



JOYFUL HUES

FOR A VIVID AUDITORIUM

Five Below unveils its new au

Five Below Inc. is an American chain of specialty discount stores for teens & tweens that offers higher-value products with pricing that does not exceed five dollars. Hence their name. This is a popular chain store with a history that goes back to 2002, when they opened their first store in Wayne, Pennsylvania. In 2011, Five Below began its expansion and today has more than 1,300 stores in 42 states across the US, becoming one of the most successful retailers in America.

Headquartered in downtown Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the company occupies 117,000 square feet within the Lit Brothers Building, a former department store constructed in 1891. The building consists of 33 separate structures that encompass an entire city block. Focusing on the section where Five Below's offices are situated, it houses hundreds of workstations, as well as training and conference rooms, a coffee bar, and a café spread across three levels. These facilities cater to the daily needs of over 300 employees. Recently, a brand-new auditorium was added to the list of amenities available to the workers and visitors at Five Below Corporation.

Back in 2018, when the company moved to its current corporate headquarters, an integral renovation was carried out. The main challenge was to preserve the history and the original architecture and raw space while adding fun elements according to the brand.

The company's new auditorium has been designed by the interior design firm Interior Architects, who in turn entrusted Figueras Seating to equip it. Five Below's auditorium has 138 Flex 6076 seats, fully upholstered, offering great comfort for the users. Following the values of the brand, the seats were upholstered in rainbow colors, giving a fun touch to the room.

Figueras transformed the seats into ideal workstations by incorporating power to



Auditorium





the seats and tables, enhancing the area's utility. The selected F48 table, known for its ample dimensions, is fixed to the floor and totally independent of the seat. It opens by means of a simple intuitive lift-up and twist movement. The front row stands out with its unique foldable lecterns, discreetly tucked into the side panels of each seat. The anti-panic folding feature ensures a swift and orderly exit, keeping aisles clear. This combination of seat and table offers an optimal and safe setting for extended work periods.

We had the opportunity to chat with **Angel Liott, designer at IA's Philadelphia studio**. Join us in a captivating dialogue with the designer behind the project, as we delve deeper into the creative journey that brought this vision to life.

As an interior designer, what are the current interior design trends for corporate spaces that you find most innovative or impactful?

One of the most innovative and impactful trends in corporate interior design is the adaptation to hybrid work models. Five Below's shift to a remote-first approach and the creation of their "WowTown" classroom is a prime example of how companies are embracing this trend. At the core of their headquarters, known as "WowTown," IA Interior Architects designed a classroom that embraces the latest trends in hybrid work. The key to the WowTown Classroom's design is a commitment to digital equity, ensuring that all participants, regardless of their location or abilities, have an equal experience. This means prioritizing visibility and audibility, making sure everyone can see, be seen, hear, and be heard.

These design principles align with industry trends focused on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) initiatives. The WowTown Classroom uses touchless interfaces, advanced audiovisual systems, and cutting-edge IT devices to implement digital equity

principles effectively, including scale, proximity, and interactivity. Furthermore, the seamless integration of the company's identity and branding into the physical space not only supports remote work but also encourages employees to return to the office. This demonstrates a holistic approach to interior design that aims to maintain a vibrant company culture while accommodating flexible work models.



Angel Liott, Designer

How do you strike a balance between aesthetics and functionality when designing a corporate space?

IA's approach infuses purpose into every design decision, allowing our team to meticulously balance aesthetics and functionality. For our project work, we draw inspiration from corporate branding, existing architecture, and the overarching design concept. Five Below's headquarters resides in a nineteenth-century classical architecture building in Center City, Philadelphia, boasting historical industrial elements like exposed ceilings, original brick, reclaimed wood, and raw materials that exude character. IA harmonized these industrial details, paying homage to the building's heritage, with vibrant colors, patterns, and graphics that reflect the dynamic and youthful identity of Five Below's brand and the personality of WowTown. Leveraging the existing architecture isn't just about aesthetics; it also aligns with Five Below's cost-effective approach, echoing the company's



ethos of maximizing value.

