

INTERIOR DESIGN®

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abstract expression



text: *c.c. sullivan* photography: *eric laignel*

sky-high ratings

Daroff and Gensler channel the lightness and clean lines of a Philadelphia tower into striking headquarters for Comcast





Philadelphia has a new icon: a 975-foot, faceted-glass tower by Robert A.M. Stern Architects. It's surprisingly tall and sexy for this buttoned-down city, but visitors striding across its plaza, surfaced in twinkling gray-green granite, might miss the tasteful signage announcing the building's primary corporate tenant. No doubt remains, however, once in the lobby: A two-story, 85-foot-wide LED display broadcasts welcome to the offices of cable giant Comcast. The display alternates hours of boffo imagery with brief instances of trompe l'oeil wood paneling. Above that, Jonathan Borofsky's shiny steel tubes bearing cartoonish pedestrians crisscross the atrium of the 110-foot-high lobby, also a public winter garden.

The dotted high-wire figurines and epic digital wallpaper are quickly left behind. Inside the 56-floor Comcast Center, a low-fat sophistication exudes. From the carefully varied elevator lobbies, the spaces open into bright, airy, tone-on-tone interiors that preserve the big views and clean lines intended by Stern's handsome obelisk design.

A collaboration by Daroff Design + DDI Architects and Gensler, the more than 1,000,000 square feet of office space reflect a

longstanding relationship between principal Karen Daroff and Comcast's founder Ralph Roberts and his son, the current CEO, Brian. Two decades ago, Daroff designed the company's first real home, a humble 80,000 square feet near the Main Line. The company spent the next 18 years growing rapidly, moving into three different Daroff-conceived offices, all on Market Street, and expanding into other downtown spaces as necessary. Looking to bring all his

Previous spread: A switchback staircase in fritted glass and stainless steel connects four executive floors inside Philadelphia's Comcast Center, the interiors by Daroff Design + DDI Architects and Gensler, the building by Robert A.M. Stern Architects. Flooring is Galil gold limestone tile, walls are paneled in European white ash.

Top: Comcast corporate branding begins with the Niles Creative Group's 85-foot-wide LED display on a 40-foot-high wall housing the elevator bay. **Center:** The conference center seating area looks out to the spires of a Murphy Jahn building. The etchings are by Ross Bleckner.

Bottom: The desk in the conference center's reception area is marble.

Opposite: This atrium's triple height and cork flooring was specified by Stern. Gensler made the space into a lounge for Comcast's interactive media department with Christian Biecher sofas, Sebastian Wrong floor lamps, and Luke Pearson and Tom Lloyd chairs along its perimeter.



employees under one roof, Brian Roberts saw the Stern tower as the perfect solution. "He envisioned a vertical urban campus, with lots of amenity floors, in a lounge think-tank environment," Daroff recalls. "It was to be sophisticated, not ostentatious or flamboyant." When the original project of 500,000 square feet scheduled for what Daroff calls an already accelerated timetable doubled in size, the architect knew she'd have to bring in reserves. Her first call was to Arthur Gensler; the firms had successfully collaborated on two recent large commissions: Kentucky's Louisville International Airport and Terminal 5 at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York.

Today, Comcast's 2,900 employees have the run of some 50 floors in its eponymous tower, topped

