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2018 PMI PROJECT OF THE YEAR WINNER



From left, Mary Beth Cooper, Liz Failla, Stephanie Repasky, PsyD and Fernando Rivera, Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA

The AllBright is London's first women-only private members' club.



PHOTO BY TOLGA AKMEN/AP/GETTY IMAGES

A Room of Her Own

The wallpaper at The Wing in Washington, D.C., USA is the first indication that this is not your typical gathering space. Illustrations of Frances Perkins, Nellie Tayloe Ross and other prominent women adorn it and, like every design element in the 10,000-square-foot (929-square-meter) space, the wallpaper was chosen with women in mind.

The Wing is just one of many women-only spaces cropping up around the world. They include The AllBright, which opened a members' club in London, England in March as part of a £9 million project to build a digital academy and networking spaces around the world, and Seattle, Washington, USA-based The Riveter, which in the same month announced that it had raised US\$4.8 million to open coworking spaces in multiple U.S. cities. "I realized there was no space that women could just go and be comfortable in," Jen Oleniczak Brown, founder of Fearless, a women-only space in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, USA, told *Yes! Weekly*.

Women-only spaces are moving beyond office hours, too. Hotels such as the First Cabin hotel chain in Tokyo, Japan are embracing specific amenities and floors dedicated to female travelers.

Yet what separates successful projects from ones that come across as condescending or over-the-top is an active understanding of requirements management and engaging with end users. "Project managers should collaborate with and be open to critique and questioning from the people who will be most affected by their decisions," says Gabriel A. Maher, a designer working in the Netherlands. "This openness will be incredibly beneficial to the result."

On International Women's Day in March, Erinn Farrell completed a five-month, US\$350,000 project to open The Coven in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA. Before designing and building the physical space, the team set up events they called "witching hours" that invited women and people who identify as nonbinary to dinner gatherings. "We watched

"Project managers should collaborate with ... people who will be most affected by their decisions."

—Gabriel A. Maher, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

how they interacted in the space and were able to prototype several ideas,” she says.

The team incorporated that stakeholder feedback into the final project plan. For example, when the team shared early concepts, many people said they wouldn’t make much use of a traditional office layout. So Ms. Farrell and her co-founders opted for an open layout, along with multipurpose rooms that can be used for activities such as meditation, acupuncture and massages.

As part of the project, the team created a private Facebook group for the community to share ongoing ideas and feedback—even after the physical space had been completed. That ongoing input led the team to change a room initially billed as a “mother’s room” for nursing to a more inclusive, more versatile “parent and prayer room.” “We had to be willing to be wrong and listen,” Ms. Farrell says.

Scope, schedule and budget are all markers of success—but those project wins won’t mean much if the community doesn’t buy in, says Ms. Farrell. To that end, regular member surveys help the team ensure the project is realizing its intended benefits. When the founders learned that branding The Coven as “women only” excluded people who do not identify with a binary view of gender, they modified the space’s signage and digital branding. “It was unintentionally hurtful to people that we cared about, and they let us know,” Ms. Farrell says. “There have definitely been hard lessons there.” —*Ambreen Ali*

Beyond the Binary

Gender seeps into every corner of our built environment, from clothes racks to bathrooms, counter heights to desk chairs. “Most spaces are inherently gendered and revolve around normative gender experiences,” says Gabriel A. Maher, designer, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. “Design reproduces and reinforces categories of identity.” Take, for example, the Henry Dreyfuss data sets on ergonomics, which were based on male military bodies and have been used for decades to design products.

But cultural norms are shifting beyond binary ideas of gender. Last November, U.K. retailer Topshop announced gender-neutral fitting rooms. U.S. retail giant Target launched a gender-neutral clothing line for kids and did away with the usual “boys” and “girls” signage for many of its products. And according to Yelp (which advertises whether a business has a gender-neutral bathroom), more than 160,000 businesses in the United States alone had gender-neutral bathrooms as of 2017.

To be more inclusive, project managers must become aware of their own biases that can affect how a project is designed and executed, Mx. Maher says. Doing so helps ensure the result will both resonate with the intended audience and have a broader reach. “As designers, we need to be ever vigilant to reflect on our own positions and privileges—it’s an important challenge.”



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Source: Yelp

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