Consistency across Five Below's brand and its physical environment is a fundamental aspect of our design philosophy. It not only sparks creativity within the innovative team but also serves as a potent recruitment tool, echoing the company's motto of "let go and have fun" and creating an environment that mirrors the brand's spirit. In the case of the WowTown Classroom, where digital equity was the guiding principle, IA found inspiration in the concept of pixels. Recognizing that individual pixels contribute to a greater digital composition, we translated this idea into a metaphor for community and inclusivity within the WowTown Classroom. Each participant became a vital pixel in the overall composition, underscoring that the WowCrew community is greater than the sum of its parts. This pixelation concept was thoughtfully integrated through various abstract and representational approaches. For instance, metal railing screens feature a pixel motif and strategic use

of colors in the seating arrangement creates a visual composition reminiscent of pixelation. These design choices enhance both aesthetics and functionality, symbolizing inclusivity and community collaboration within the digitally-driven environment of the WowTown Classroom.

What inspired you to choose Figueras' seats for the Five Below room you designed?

In IA's quest to design a cutting-edge classroom that champions an equitable experience, we sought an ergonomic chair that fulfilled a range of specific criteria. These included a compact size for efficient space usage, flexibility, and the option for customized upholstery and materials. Equally crucial was the seamless integration of power, ensuring users' comfort while using their devices. The capacity to collaborate effectively with responsive representatives added the finishing touch to this fast-paced project.

How do you believe our seats enhance the overall experience for corporate room users?

At the beginning of the design process, IA identified the seating as a primary opportunity for creativity in this project, operating as the focal point to instill the desired fun yet intentional atmosphere. The seat colors not only reinforce Five Below's brand but also serve a functional purpose, indicating optimal sight line. They also serve as wayfinding elements, notating spaces for WowCrew members with restricted mobility. While ergonomic functionality is crucial, the intentional connection between color, aesthetics, and functionality adds depth and purpose to the overall design.

What advice would you give to other interior designers when choosing seats for corporate spaces?

When choosing seats for corporate spaces, it's crucial to consider both form and function. Look for seating solutions that align with the overall design concept while giving priority to comfort and ergonomics. Collaborate closely with manufacturers and suppliers to ensure that the selected seats meet the specific needs of the space and its users.

What was the biggest challenge during the project?

The primary challenge revolved around preserving the existing architectural conditions of the space while successfully creating an environment that promotes equitable experiences for all participants. This involved addressing concerns related to acoustics, sound transmission, sightlines, and the delicate balance between optimal seat capacity and the sizing and spacing of seats. Close collaboration with the client included presenting various studies on worksurface sizes, seat spacing, and sightline optimization. Navigating these complexities and design considerations required meticulous

attention, and we worked closely with the client to prioritize their preferences. Achieving optimal sound transmission, especially given the low exposed ceilings, demanded innovative collaboration with acoustical, structural, and AV consultants.

How was the collaboration process with our company from seat selection to installation?

From seat selection to installation, Figueras displayed a dedication to quality and customization that matched the project's objectives. Their team closely worked together with IA to guarantee that the chosen seats aligned with the specific design and functionality needs of the classroom. The installation process was both efficient and professional, resulting in seating solutions that seamlessly integrated with the overall design concept.

How do you see the future of interior design in corporate spaces and what role do you think seats will play in that context?

The future of interior design in corporate spaces is expected to keep progressing to meet the evolving needs of the workforce. As workplaces adjust to hybrid and flexible work models, interior designers will have to concentrate on designing spaces that foster collaboration, well-being, and the seamless integration of technology.

Seats will play a central role in this context. They will be required to offer comfort and ergonomic support for employees spending extended hours in meetings and workspaces. Furthermore, seats are likely to incorporate advanced technology features to facilitate remote collaboration and connectivity. Striking a balance between aesthetics, functionality, and technological integration will be crucial as interior designers shape the corporate spaces of tomorrow.