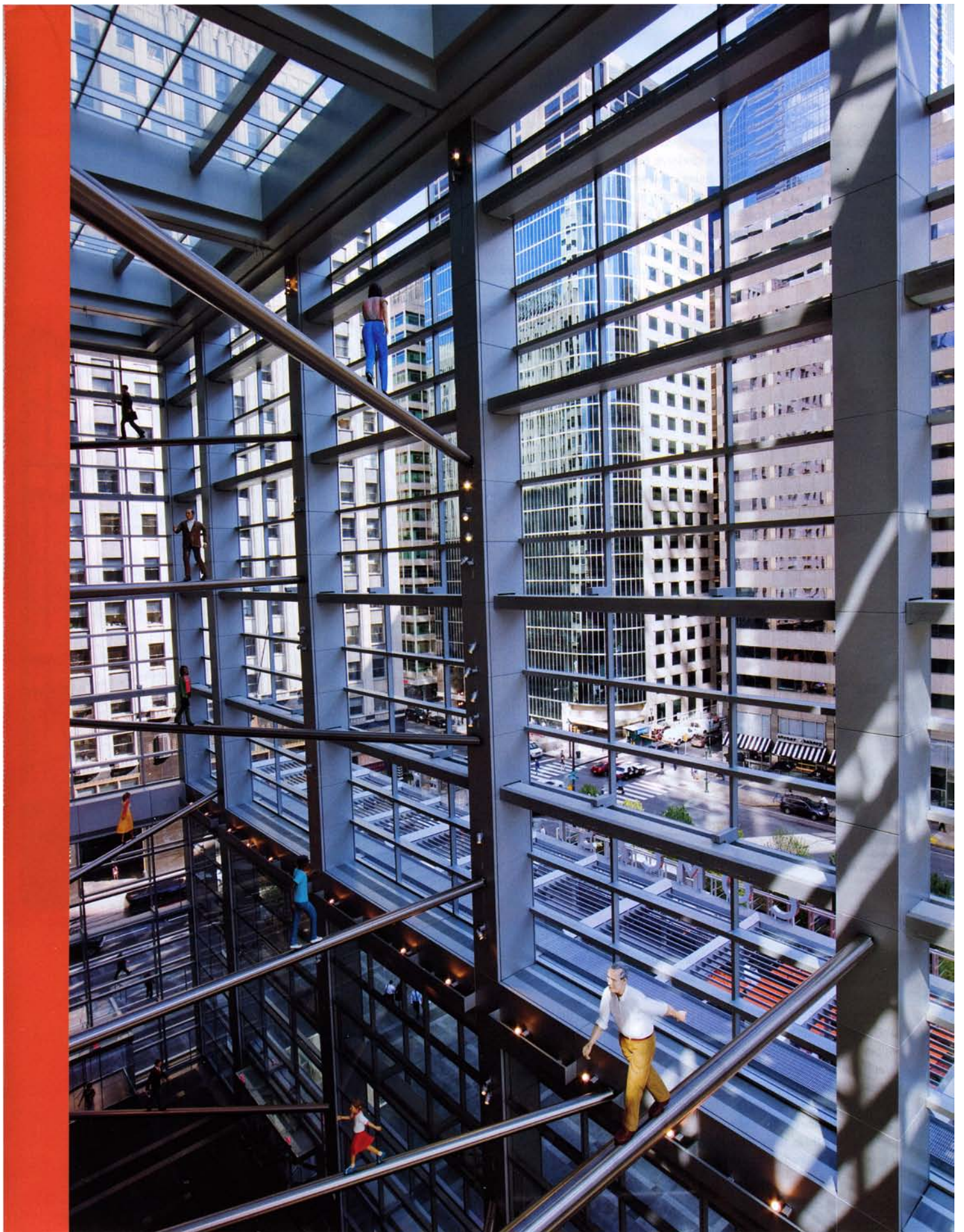
out by an urbane conference-room floor of custom makoré wall panels, cream-colored limestone, and vast tables of knife-edged Macassar ebony. The furnishings' toned leathers and fabrics are invitingly modern, and they, along with the extensive art collection, appropriately defer to the real show: killer views of Philadelphia's spires and neighborhoods.

