

# GreenSource

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Outside  
is the  
New Inside

MR CLINTON  
TACKLES  
INEFFICIENCY

LESSONS FROM  
THE DUST BOWL

JOSEPH ROMM  
ON THE  
GOVERNMENT







CASE STUDY

## MERCK SERONO GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

PENNY BONDA

# Ecological Antidote

A BIOTECHNOLOGY COMPANY CONSIDERS ENVIRONMENTAL  
HEALTH AND SUSTAINABILITY FOR ITS NEW HEADQUARTERS

THE CLIENT AND THE DESIGN TEAM OF THE NEW Merck Serono headquarters in Geneva brilliantly accomplished an outcome rarely identified as a guiding design vision, yet one unquestionably important to organizational success: sense of place. The 1,200 workers at the global biotechnology company, created by a merger in 2006, had been scattered over six sites in the Swiss city. Bringing the disparate staff together to a single campus-style location was an obvious project directive; uniting them into a community, however, did not happen automatically or easily. It required strategic space and materials solutions that emphasized community, comfort, and communication.

Awarded the interior project after winning an international competition, Mackay + Partners, a London-based multidisciplinary practice, faced the challenge of ensuring a seamless integration of architecture and interiors in a building already under construction. The primary architect, Chicago's Murphy/Jahn, designed six linked buildings with a total floor area of 807,000 square feet, connected under the roof by an atrium. M+P designed 430,556 square feet of this vast project, the largest in Geneva in 2006. M+P's scope included all public spaces and offices, executive suites, conference rooms, meeting rooms, and other support spaces.

The implementation of energy-efficient concepts, including daylighting, natural ventilation, and solar technology, maximizes the use of natural resources and minimizes mechanical equipment needs, resulting in a building that modulates its own climate. The glass-and-steel structure—more glass than steel—is located on the shores of Lake Geneva and uses the lake

» Blue, the corporate color, calls attention to the reception desk, scaled to the six-story entrance and designed to mimic the steel structure of the architecture.



« The bistro atmosphere of the cafe, a central gathering place, spreads from inside the library to the light-flooded forum.

### KEY PARAMETERS

**LOCATION:**  
Geneva,  
Switzerland

**GROSS SQUARE  
FOOTAGE:** 430,556  
ft<sup>2</sup> (40,000 m<sup>2</sup>)

**COMPLETED:**  
December 2006

**PROGRAM:**  
Reception areas,  
library, cafe, kiosk,  
atrium, restaurant,  
offices, speak-  
easies, executive  
suites

### TEAM

**OWNER:** Merck  
Serono

**ARCHITECT:**  
Murphy/Jahn

**INTERIOR DESIGNER:**  
Mackay & Partners

**ENGINEER:** EGS

**CONTRACTOR:**  
Steiner

**LIGHTING:** L-Plan

**LANDSCAPE:** Olaxis  
Architects  
Paysagistes



water as a geothermal source for heating and cooling. "Because Swiss code strictly prohibits mechanical air conditioning," says M+P senior partner Ken Mackay, "we collaborated closely with the architects to optimize the use of natural resources, such as installing a humidity-producing rain cloud in the atrium." Other strategies include external stainless-steel blinds and interior fabric shades on the south elevations to control heat gain and glare.

The designers also joined forces with German manufacturer Gebr. Kufferath AG on a supergraphic that dominates the back of the atrium. Made from beeswax embedded with LEDs, the striking media wall is computer controlled to showcase video or still images of Merck Serono product launches, company information, and other messages. "The beeswax is a heat-resistant hardwearing surface that will last 10 to 15 years," Mackay says. "It's a Times Square look, but softer."

M+P used translucency, visual connection, and color to further soften and bring order to the vast interior spaces. Through a series of bridges designed to form meeting places where the bridges intersect, the designers have cleverly created inviting work areas within a large open building that might otherwise overwhelm its occupants. These popular spots, dubbed speakeasies, are furnished with striking red

» The inviting cafeteria, which accommodates 500 and serves 1,200 meals in two services, encourages departments to mix and interact.



The interior designer custom-designed tables and seating for the restaurant using composites of cell-bond-colored glazing panels.



## FIRST FLOOR

- 1 Administration office
- 2 Atrium
- 3 Forum
- 4 Cafe and library
- 5 Cafeteria
- 6 Outdoor dining
- 7 Daycare
- 8 Fitness
- 9 Conference center

Offices are placed to link work groups within departments. The large sliding doors allow for open communication.



» The library features custom shelving and a quiet reading zone.

