

# the gold *standard*

IIDA's new Headquarters and Learning Center  
achieve LEED Gold certification. *By Michelle Bowles*  
*Photography by Eric Laignel*

IIDA  
INTERNATIONAL  
INTERIOR DESIGN  
ASSOCIATION

In the reception area, a coffee table by Urban Hardwoods is made from 100-percent reclaimed wood from a felled tree, and the area rug by Merida Meridian is made with 100-percent wool upholstery. The cork flooring is 100-percent rapidly renewable and made from pre-consumer content, while the Carnegie draperies are made from 100-percent Trevira CS, a material produced with little energy and no dangerous waste products. Other stand-out features include FSC-certified oak paneling, a custom millwork reception desk and television stand made from recycled wood fiber, and drywall made from 99-percent recycled content.

When it came time to design the new IIDA Headquarters and Learning Center, there was little question that the space should be sustainable and energy-efficient. Envision Design, an architecture and interior design firm in Washington, D.C., with a sustainability focus, was called in to bring the green vision to life. Throughout the Headquarters – located in Chicago’s Merchandise Mart, within a half mile of 28 bus lines, five subway stations and six elevated train lines – 25 percent of materials specified are made with post-consumer and post-recycled materials. Seventy-two percent of the furniture and products specified in the construction were manufactured within a 500-mile radius of the site, and 5 percent of the products are made with rapidly renewable materials such as cork and wool.

Still, beauty and functionality weren’t ignored. “We tried very hard to ensure when you walk into the space, it didn’t scream, ‘I’m recycled,’” says Designer Ken Wilson, IIDA, AIA, LEED AP. “All the wood is [Forest Stewardship Council]-certified, and you’d never know that. You wouldn’t know that the lighting is extremely energy-efficient, that the ceiling tiles have a high recycled content or that the paints are rated for zero VOCs. It looks like a very contemporary, modern workspace.”

After the space was completed, the Merchandise Mart, the world’s largest commercial building, became LEED for Existing Buildings-certified. And in March, IIDA achieved LEED Gold certification for the offices. “As IIDA’s mission states, ‘IIDA seeks to promote awareness and knowledge of interior design strategies that reduce negative impacts on our natural environment and improve the health and well-being of all people,’” says Cheryl S. Durst, Hon. IIDA, LEED AP, IIDA Executive Vice President and CEO. “The new Headquarters is an illustration of these tenets in action for our Members and the design community.”



**ABOVE, LEFT**

Staff members’ low-profile desks are situated in an open floor plan and surrounded by private offices with glass walls and doors, allowing for plenty of natural light to enter the entire space for all occupants. An under-the-floor air delivery system, which requires less energy to heat and cool the space, allows for individual temperature control. “Aside from the amount of energy saved, the real benefit of [sustainable Interior Design] is creating a better, more productive work environment,” says Wilson.

**Design Firm:**

Envision Design,  
Washington, D.C.

**Designers:**

Ken Wilson, IIDA, AIA, LEED AP, Principal  
Rob Moylan, IIDA, LEED AP, Project Director  
Ashley N. Compton, Associate IIDA, LEED AP  
Michelle V. Egrie, LEED AP  
Kevin Kenney, IIDA, LEED AP  
Michele LeTourneur, IIDA, LEED AP

**The Bottom Line:**

“The focus of our practice is sustainable projects. We’re a firm founded on this idea. It’s really ingrained in the culture of our firm. It’s not as though we have some green projects and some non-green projects — they’re all green projects.” — Wilson



**LEFT**  
 For the Learning Center, sustainability meant flexibility. On any given day, the space may be used as a theater-style classroom, a training facility, a large boardroom or even an entertainment venue. In the curtain behind the bar, the team incorporated LED lights that change colors — white for day; magenta, turquoise or any number of other colors for evening events. “We did extensive dimming of the fluorescent lighting so we could create a mood that was completely different at night and during the day,” Wilson says. All of the tables break down, so the room can be used both for collaborative training and for lectures. “You can also bring in 6-foot-round dining tables, so you could have a dinner for 50 people. The adjacent rooms, like the boardroom, could function as staging for catering,” Wilson says. “That all adds to the flexibility of the space.”

**A Helping Hand**  
 Designers know that for typical non-profit or association clients, budgets are tight, and that may mean making some sacrifices. But for the new IIDA Headquarters and Learning Center, the Envision Design team had the benefit of generous donations from IIDA Corporate Members and other contributors. “That was a great part of this project,” says Moylan. “The association did not spend the amount it looks like it did.”

IIDA WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING CORPORATE MEMBERS AND VALUABLE CONTRIBUTORS FOR THEIR GENEROSITY IN MAKING THE NEW HEADQUARTERS AND LEARNING CENTER A REALITY:

ALLSTEEL  
 ARMSTRONG WORLD INDUSTRIES  
 BUSINESS OFFICE SYSTEMS INC.  
 CARL HANSEN & SØN  
 CARNEGIE FABRICS  
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 KNOLL  
 LEES CARPETS  
 LUNA TEXTILES

LUTRON  
 MAHARAM  
 MERIDA MERIDIAN INC.  
 OFFICE (R)EVOLUTION  
 SHAW CONTRACT GROUP  
 TEKNION  
 URBAN HARDWOODS

**A special thanks to:**

ENVISION DESIGN  
 KJWW ENGINEERING CONSULTANTS  
 MERCHANDISE MART PROPERTIES INC.  
 TURNER CONSTRUCTION

