



hola, la ciudad

Mexico City—and Latin America—welcomes a green change with HOK's design for Torre HSBC

By Linda Burnett
Photography by Adrian Wilson

When we think of bustling cities of industrialization, we often picture the obvious—New York, London, Paris, Tokyo. But some 70 percent of urban dwellers are in developing countries, and that means more than a handful of untapped potential. Some companies have taken heed. In 2002, the British bank HSBC, with more than 130 years in the business and a global strategy to target emerging markets, acquired the local Banco Bital in Mexico City with a plan beyond deposits and withdrawals. Mexico City has unveiled the first LEED-certified building not only in its country, but also in all of Latin America, with the HOK-designed headquarters for HSBC Mexico smack in the middle of a burgeoning urban center.

Located on the Paseo de la Reforma, the city's main thoroughfare, Torre HSBC (HSBC Tower) is a beacon of forward thinking—going green. Although the concept might be untested for the region, carbon neutrality has long been essential to HSBC's operation. Since it was a given that HSBC required a green building, "I thought we had a good chance to go further and get certification," Claudio Tanco, HSBC's regional head of corporate real estate Latin America, says of the decision to reach for LEED Gold status. "We knew it would call attention to be the first to get certification in Latin America, but that wasn't the driver."

The top two floors of the LEED Gold HSBC Mexico headquarters in Mexico City are reserved for executive functions, such as the double-height winter garden (left) where upper-tier clients may relax in a spacious, calming setting. In the daylight-drenched lobby (above), the oversized Juan O'Gorman mural, a national treasure, is positioned for all eyes to see.



Basados en la misión y el tamaño que actualmente tiene MetLife en nuestro país, HOK realizó el proyecto de sus oficinas corporativas, las cuales albergarían luego de la unión, a los empleados y directivos de ambas empresas en un edificio antiguo, con grandes áreas inútiles para su productividad. El mayor reto al que se enfrentaron fue el de entender ambas filosofías de trabajo, para después darle un balance tal que el espacio nuevo expresara arquitectónicamente una forma totalmente diferente de operar.

Based on the mission and presence of MetLife in Mexico at that time, HOK designed its corporate offices to accommodate employees and executives of both companies, who previously worked in an outdated building, with large, unproductive areas. In designing the new space, HOK took on the challenge of understanding both work philosophies and balancing the two completely different operations into one.





Another view of the winter garden at the top of the building shows how comfort and aesthetics were not compromised for the sake of going green (above). Light even penetrates interior rooms, such as the executive dining room (left). On a general work floor, the southern curtainwall (opposite top) and informal meeting area (opposite bottom) overlook the Paseo de la Reforma: 90 percent of the occupied space has views to the outside.

Mexico City has long had problems with clean water, so sustainable building practices with a requirement to decrease water usage is more than a signal for change. Tower HSBC uses 55 percent less water with the help of a 4,000-sq.-ft. green roof that reduces storm water runoff and filters pollutants, and an on-site graywater treatment plant. And since there are only 10 private offices, allowing for an ample open plan for 90 percent of the space, daylight floods in, stimulating an intelligent lighting system and helping reduce energy usage by 40 percent. All the details were considered. The copy/fax room here is isolated for indoor air quality control.

With more than 100 million inhabitants, Mexico not only received the re-branding of a bank, but also a nod toward social consciousness. "We are pioneers in green. We also introduced the first gym on the office premises and other amenities," says Tanco of the 400,000-sq.-ft., 24-story building. "It was a campaign of difference." Some of those differences came in the form of HSBC's company-wide culture that includes providing different receptacles for recycling, carpooling parking spots, and a non-smoking policy for some 2,500 employees. "A non-smoking building didn't exist before in Mexico," adds Tanco. "HSBC provided therapy for those who needed to quit." (Employees may smoke in designated outdoor areas if desired.) Even going without closed offices was new to Mexico, so employees were schooled in how to work without privacy for the sake of open communication.

HOK juxtaposed the modernity of the building with an homage to Mexican tradition in the lobby, which features a 10-ft. by 75-ft. mural by the country's beloved architect and painter Juan O'Gorman, aptly titled "El Crédito Transforma a México," meaning "the credit transforms Mexico." "It was originally located in a space where few people were able to see it," says Juan Carlos Jimenez, principal in charge at HOK, Mexico. "It was our intention to bring it to a place to be seen by all." The mural is considered one of Mexico City's treasures, and its care was under great scrutiny. "The mural had to be dismantled in one piece and transported on a weekend night two city blocks," adds Javier Presas, HOK's project manager and leader.

The building can't help but be seen by token of its presence in the hub of Mexico City's Independence Circle, a place where folks conduct public gatherings, from celebrations to demonstrations. "It's the best location," says Presas. "It turns the building into a landmark." It also meant the \$150 million building could not compete with the Angel of Independence, an icon that commemorates Mexico's struggle for independence. "It needed to be simple but solid," Presas says, of the building's impression.



design



No detail was left behind, with areas on each floor to house copy/tax rooms, vending machines and a snack bar counter (above left), and a communication-ready 148-seat auditorium (above right).

The size, complexity, and change that this project brought required a team effort from designers to employers to the city itself. "We designed spaces for bike racks and bathrooms so people who ride their bikes to work could shower," says Jimenez. "This is unheard of in Mexico." HSBC taught the public what all this meant with a marketing campaign of billboards, articles and bus stop ads that focused on the benefits of being green, using fewer resources, and recycling.

"HSBC truly has been visionary in making this, its first office presence in Mexico City, a special building," adds HOK vice president Arturo Perez Rivera, who had a close involvement with the client team on the building interiors. "They challenged HOK to position their company well in the market and grasped the importance of sustainability from the outset." At the building's inauguration in 2006, the then president of Mexico Vicente Fox Quesada attended, christening a step in the green direction and demonstrating that when it comes to the environment, we're all in this together. ☒

For a list of who, what, where, please see page 128.

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