

Cahners

INTERIOR DESIGN

NUMBER 6

Office 2000

Throwing a Curve in the Workplace

NeoCon 99

\$7.95 US / \$8.95 CAN



Circus Maximus

David Ling devises a monumental elliptical enclosure for the Manhattan offices of nickandpaul, a young branding agency.



DAVID LING'S NEW OFFICE for nickandpaul—an unconventional branding agency whose clients include Coca Cola, Intel, and Lever Brothers—occupies an 18,000-sq.-ft. loft on the second floor of the Chelsea Market building. With a few bold gestures, Ling provided the company with an exciting, unfussy space that sustains multiple activities while establishing a fluid hierarchy of private and shared areas.

Ling approached the building shell in an archaeological manner, digging and scraping carefully without changing very much. Existing maple columns and metal casings were sandblasted, the wood floor was stripped and refinished, and the ceiling and walls were painted white. Ling salvaged several relics from the building's former life as a Nabisco factory, including a large boiler, vintage double-hung windows, elevator machinery, and old glass flasks. A new HVAC system was brought in, a kitchen and bathrooms were constructed, and the whole fast-→

Above: The office's central arena, framed by the inner ellipse, serves as a meeting space, work area, and library. An old boiler was salvaged from the basement of the building, a relic from the days when the Chelsea Market was a Nabisco factory. "We scrounged around for as much detritus as we could find," says Ling, "and incorporated the pieces as decorative elements."

Opposite: A "romp room" occupies the space between the two elliptical shells. The inner ellipse is double-faced with thin fiberglass panels attached in a diagonal pattern.

LUMASITE FIBERGLASS: AMERICAN ACRYLIC CORPORATION. SMARTIE CUSHIONS: CAPPELLINI/MODERN AGE. GENERAL CONTRACTOR: WISE CONSTRUCTION.