CEO Roberts and other top executives occupy the four floors below, connected by a dramatic staircase. Its fritted-glass treads and stainless-steel caps and handrails wrap around a four-story column of flat-screen monitors. On the floors below, perimeter offices have glazed interior walls, while open-office areas, marked by an occasional pop of saturated



Top left: The upper-floor staircase wraps around a column of LCD monitors. **Top right:** A banquette and Roberto Romanello chairs furnish this seating area on the Comcast University floor. **Bottom left:** Another Bleckner; this one oil on linen, and Piero Lissoni lounge chairs appoint the 52nd-floor reception area. **Bottom right:** Painted aluminum frames the glass in the winter garden.

Opposite: Crisscrossing steel tubes in the 110-foot-tall winter garden lobby are actually components of *Humanity in Motion*, a sculpture by Jonathan Borofsky.



color—red, green, orange, or blue—have low workstations and high ceilings to maintain sight lines. Everyone can see the horizon in the distance, yet a glance down reveals William Penn teetering precariously atop City Hall. “No lowest common denominator philosophy here,” notes Gensler principal and design director Keith Rosen. “There’s a huge variety of spaces, color, and design.”

The coherence of that variety is impressive, but the heart of the Comcast Center is Ralph’s Café, a two-story dining universe wrapping the 43rd and 44th floors. The cafeteria’s vibe is orderly and cool, but casual and creative, too, thanks to the number of spaces carved out by Daroff and Rosen. Staff can nosh while tucked into custom circular banquettes on the café’s first floor. The second floor, really a mezzanine, offers more international fare—tacos, sushi—amid more mysterious environs. One area has tables and sleek white chairs enclosed by a



curvaceous half wall of Corian, its organic form picked up on the ceiling. A color-changing LED light show glows from behind custom white-lacquered wood grilles surrounding the perimeter.

Below Ralph’s is Comcast University, a training center, on the most colorful and graphic of the office floors. The four bright colors that make mere cameo appearances elsewhere take over here. Three-dimensional, lenticular photographs and oversize infographics add to the fun.

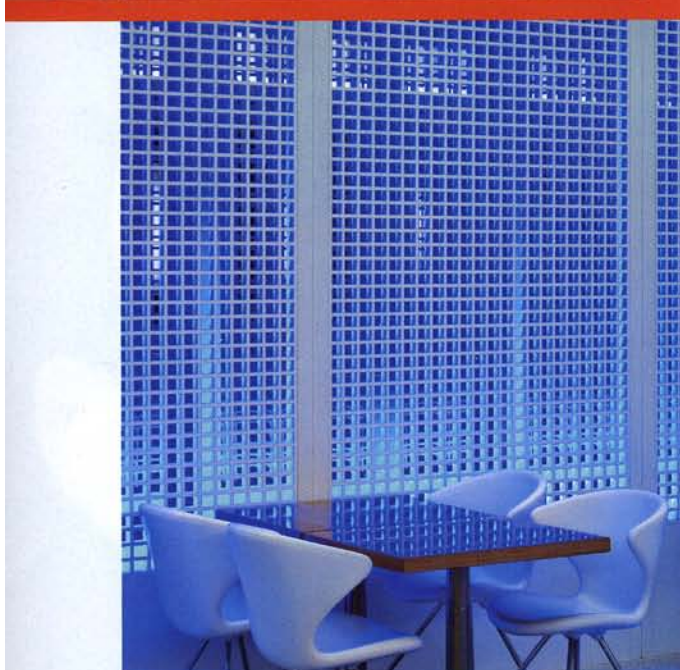
Below, the tower’s shaft encloses Comcast’s workhorse content and programming teams; lower floors hold customer service. In many instances, the building’s translucent architecture takes over. Most notable are three “sky-atria,” as Stern calls them, three-story glass boxes grafted onto the building’s facade that yield its distinctive profile. One of these soaring spaces comfortably ➤



Opposite: Another sky atrium overlooking the lobby serves as a coffee bar for Comcast employees. The bar-height tables faced in terrazzo are custom by Daroff Design + DDI Architects.

