Great design, lots of light and attention to detail:
Here are the best new offices in the Chicago area

BY ZLATA KOZUL NAUMOVSKI

Employees who have returned or are soon returning to recently remodeled or new offices will find they’ve got lots of options. Winners chosen from a robust list of 52 entrants in Crain’s 13th Coolest Offices contest have spaces designed to accommodate individual, heads-down work as well as conducive collaborating. Stadium seating is still a thing, but so are work labs, chic cafes and outdoor rooms accessed via retractable garage doors. Green (living) walls are still going strong, while art is no longer an afterthought, with Chicago-centric pieces in many offices. Here, Crain’s contributing editor Jan Parr, (a former design magazine editor) and design writer Zlata Kozul Naumovski suss out spaces that could entice even the most dyed-in-the-wool work-from-home enthusiast into coming back to the office.

COOLEST OFFICES 2021: THE WINNERS

SHURE

Space: A modern glass commercial office building originally designed by Helmut Jahn in 2001 in north suburban Niles

Who did it: Perkins & Will, led by Tim Wolfe, interior design director

Cool because: It provides a whole new look and feel for associates of the audio products company. The massive wood and steel pavilion brings a sense of scale to the seven-story atrium and creates space for associates to collaborate, foster connections or simply find respite. A glass barrel roof offers incredible access to light.

Coolest feature: Sidney’s Cafe, named after founder Sidney Shure. The neon “Ignition” and “Coffee Is a Fruit” signs let you know exactly where to fuel up. The cafe opens to a grassy area outside where musically talented artist associates entertain with live music while others barbecue during their “Eat to the Beat” events.

Why employees like it: The firm has a “work anywhere” philosophy, and the redesigned space supports more flexible ways of working. Within the pavilion and Sidney’s Cafe, workspaces vary from large-group meeting areas to individual quiet booths complete with audio/visual technology. “We no longer wanted associates to be tethered to their desks but rather seek out spaces conducive to fostering creativity, collaboration and even quiet (me) time,” said Pat Knoll, vice president, global facilities. “The pandemic came along and accelerated flexible working at a pace far greater than we could have ever imagined.”