

the art of the deal

For Thomas H. Lee Capital on Fifth Avenue, Pierce Allen was bullish on blue-chip paintings, photography, sculpture, and furniture

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photography: eric laignel*





Previous spread, left: Larry Rivers's mixed-media portrait of Herbert Lee hangs in the main hallway at his son's investment firm, Thomas H. Lee Capital. Pierce Allen handled the interior.

Previous spread, right: The office is on the sixth floor of Fifth Avenue's General Motors Building, completed by Edward Durell Stone in 1968. Photography: Ezra Stoller/Esto.

Above: In the main conference room, an Andy Warhol camouflage painting and a Jasper Johns lithograph stand out against walls of cerused English burl white oak, while leather-covered chairs surround a custom resin-topped table. **Right:** Screens attributed to George Nakashima let light into reception, with its resin-fronted desk. **Below:** Pierce Allen carefully detailed the hallway to create a rhythm similar to that of Stone's facade. The lithograph is a Gerhard Richter.



When Edward Durell Stone completed the 50-story General Motors Building in 1968, it was a place where automotive titans surveyed the city from on high. GM still occupies floors 14 through 16, and today's titans include executives at Estée Lauder, Icahn Associates, and investment firm Thomas H. Lee Capital. From his corner office, founder and CEO Tom Lee can take in Central Park, Bergdorf-Goodman, and the Plaza and Sherry-Netherland hotels—albeit from the relatively intimate perspective of the sixth floor. It's even possible to recognize friends and colleagues down on the street as they approach the building from Fifth Avenue.

"From here," Lee says, "Grand Army Plaza really feels like a plaza."

Lee's genial attitude precedes him in business, too—the financial press has dubbed him the Teddy Bear at the Gate for acquiring only companies that wish to be. And that may explain his desire for a welcoming office. Sure, the rooms would be big, but not too big to be inviting. "Spacious but gracious," he says with a chuckle.

For those qualities, he knew he could rely on Pierce Allen, the firm responsible for his apartments in Manhattan and Palm Beach, Florida, his house in East Hampton, New York, and the cabin of his private jet as well as a previous office that his company had

outgrown. By now, designer DD Allen and her partner, architect Michael Pierce, had spent so much time with Lee and his wife, Ann Tenenbaum, that this latest commission seemed almost like a family project.

Bringing familial warmth to the 10,000-square-foot L-shape office was relatively easy, because Stone's facade isn't all glass. Instead, residential-looking bronze-framed bay windows alternate with solid walls, giving the rooms a domestic scale that no ordinary curtain wall could have. Familiar, however, couldn't mean predictable.

Since reception overlooks a narrow side street rather than the park, Allen filtered the view with shoji-style panels attributed→





to George Nakashima. A patchwork rug of vintage kilims adds craft to the mid-century collage while softening the spareness of a sofa by Antonio Citterio. Allen used a synthetic resin for the front of the reception desk. "I always try out new things on Tom," she says.

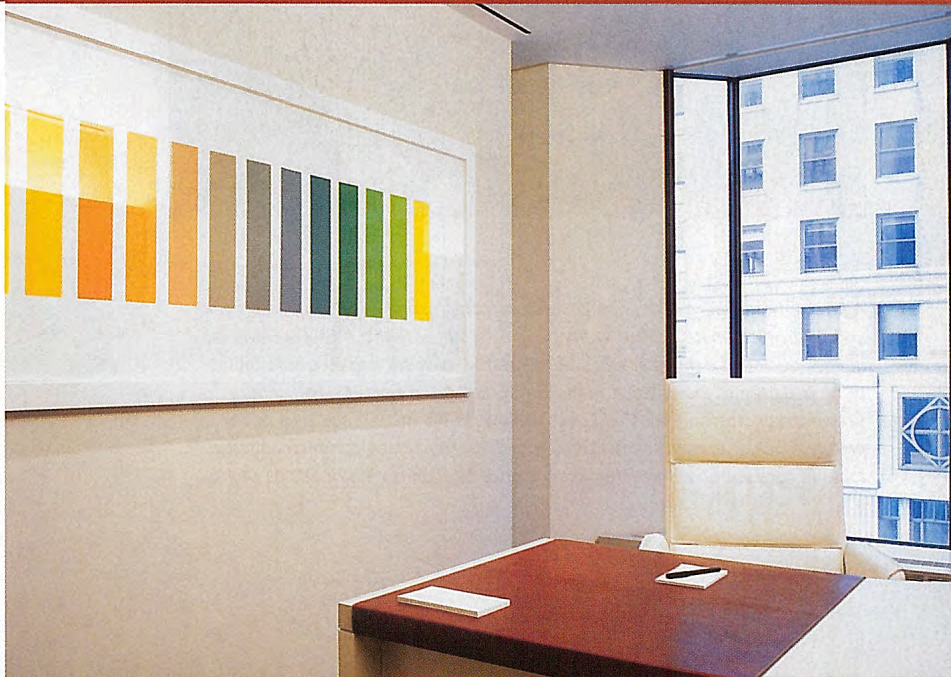
The same resin tops the 20-foot-long custom table that anchors the adjacent conference room. For three walls, Allen chose English burled white oak with a pronounced grain brought out by cerusing. One wall is glass that turns opaque at the touch of a button—a classic executive toy. "It's the traditional wood-paneled conference room that really isn't traditional," Allen says. She's not referring to just furniture and finishes: Note the Andy Warhol camouflage painting, part of Lee and Tenenbaum's unrivaled contemporary collection. (She's vice chairman at New York's Dia Art Foundation.)