Left, from top: This conference room features leather-upholstered chairs around a knife-edged Macassar ebony table and an acrylic on canvas by Charles Arnoldi. Leather-covered armchairs, a wool rug, and limestone flooring furnish the 56th-floor lobby. This open office area has Florence Knoll workstations and a trio of Tom Slaughter silkscreens. **Right, from top:** Elevator lobbies feature nylon carpet and stainless-steel signage. Each of the Roberto Romanello armchairs in the reception area for Comcast's training center represents the project's color palette. Daroff's custom banquette with vinyl-covered cushions and Eero Saarinen chairs surround an anigre table on the first floor of Ralph's Café.





Top: Ralph's second floor offers vinyl-covered booth seating, more anigre tables, and glass sconces. **Center:** Ralph's elevator lobby has anigre-clad walls and terrazzo flooring. **Bottom:** Color-changing LEDs backlight Daroff's custom lacquered trellis on the second floor of Ralph's. The chairs are Martin Ballendat.

Opposite: Nearby, the organic shape of Daroff's custom Corian partition is reflected in the ceiling, fitted with recessed pin spots.

houses the lounge for the interactive media division; another is taken by offices. Daroff and Gensler have unified spaces such as these on dozens of floors, producing fresh riffs on the tower's governing principals:

lightness, translucency, and clean-lined simplicity. "Chemistry was an important part of this project," says Daroff. "I identify with Gensler's vocabulary, and they share our aesthetic." For this design match, the tallest tower in Philadelphia provided a chance to reach new heights. 🏗️

PROJECT TEAM

MARTIN KOMITZKY; ALINA JAKUBSKI; RICK MARENCIC; MICHELE SEGRE; RAUL GUTIERREZ; BILL MCKOWN; BETSY WOLLENSACK; ANDREA WHITE; JAMES RAPPOPORT; DAROFF DESIGN + DOI ARCHITECTS. WALTER HUNT; JOSHUA KATZ; SEAN BURKE; CHRISTOPHER CURSON; LARISSA ERAZMUS; MARC FISCHER; PEG HARRIS; SHIHUA LIONG; SUSAN MAY; ZENOS MORRIS; TOUFIC SAAD; TOM VECCHIONE; BELINDA WATTS; YESIM YETIS; GENSLER. NW SIGN INDUSTRIES; GRAPHIC DESIGN. VICK ART ADVISORS: ART CONSULTANT. SHEN MILSON & WILKE: AUDIOVISUAL, ACOUSTICS CONSULTANT. DOMINGO GONZALEZ ASSOCIATES; FOCUS LIGHTING: LIGHTING CONSULTANTS. WICK FISHER WHITE; MEP: DAVID CHOU & ASSOCIATES; STRUCTURAL ENGINEER. PENNONI ASSOCIATES; CIVIL ENGINEER. ALLEGHENY MILLWORK & LUMBER CO.; WOODWORK. L.F. DRISCOLL CO.; GENERAL CONTRACTOR.