PHOTOGRAPHY: TODD EBERLE

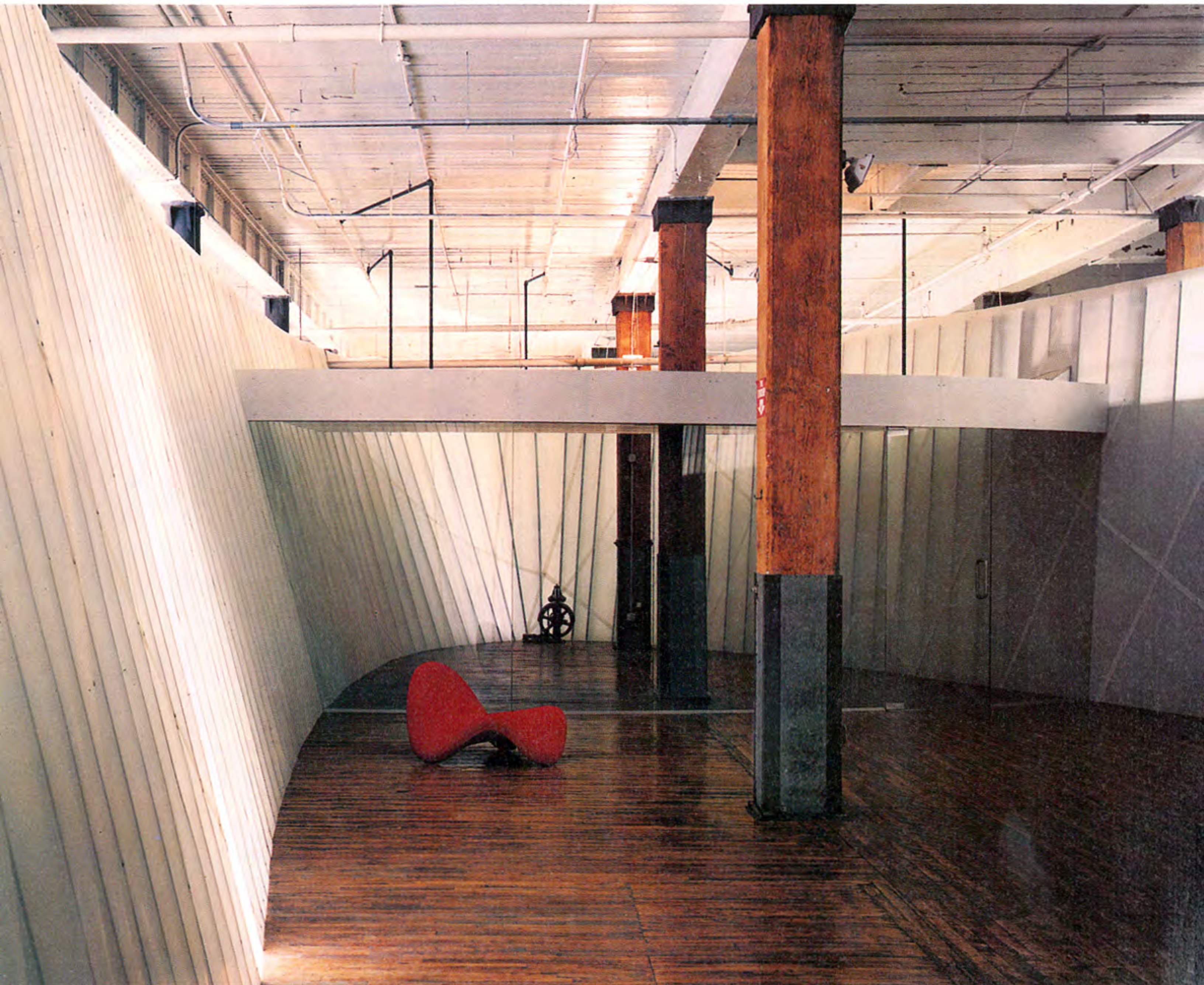


track project was completed from design through construction in four months at a cost of \$30 per sq. ft.

Ling sought “an architectural manifestation of nickandpaul’s approach to business,” with respect to two major parameters. The first was how to organize the relation between the so-called “strategic” and “creative” employees, two distinct groups that not only have their own requirements but also come together at key moments. “The problem with nickandpaul’s old office,” says Ling, “is that the two teams were, acoustically and visually, on top of each other. They need to meet in both planned and spontaneous ways, but they also have to be able to separate.” During much of the workday, the strategics are on the phone or involved in group brainstorming while the creatives develop mood (or story) boards while listening to loud music.

The second design parameter was nickandpaul’s interest in what the two partners call “an ecosystem of ideas.” It is the company’s business to find tendencies in popular culture and pass them onto companies that repackage these trends for the cultural mainstream. Ling interpreted nickandpaul’s mission as a cyclical rather than linear process.

Working with these ideas, Ling divided the office into two distinct areas for the strategics and creatives, with a third, central zone that both separates and connects them. The central space, a kind of courtyard about 150 ft. long by 40 ft. wide, contains a large reception desk, a “romp room” (basically, a bunch of ragtag sofas where people can exchange ideas informally), an open library, and work areas. It is defined by a canted elliptical enclosure of translucent fiberglass, →





Opposite: One end of the central space was separated by a wall of glass to form a more private, enclosed meeting area.

Above: A curvaceous counter of sheet metal and birch plywood serves as the reception desk. The meeting room is visible beyond.

GLASS: PPG. PIERRE PAULIN TONGUE CHAÎSE, STOOLS: CAPPELLINI/MODERN AGE.



a sweeping form with apparent organic connotations. The shell draws formal inspiration from Richard Serra's *Torqued Ellipses* (a monumental sculpture recently on view at the Dia Center for the Arts), while reconsidering the artwork's materiality, scale, and character. Ling's structure is at once massive, dynamic, and very light, and coordinates a set of activities as it makes its sweeping sculptural gesture. Around the central ellipse is a second, partial ellipse that is also torqued. This supplementary shell further divides the two sides of the office and establishes a kind of corridor in the interstitial zone. The dimensions of the corridor continually change, and one has the sense of an extended, mysterious passage in moving through it.