A hallway leading from the reception area to private offices doubles as a gallery, where a photorealist portrait by Gerhard Richter seems to be scoping out a mixed-media portrait of Lee's father, Herbert, by Larry Rivers. A series of eight pastel drawings by Francesco Clemente lends interest to the workstations of secretaries' row. In the staff kitchen, the scene gets edgier with a wall-mounted LED installation by Tatsuo Miyajima.

In senior executives' offices, Allen mixed Lee and Tenenbaum's artwork with mid-century furniture and decorative objects of equal quality. In the office of managing director Jim Burritt, that meant a black-lacquered desk by Stowe Davis and a swivel chair by Edward Wormley. Even a side table is an important piece, a mid-1960's →

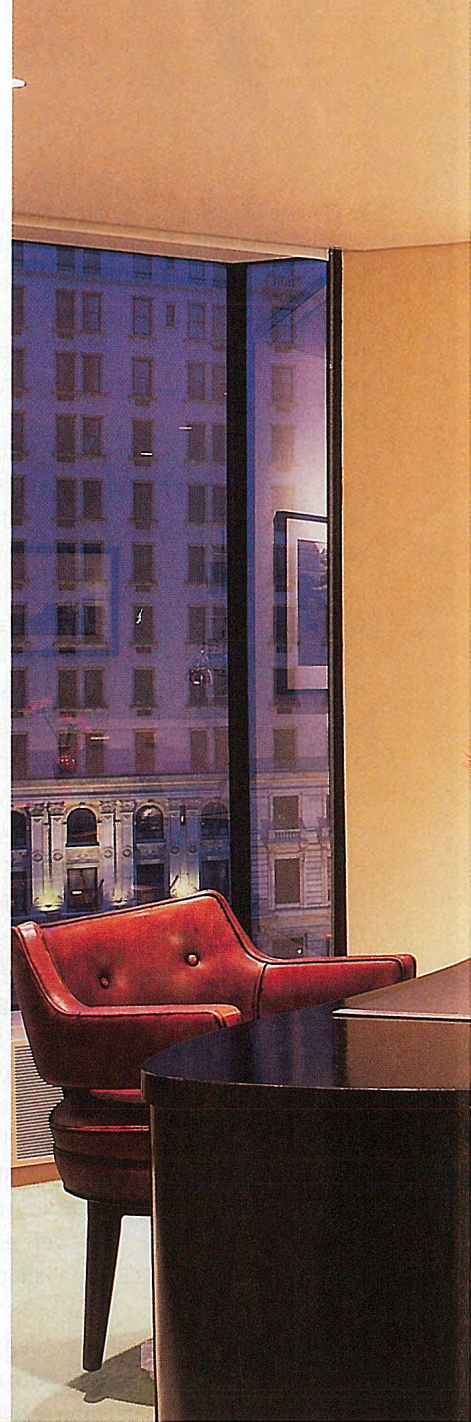
Opposite: In a meeting room that features vintage Nicos Zographos chairs, the glass pendant fixtures could be flying saucers landing in Vera Lutter's silver-gelatin diptych of Rockefeller Center.