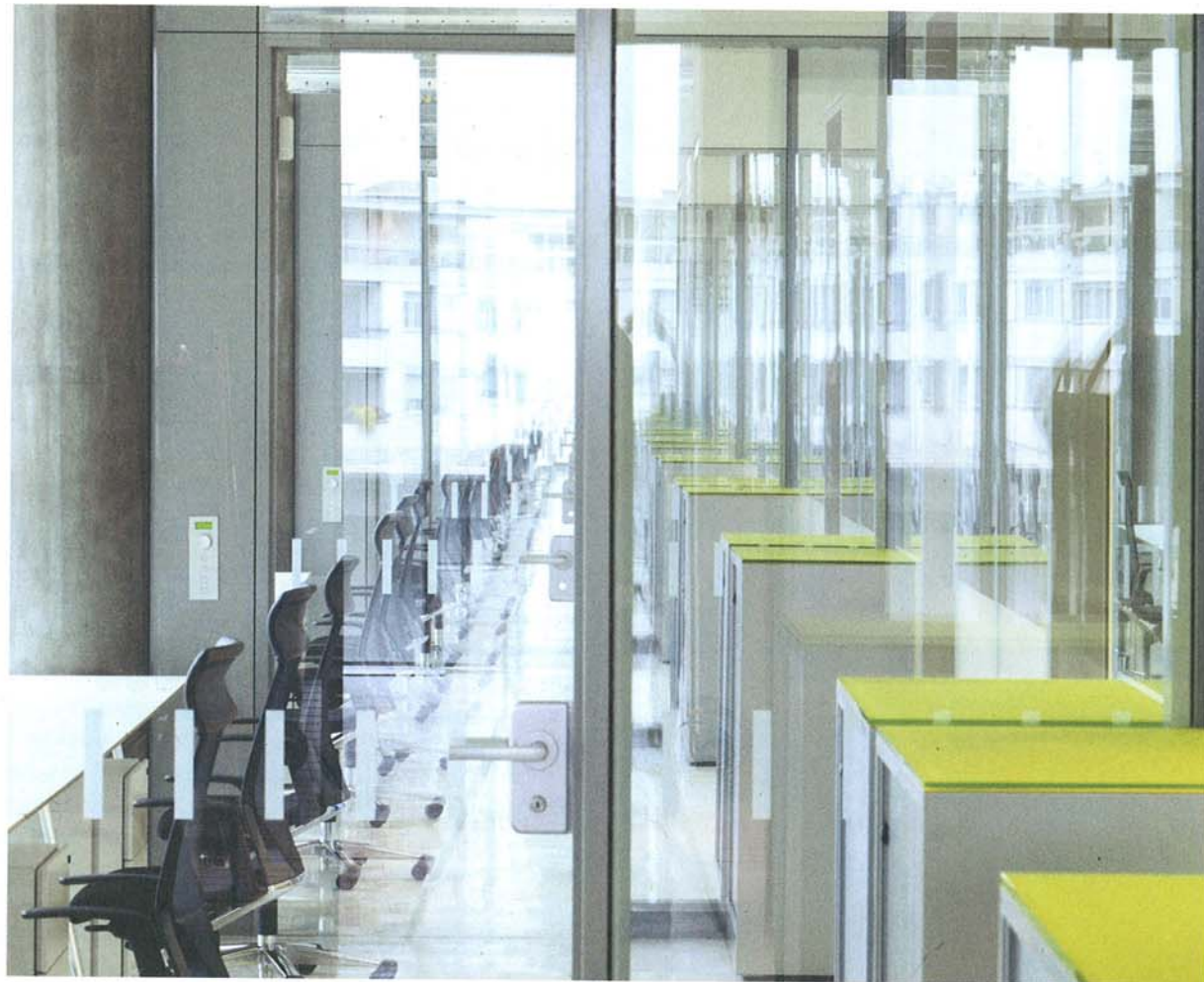


» The forum, with a village-square atmosphere, is the heart of the complex.





» Lab spaces provide desks facing the forum with localized storage behind. The yellow glass tops link to the media wall's beeswax panels within the entry.



« Oak is used throughout the executive suite. A battened-wood panel denotes the upper margins of room partitions (far left).

« The executive suite includes offices, meeting/dining rooms, and the boardroom. Stitched white leather appears in wall paneling and furniture (left).



» The speakeasies, or random collision points, create places for serendipitous meetings and also help with way-finding.

seating, which plays against the frosted-white glass floors of the bridges; their purpose is to increase communications within the company. The restaurant, cafe, library, and gym have been more successful than anticipated in connecting people who had never worked together before, according to Gavin Harris, an M+P partner and interior designer.

The guiding philosophy in materials selection, as dictated by the client, centered on the use of natural materials and a commitment to bringing in the outdoors. Stone used to landscape the exterior was brought into the atrium; timber used in the restaurant was carried through to the decking outside. According to Harris, recyclability and adaptation for reuse informed the furnishing choices, such as the carpets and demountable office partitions.

As one of the biggest buildings in Geneva, the scale of the Merck Serono headquarters is impressive. It sits beautifully within the landscape and links to the lake, creating a true sense of place where people can connect. It's not a place where people just come to work and then leave. «



» Integrating media into the facade, such as kinetic lighting, offers the potential for an emotional connection between observer and architecture.

» The library's periodicals are housed in custom-designed shelving, constructed of surfacing material and LED lighting.



## SOURCES

RESTAURANT FURNITURE:  
Arper s.p.a.

ROLLING RACK/TEA POINTS:  
Ahrend International

EXECUTIVE AREA FURNITURE:  
B+B Italia Spa

CHAIRS: Bene

SPEAKEASY SEATING: BPA  
International s.r.l

PARTITIONS: Faram Spa

MEETING PODS AND CAFE,  
KIOSK POD AND SERVERY: M3  
Design Development Limited

SHELVING AND DESKS,  
RESTAURANT TABLES, BENCHES,  
ATRIUM SEATING: Molteni & C

PARTITIONS, JOINERY, DOORS,  
SPEAKEASY TEA POINTS,  
RECEPTION DESK:  
Roethlisberger

OFFICE DESKS AND STORAGE,

MDL SYSTEM WORKSTATIONS,  
MDL MEETING TABLES:  
Unifor

TASK CHAIRS: Steelcase  
(Think)

CARPETS: Bentley Carpets,  
executive area; Milliken,  
office areas