

## 2015 Chicago's Coolest Offices

### MEDIUM CATEGORY

(5,001 to 15,000 sq. feet)



#### Medium category winner: The Tie Bar

This former Naperville retailer needed a downtown office stylish enough to show off on Instagram. [Take a tour and see pictures of the judges picks in this category here.](#)



When executives at the Tie Bar began hunting for downtown space last year, their No. 1 concern was natural light. Previously working out of a Naperville warehouse, the mostly online retailer of price-friendly ties, socks, belts and pocket squares needed headquarters in the city to attract talent. They also required a light-filled office that could serve as a stylish backdrop for social media product shots. Since it plays a supporting role online, the HQ had to mirror the company's textured, masculine persona.

"We want people to walk in and feel the brand," CEO Michael Alter says.

Working with Chicago design company Nelson, the team created an open-plan office that communicates a masculine look with its exposed brick, reclaimed barn wood and closets sheathed in belts. The 6,897-square-foot West Loop space feels airy and multipurpose. A hipster-chic reception area doubles as a kitchen, hangout spot and display space, while a wide, brick-walled loft area features honey-brown wood desks.

No matter where you are, the place is flooded with light. That's critical for the work the Tie Bar does, says Allyson Wicha Lewis, vice president of

merchandising, who helped search for and design the new office. She and others need white worktables and natural light to see the true colors of the fabrics they use for the collections they design monthly. "This space allows all of us to see the product."

Private offices are fronted with frameless glass, a necessary indulgence for the unbroken light it allows. Between these offices are floor-to-ceiling glass panels, also frameless, that meet the building's outermost windows: The rooms are lighter and feel larger as a result. Another eye-catcher is a double-monitor megadesk in a private space that's used by programmers who need uninterrupted quiet while tag-team coding. The six-month build-out did not break the bank, says Alter, who points to inexpensive tongue-and-groove painted plywood flooring, \$50,000 in savings from salvaged lights and oversized monitors acquired via credit card points.

The company's culture changed with the move downtown and the new design, executives say. Lewis says the "energy of the space" works in the Tie Bar's favor when recruiting. — Anne Moore