Top: A vintage architect's lamp and a Richard Estes screen print of a subway train introduce angles in a visitor's office furnished with Florence Knoll chairs. **Center:** In an executive office, Ellsworth Kelly's screen print echoes the verticals of Stone's bronze-framed bay windows. **Bottom:** Francesco Clemente's pastel-on-paper series lines the hallway where support staff occupies custom workstations encased in resin.





Above: Edward Wormley's wool-covered armchairs, a vintage lacquered desk, and a Roy Lichtenstein drawing appoint Lee's office. **Right:** A Stowe Davis lacquered desk and a Jules Wabbes filing cabinet, now serving as a side table, bring pedigree to the office of managing director Jim Burritt. The Gregory Crewdson photograph adds edginess. **Below:** In the conference area of Lee's private office, a copper pendant fixture by Poul Henningsen complements the table of cerused English white oak. A bronze by Roberto Matta stands nearby.





mahogany filing cabinet by Jules Wabbes.

In Lee's office, the least famous name represented is actually Allen, who designed the burlled-oak conference table. Above it hangs a vintage copper lantern by Poul Henningsen; the coffee table is by Paul Laszlo; and a filing cabinet, which Allen refinished, is attributed to Paul Dupré-Lafon. Meanwhile, walls between the windows provide a perfect setting for a Roy Lichtenstein drawing and Jasper Johns painting; a bronze by Roberto Matta stands on a pedestal. The suite's generous size gives the museum-quality objects room to breathe. "It's very serene," Allen says. For an investment banker's office, that's saying a lot. ■

PROJECT TEAM: **KATHERINE KUSEL; NANCY SUAREZ-SANTOS; RAYMOND LIU; ANDREW KAMINS.**

TABLE RESIN (CONFERENCE, MEETING ROOMS), DESK RESIN (RECEPTION), WORKSTATION RESIN (SUPPORT AREA): **RONALD MARK ASSOCIATES.** CHAIR UPHOLSTERY (CONFERENCE ROOM, RECEPTION, MEETING ROOM, EXECUTIVE OFFICE): **EDELMAN LEATHER.** WALL PANELING (CONFERENCE ROOM), CUSTOM DESK (EXECUTIVE OFFICE), CUSTOM WORKSTATIONS (SUPPORT AREA), CUSTOM TABLE (CEO'S OFFICE): **MEAD & JOSIPOVICH.** CHAIRS (CONFERENCE ROOM), TASK CHAIR (EXECUTIVE OFFICE), MEETING CHAIRS (CEO'S OFFICE): **KEILHAUER.** CUSTOM RUG (RECEPTION): **FJ HAKIMIAN.** CUSTOM WALL COVERING: **ELIZABETH DOW THROUGH INTERIOR DESIGN COLLECTIONS.** FLOOR TILE: **MARCELLO TILE.** PLASTERWORK (RECEPTION, HALLWAY, SUPPORT AREA): **ART IN CONSTRUCTION.** SCREENS, TABLE (RECEPTION), CHAIRS, PENDANT FIXTURES (MEETING ROOM), DESK, DESK LAMP, CHAIRS, TABLE (VISITOR'S OFFICE), ARMCHAIRS, PENDANT FIXTURE (CEO'S OFFICE), DESK, DESK CHAIR, DESK LAMP, ARMCHAIR, TABLE, FILING CABINET, PENDANT FIXTURE (MANAGING DIRECTOR'S OFFICE): **THROUGH WYETH.**

CHAIRS (RECEPTION, SUPPORT AREA): **HERMAN MILLER.** WALL COVERING (MEETING ROOM), CLUB-CHAIR, SOFA FABRIC (MANAGING DIRECTOR'S OFFICE): **ANGELA BROWN.** CHAIR UPHOLSTERY (VISITOR'S OFFICE): **SPINNEYBECK.** SOFA FABRIC: **DONGHIA FURNITURE/TEXTILES.** SOFA (VISITOR'S, MANAGING DIRECTOR'S OFFICES): **DENNIS MILLER ASSOCIATES.** TASK CHAIR (CEO'S OFFICE): **ICF.** DESK: **THROUGH R.E. STEELE ANTIQUES.** WALL COVERING: **LEE JOFA.** CUSTOM DRAPERY: **DELTA UPHOLSTERS; HOLLY HUNT (FABRIC).** CARPET: **BEAUVAIS CARPETS.** EXECUTIVE ARCHITECT: **GENSLER.** GENERAL CONTRACTOR: **STRUCTURETONE.**