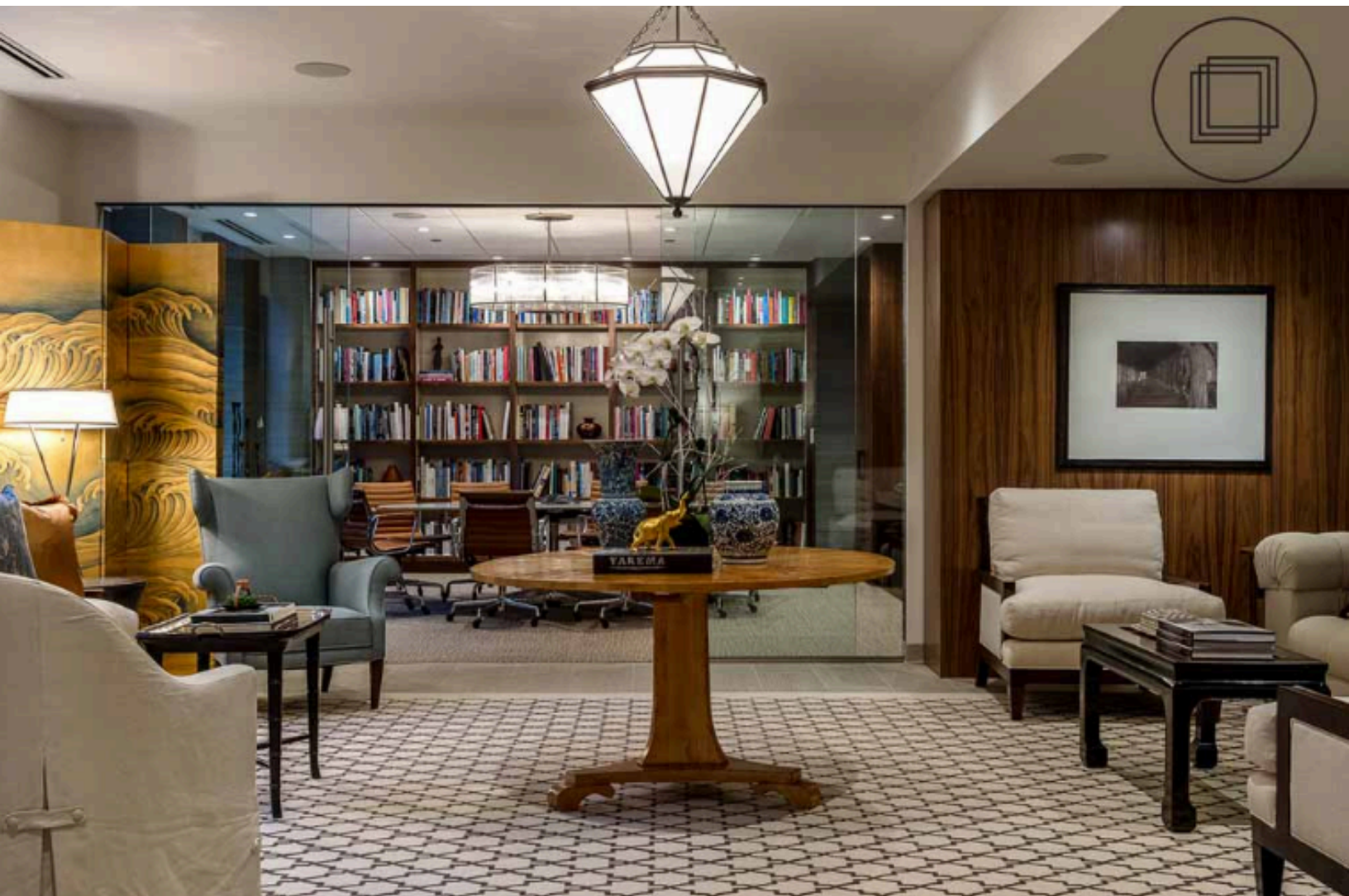


# The 12 Coolest Offices in Chicago 2019

By Jackie Bender

What makes an office cool? We use the term as a catchall for a well-designed workplace that's a good representation of the business and allows employees to work comfortably and efficiently. After that, opinions diverge. Should they be homelike, with lounges, table tennis and the like? (No, says judge **Richard Wright** of Wright Auctions.) Wright, along with interior designer **Michael Del Piero** and Crain's assistant managing editor **Jan Parr** (a longtime design magazine editor in a previous life), chose 12 offices out of 78 submissions for this year's crop of Coolest.



WINNER'S CIRCLE

# TOM STRINGER DESIGN PARTNERS

Gold Coast / Design

At first glance, Tom Stringer Design Partners' new office in the Palmolive Building could be mistaken for one of the skyscraper's luxury Michigan Avenue penthouses. And that's intentional. Arguably the most classic design on our list, the space seamlessly blends comfortable furniture with antiques and touches of home. The result is a tailored workspace that appeals to the designers' own tastes—and those of their high-end residential clients.

On the third floor above Louis Vuitton, employees and guests enter through a grand salon and are welcomed by cozy sofas and a rotating collection of sculptures and art—some of which may be on the way out to a client. The kitchen, with banquette seating, feels like a cafe. It's adjacent to a dining room where the 20 employees sit down for a family-style lunch daily. "It's probably saved us hundreds of staff meetings," says Tom Stringer. The conference room doubles as a library, with an entire wall of art and architecture books, a full-time librarian and a mix of meeting tables at sitting and standing height. Desks are compact, as most of the employees spend their days floating about the ornate rooms with their iPads.

Stringer calls the light, bright and white color palette an "ever-evolving backdrop for interesting things." Right now, accents of blue flow throughout the interior and the nearly 10,000-square-foot terrace, designed by landscape designers Eiserman & Associates.

"I guess I'm just in a blue moment," Stringer says, adding that this could change at any moment: "We're designers, and we get bored!" The quality lighting and neutral background serve important practical functions, too; they allow the team to analyze textiles, fabrics and colors without distortions or distractions.

The 2017 move from River North followed a gut rehab. The new location created room for growth—plus some unexpected shifts in foot traffic. Local clients now drop in just to say hello, thanks to the inviting atmosphere and central location. Most clients, however, are not Chicago locals. Those flying in can conveniently stay at the neighboring Four Seasons Hotel and shop their way to and from consultations in a space that epitomizes their design goals.

"The success of Tom Stringer's office is in how it represents the company's work," says judge Michael Del Piero. "The space, with its sophisticated residential feel, communicates the firm's beautifully elevated aesthetic."