

Revolutionizing a Private Office in Saudi Arabia

How Steelcase combined the past with the present to create an innovative and elegant leadership space

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The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is a land steeped in tradition. It's a place where relationships are cultivated and nurtured with care, social customs with an air of formality are followed and work and workplaces reflect time-honored techniques and styles.

However, a shift has happened, and the nation is eager for change; a change that maintains the rich values of Saudi culture with an inspiring and innovative vision for the future.

Dr. Khaled Al-Jeraisy is a changemaker in the KSA with an office that revolutionizes where and how leaders work. As President and CEO of Riyadh House Company and a board member of the joint venture Steelcase Jeraisy, Dr. Khaled hosts visitors and travels often.

Treated like a second home, his office previously resembled those of many leaders in the area — vast and full of classic status symbols like leather furniture, dark colors and heavy wooden desks. But after a visit to Steelcase's Learning and Innovation Center (LINC) in Munich, Germany, his vision of leadership and luxury changed.

Dr. Khaled and the board of directors gathered at the LINC soon after it opened to discuss and see firsthand Steelcase's point of view on the future of work. The room where the meeting was held and the experience Dr. Khaled had with his colleagues intrigued him. With several applications for different work modes in one place, he saw how a progressive design could enhance his space and knew that day he wanted to make a change.

"After having worked in the space for a day, I saw myself leveraging similar applications in my office. I was interested in having the same range of collaborative and interactive zones to host and work with the various kinds of guests I have back home," says Dr. Khaled.

CREATING CONTEMPORARY LUXURY

To make this drastic of a change in aesthetics and functionality in a Saudi leader's office was a bold move.

Certain elements of the office needed to be maintained while updating the space, such as its heightened sense of elegance and significant size. Hania Arafat, a Steelcase design consultant, knew the first step in transforming Dr. Khaled's private office was to brighten it up.

Using high-end hotels as her inspiration, Arafat created a “contemporary luxury that uses traditional materials and styles with a modern take,” she says. Instead of shiny, gold and covered in marble, she drafted a design with matte, neutral tones found in beach-front hotels and paired down versions of traditional finishes to evoke a new sense of luxuriousness. The Bolia coffee table situated in a lounge setting is the perfect example. With a marble top and gold legs, the table introduces traditional features with a contemporary style.

FORM MEETS FUNCTION

“The functionality of the office was also revamped with five microsettings,” says Hasan Alharbi, Steelcase regional sales director. “All of the settings offer optimal performance for different modes of work,” he describes.

Dr. Khaled’s new desk — now a large meeting table where he can collaborate with up to six guests — may be the biggest change. Additional meeting and social space were created with lounge seating and a large-scale, interactive display, offering a space that evokes a sense of home while still being very functional.

A traditional lounge setting near the windows is ideal for hosting guests, sharing a coffee and one-on-one conversations. When working individually, Dr. Khaled can use the Brody (a worklounge that provides shielded privacy) when he needs to focus, intentionally signaling to others that he does not want to be disturbed. He can also work from a height-adjustable desk to integrate more wellbeing into his day.

REDEFINING EXPECTATIONS

The result is an office fit for a Saudi leader that feels like home. It is a welcoming and warm environment that is a comfortable place to host visitors, while still emitting elegance and luxury.

“What I love about the office is that it is functional, yet also looks and feels great,” says Dr. Khaled.

His visitors agree. One guest was so inspired by the modern office that he bought the very same furniture in Dr. Khaled’s on the spot, creating an exact replica in his own space. Other guests have also found the office exciting, adapting their own spaces based on the design.

Dr. Khaled is leading with a forward-thinking mindset, the same approach the KSA as a whole is pushing for. By adopting something substantially different than anything that has been done before, he created a new precedent and is opening up the imaginations of other leaders in a traditional culture.

“We see more and more leaders looking for progressive office designs,” says Alharbi. “I think this is a trend that will continue in the region.”

Filled with a light, modern aesthetic and functional settings that cater to the range of work he does, Dr. Khaled’s private office is a prime example of the beauty and innovation that can emerge from a blend of the past with the present.