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**DESIGN THEORY** | ANGELA BALLARD  
EDITED BY DANIELLE DEVINE | PHOTOGRAPHY BY TRENT BELL

# Work-Life Balance



**Interior Designer**  
**Angela Ballard** of Knickerbocker Group

ON RESIMERCIAL DESIGN

**“The workspace should feel like a home away from home where employees can be their best, most productive selves.”**



## **MH+D ASKS BALLARD TO TELL US MORE.**

**Q.** Tell us about the “resimercial” approach you took in your design of Knickerbocker Group’s Portland offices at 82 Hanover Street.

**A.** Resimercial is a design style that brings the coziness of home into an office environment. On this project, I didn’t want to be limited to commercial office furniture. I wanted to give our clients an up-close chance to see the furniture, lighting, and other design elements that we use in our residential projects. The right selections perform just as well in a commercial environment. We spec pieces that withstand salt water, pets, and red wine, so they can also hold up to a work meeting! We wanted the staff to feel at home: to be able to grab a cup of coffee from a beautiful, functional kitchen, catch up with a colleague in the lounge area, and feel the sun shining on their face as they sit at their desk. What we

didn’t want was a sterile office environment but to create a sense of ease in an organized environment that would foster focus and creativity.

**Q.** What sparked your interest in resimercial design?

**A.** I worked in commercial interior design for ten years mostly designing office environments. I worked with several clients who were just beginning to explore the concept of resimercial design before it actually had a title. I did break rooms with colorful lounge furniture and bars for Bank of America and helped design tents for quiet focus time, “teacups” (based on the theme park ride) that would seat two to three people for a brief meeting, and airplane cubbies that were meant to be functional workspaces for Google. Transitioning into residential design allowed me to see a softer, more casual side of design.



Q. How is this approach particularly relevant now, as many navigate a return from remote work into in-person?

A. If employees are taking a call at home on their sofa, why shouldn't they be able to do that in the office? We provided areas of comfort and different types of environments where employees can take a break from their desk or computer screen. Working in a space where we want to spend time increases employee satisfaction. Making the office a fun place to work has the added benefit of employees becoming more engaged.

Q. What design elements are included in the office to accommodate work during the pandemic as well as remote or hybrid employees?

A. We created a variety of spaces, from large sun-filled conference rooms where employees can spread out during a meeting to cozy corners where an employee can take a private call, and there are also touchdown areas for those who need to pop into the office just for the day—those who might usually work out of our Boothbay campus. The conference rooms are set up with large screens

for video chats, there are touchless surfaces such as the soap dispensers, and desk heights are adjustable at the touch of a button, which is great for those who are desk sharing. There's also a roof deck where employees can have a casual lunch meeting or take a movement break, or we can host an event—all outdoors, even though we're in a city environment.

Q. What are some elements that you would find in a residential workspace?

A. Durable but comfortable upholstery, soft lighting using incandescent bulbs, and a variety of materials and patterns that are reminiscent of those you might have at home. Different types of spaces that are available to all employees, places to meet with a large or small group but also areas to retreat to for focus time. Homey elements like a gallery wall of fun product photographs and images can reflect a company's philosophies or highlight the employees. A variety of plants in different types of planters add interest and reflect the collection you might also have at home, as well as plenty of natural daylight, and well-organized spaces that inspire creativity.



Q. How have you applied these design concepts at the COVE by Knickerbocker Group space?

A. Both of our two interior design studios, the one in Portland and in Boothbay, hold a different function than the office, but the concept of collaboration and motivating work environments still holds true. The studios were developed to be a blank slate to showcase our furnishings, accessories, cabinetry, and COVE Homes designs and interior packages and to also serve as our interior samples library. It's

a multifunctional place for client and vendor meetings and internal collaboration zones. The furniture displays are meant to be used—I'll often see employees sitting on the sofas, having a meeting there! Or recently, we had an author sign books at a game table. The spaces are designed to be flexible. For example, they're in a neutral palette, and we designed layout tables that are intended to hold samples now, but could hold drawings or files in the future. The space can easily change out its function—whether it's something short-term for an event or longer term, as the company's needs shift over time. **MH+D**



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