought a slightly smaller version of Office\_Excavate to Philadelphia for NeoCon East.

Office\_Excavate was an astonishing exercise in product presentation, a study in future workplace designs and innovative marketing. And while the lifecycle of its idea is coming to a close as the exhibition cycle comes to an end for the year, the Wolf-Gordon designers are beginning to think about what's next for its 2017 exhibit.

Office\_Excavate is a good example of how Wolf-Gordon thinks as a company. It is the result of a year of collaboration and showcases products without being heavy-handed or literal, proving Wolf-Gordon wants to explore what's possible rather than what has already been done.





According to Marybeth Shaw, vice president of marketing and design, Office\_Excavate was first installed between the first floor elevator banks during NeoCon 2016. The project began with a conversation between Shaw and Hjalti Karlsson and Jan Wilker of karlssonwilker, inc. They discussed a rather extreme range of contemporary workplace activities and policies beyond lounge areas, nap rooms, game rooms, spa services, cafeterias with catered meals, flex time and unlimited vacation.

### The idea for Office\_Excavate came partially from Wolf-Gordon's own move from Long Island City in Queens to Manhattan.

Following the conversation, karlssonwilker drew up a series of "postures" or positions for the body in the modern office. Architect Graham Kelman visualized the idea and developed the installation's architecture, in close collaboration with Shaw and karlssonwilker. Jorge Parreira of New Motor devised the fabrication and installation plan, and Hoover Canar upholstered more than 100 forms.

As with previous sponsored installations for Wolf-Gordon at NeoCon, Office\_Excavate represents a best-case scenario of collaborative process, talented designers and complete freedom of program. Office\_Excavate suggests dramatically different office environments can be imagined for 21st century work, enabled by technology and equally important, more flexible norms for individual and collective work.

Wolf-Gordon shares a showroom on the 10th floor, so it is able to display its products in a more traditional way, but Shaw said it is part of the company's DNA to push the boundaries of what's possible. "We started doing (sculptural elements to welcome visitors) at NeoCon in 2012, and it's very important for Wolf-Gordon to celebrate its brand on the first level," she says. "We decided to do these projects on the

first floor as a sponsor. From 2012 to 2015, we did sculptural objects over the escalators on the eastern side of the Mart. It was fairly challenging, because we had to suspend them. Both sculpturally and in form, we had to make it work in that spot."

In 2015 Wolf-Gordon decided to do something different — a high tech project that was a long screen with thousands of LED lights suspended over the escalator bank. At the bottom of the escalator, you could see an image of yourself displayed in the LEDs. As you traveled up the escalator, the image was deconstructed into a color field.

When the Mart told Wolf-Gordon the escalator space would not be available because of renovations, Shaw says the company was excited for a new challenge. It was also ready to show off its strength in upholstery textiles, which the company added in late 2011. The company is celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2017 and is known for its commercial wall coverings. Office\_Excavate helped introduce many to its strength in textiles.

Shaw's background is in architecture, which informs a lot of what she does at Wolf-Gordon. She likes to collaborate and bring other artists and designers in on the company's NeoCon forms and sculptures. Wolf-Gordon's thoughts are unveiled throughout the year in an advertising campaign that begins with sketches and ideas and ends when the year's work is unveiled at NeoCon.

The idea for Office\_Excavate came partially from Wolf-Gordon's own move from Long Island City in Queens to Manhattan. Shaw began thinking about how dramatically different work is now compared to 20 or 30 years ago. During the company's move planning, Shaw and others at the company dove into research on the office. They found it is smaller, more communal and more recreational. "It is a place where you enjoy spending time, even if you are not at your own desk," she says.

Office\_Excavate is Wolf-Gordon's interpreta-



Office\_Excavate-map

tion of the evolution of the office — an erosion of the office grid that is transformed into a lounge-like collaborative environment. Different postures like lounging, sitting or perching are possible using the grotto and fabric covered forms around it. Based on the reaction at NeoCon and NeoCon East, Office\_Excavate was a success. "A lot of people enjoyed hanging out there," Shaw says.

Since so much thought and research goes into what Wolf-Gordon does at NeoCon, planning for 2017 is already underway. Ideas for

next year's project are beginning to take shape. What will Wolf-Gordon present in 2017? Stay tuned.

"I'm a big fan of abstraction," Shaw says. "We are less likely to do things that are literal. We want to do work that is of our time and speaks to us (and) that is made possible by what we have at our disposal, whether that is technology or new materials."

Wolf-Gordon will celebrate its anniversary in 2017 with a book on the evolution of color and pattern since its founding in 1967. **BoF**