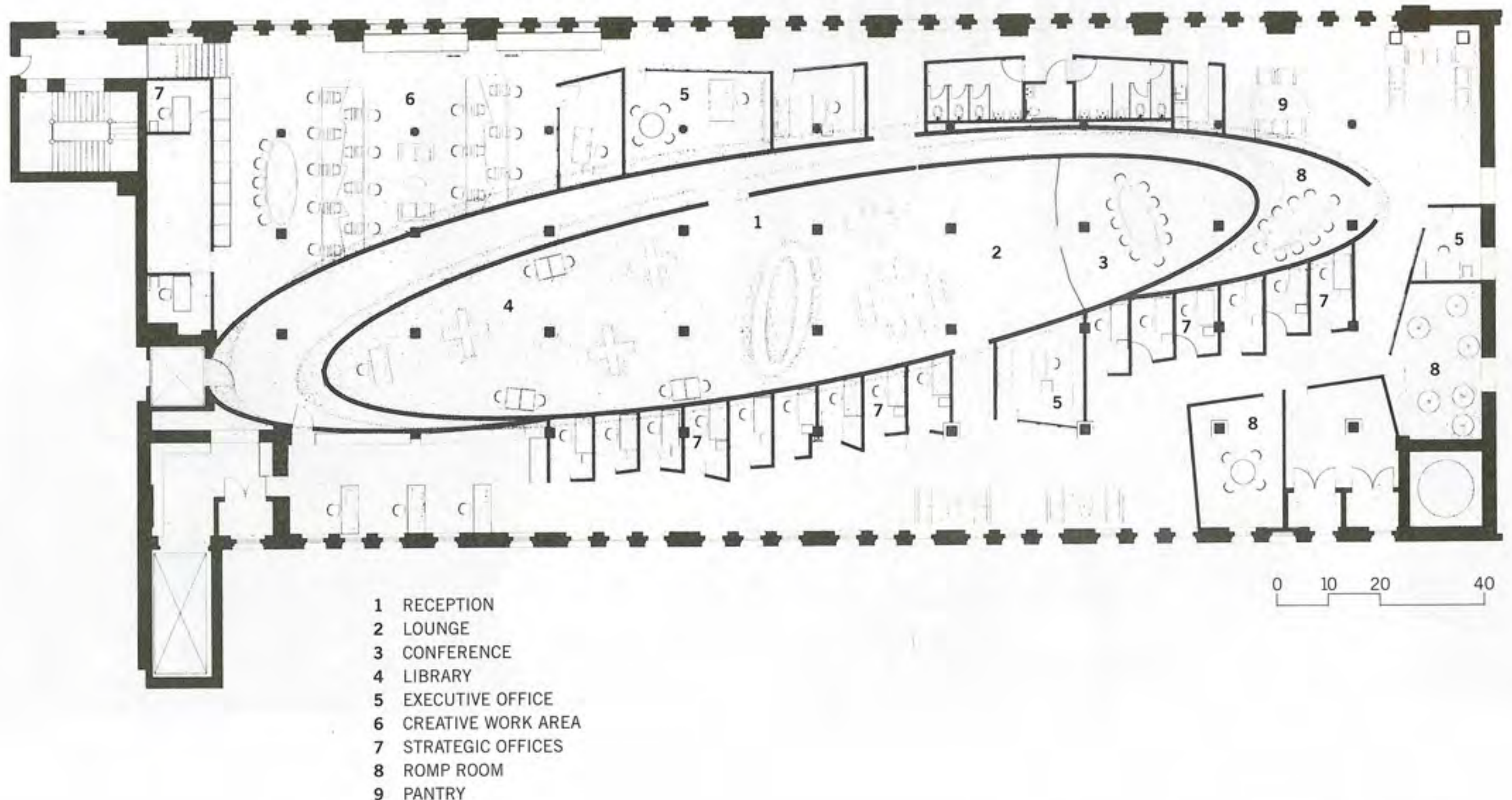
Ling established a hierarchy of meeting areas, including the open central arena, an enclosed conference room at the narrow end of the inner ellipse, and various "romp rooms." There are also a few fully enclosed work spaces, including executive offices and what Ling calls "monastic telephone cells" that attach themselves, like barnacles, to the outside of the elliptical shell. These spaces appear to grow off the fiberglass shell but orient themselves to the rectilinear grid of the existing floor, effectively mediating between the two geometries. →



Opposite (above): Cruciform wood shelves hold books, magazines, story boards, and other resources available to the nickandpaul staff.

Opposite (below): The "creatives" can pin so-called mood boards directly to the metal lath of the curving wall enclosure.

Right: A large open work area houses the "creatives" between the outer ellipse and the shell of the Chelsea Market building, a former Nabisco factory.



Taking a big sculptural gesture and making it work is no small feat. Ling says he was inspired by the possibility of exploring the tension between the rigid, orthogonal geometry of the building and the more organic, warped aspects of the curving skin and the space it holds. Constructing a dialogue of opposites—grid versus figural void; solid masonry container versus delicate translucent shell—Ling has crafted an environment in which creative and strategic tendencies as well as cyclical and linear forms gently coexist.

Ling's project team included Leo Schneidewind, Michael Boss, and Laurent Brunier.

—Henry Urbach

Below (left): Enclosed executive offices were fitted with windows salvaged from the building's original construction. Kitchen and bathrooms are beyond.

Below (right): The interstitial zone between the ellipses serves as a passage; its constantly changing volume and shifting light effects make for an exciting revision of the conventional office corridor.

Opposite: Ling illuminated the inner passage, between the two ellipses, with a continuous, suspended band of four-tube fluorescent lighting around the outer shell. The outer surface of the large ellipse was sheathed in expanded metal lath to save cost and improve light transmission.

FLUORESCENT LIGHTING: LUMAR. TOM DIXON JACK LIGHT: MOSS.