PRODUCT SOURCES

FROM FRONT BLOOMSBURG CARPET INDUSTRIES: CARPET (CONFERENCE CENTER SEATING AREA, CONFERENCE CENTER RECEPTION). **MILLER BLAKER:** CUSTOM BANQUETTES (CONFERENCE CENTER SEATING AREA, TRAINING-CENTER SEATING AREA), CUSTOM DESKS (CONFERENCE CENTER RECEPTION, TRAINING-CENTER RECEPTION), CUSTOM BAR TABLES (COFFEE BAR). **SPINNEYBECK:** BANQUETTE UPHOLSTERY (CONFERENCE CENTER SEATING AREA), CHAIR UPHOLSTERY (52ND-FLOOR RECEPTION, CONFERENCE ROOM, 56TH-FLOOR RECEPTION). **KRON:** CHAIRS (CONFERENCE CENTER SEATING AREA), TABLE (TRAINING-CENTER SEATING AREA). **BERNHARDT TEXTILES:** CHAIR FABRIC. **BERNHARDT DESIGN:** TABLE (CONFERENCE CENTER SEATING AREA), SOFAS, COFFEE TABLE, LOUNGE CHAIRS (LOUNGE). **WALKER ZANGER:** DESK STONE (CONFERENCE CENTER RECEPTION). **PREMIER WOODCRAFT:** WALL PANELING. **POLLACK:** SOFA FABRIC (LOUNGE). **HBF TEXTILES:** PILLOW FABRIC. **INTREX FURNITURE:** CUBE TABLES. **FLOS:** FLOOR LAMPS. **ALLERMIER:** SIDE CHAIRS. **CARNEGIE:** SIDE CHAIR FABRIC. **TUOHY:** ROUND SIDE TABLES. **MAHARAM:** BANQUETTE FABRIC (TRAINING-CENTER SEATING AREA), CHAIR, BOOTH UPHOLSTERY (CAFÉ). **SEGIS:** CHAIRS (TRAINING-CENTER SEATING AREA, TRAINING-CENTER RECEPTION). **KVADRAT:** CHAIR FABRIC. **CASSINA:** LOUNGE CHAIRS (52ND-FLOOR RECEPTION, 56TH-FLOOR LOBBY). **EDWARD FIELDS:** RUG (52ND-FLOOR RECEPTION). **HOLTZHAUER TILE CO.:** TILE. **OFFECCT:** SOFA, LOUNGE CHAIRS (COFFEE BAR). **DESIGNTEX:** SOFA, LOUNGE CHAIR FABRIC. **BRAYTON INTERNATIONAL:** COFFEE TABLE. **BISAZZA:** BAR TABLE SURFACING. **MSL PRODUCTIONS:** KIOSK. **3FORM:** KIOSK WALL. **DUPONT:** KIOSK COUNTERTOP. **STONE SOURCE:** KIOSK TILE. **KEILHAUER:** HIGH CHAIRS (COFFEE BAR), CHAIRS (CONFERENCE ROOM). **MASLAND CARPETS:** CARPET. **FARAM:** GLASS. **WALLGOLDFINGER:** CUSTOM TABLES (CONFERENCE ROOM, 56TH-FLOOR LOBBY). **SILK ROAD CARPET AND RUGS:** RUG (56TH-FLOOR LOBBY). **USG CORPORATION:** CEILING TILE (OPEN OFFICE). **STEELCASE:** TASK CHAIR. **ZUMTOBEL:** LINEAR CEILING FIXTURES. **HALO LIGHTING:** RECESSED CEILING FIXTURES. **KNOLL:** WORKSTATIONS, WORKSTATION FABRIC PANELS (OPEN OFFICE), CHAIRS (FIRST-FLOOR CAFÉ). **SCUFFMASTER:** ELEVATOR DOOR PAINT (ELEVATOR LOBBY). **INTERFACEFLOR:** CARPET (ELEVATOR LOBBY, TRAINING-CENTER RECEPTION). **LIGHTING SERVICES:** SPOTLIGHTS (TRAINING-CENTER RECEPTION). **TABLE TOPICS:** CUSTOM TABLETOPS (CAFÉ). **CHAIRMASTERS:** CUSTOM BANQUETTE, CUSTOM BOOTHS. **CONSTANTINE:** CARPET. **SPRADLING INTERNATIONAL:** BANQUETTE UPHOLSTERY (FIRST-FLOOR CAFÉ). **HERBERT SCHMIDT LIGHTING MANUFACTURER:** SCONCES (SECOND-FLOOR CAFÉ). **ROMAN MOSAIC AND TILE COMPANY:** FLOORING (CAFÉ ELEVATOR LOBBY). **SANDLER SEATING:** CHAIRS (SECOND-FLOOR CAFÉ). **COLOR KINETICS:** LEDS. **ECOPHON:** CEILING TILE. **THROUGHOUT BENJAMIN MOORE & CO:** PAINT.

