Listen Up

A new headquarters balances the bold style and refined quality of Beats by Dre’s products

BY SAMANTHA SCHWIRCK
Beats by Dre’s sleek, colorful headphones seem to read consumer minds—and it’s not just because they’re attached to people’s heads. The headsets merge technology and fashion, and they’ve come to be known just as much as a style accessory as for their sound capabilities. In a way, the headsets offer a two-for-one deal, which stands out amongst today’s sea of electronics options.

Not surprisingly, the unique design proved successful from the start, causing rapid expansion for the company. Since Beats by Dre was founded in 2008, speakers, streaming services and accessories have been added to the product line, as well as several hundred employees. Company growth called for a new headquarters that could accommodate 650 employees (including four executives and three CEOs) across more than a dozen departments. In 2012, Loescher Meachem Architects and Bestor Architecture designed the company’s new 105,000-sq ft campus in Culver City, CA. The site, which opened last spring, is defined by its sprawling layout, but separate areas are all connected via one main hub.

In the same spirit as Beats’ products, the new headquarters is stylish and modern with pops of bold color throughout. Excitement is balanced by details that ensure the overall aesthetic remains elegant and sophisticated to represent the quality of the company’s products. Lighting Design Alliance (LDA), Los Angeles, created the illumination plan for the new site. The design team—consisting of Chip Israel, Patrick Salmons and Ashley Yin—was tasked with providing a flexible system for various users, while also accentuating the company’s key branding themes—style and quality—which are conveyed through the architecture and décor.

“The overall goal was to create a modern office environment with stylish, decorative fixtures, energy-efficient light sources and sophisticated control systems,” says Patrick Salmons, former lighting designer with LDA. “The lighting not only complements the architecture, but captures the essence of the company itself.”

THE CAMPUS

LDA worked alongside the architects and engineers for approximately two years during the design and construction process. Two existing industrial buildings were repurposed for the new headquarters, which now consists of one sprawling site with multiple distinct but connected parts.

First is the main building, which sits at the front of the campus and houses reception areas, administrative and marketing departments, and lounges and conference rooms. Its defining feature is the two-story lobby that runs its length, doubling as a corridor that connects two atriums on each side of it. The lobby is large enough for all of the employees to gather in at once, and features a small café as well as tables and break-out spaces for collaborative meetings. Workspaces in the main building are within the two atriums—one has a blue color theme and is used by the operations departments, while the other is white is used by the marketing departments. Both atriums have second-story meeting rooms that overlook the more communal lower-level spaces with open desks.

In both atriums, existing structural beams were customized to house three-headed recessed fixtures without altering the construction of skylights. Cushioned benches (far left), backlit by linear fluorescent slotlights, are recessed into the walls of bright red corridors. A two-story lobby with a café—illuminated by daylight and LED downlights—runs the length of the main building, connecting the spaces.

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ment and sophistication. Another energizing element is the corridors that connect the atriums and lobby, which are completely red—another one of Beats by Dre’s defining colors—and feature nooks with cushioned seats that are backlit by linear fluorescent slotlights. Throughout the building, photo murals of Los Angeles and geometric wall patterns provide finishing design touches.

The campus’s second building houses an acoustical testing lab, Beats’ engineering and development departments, and a gym and larger café. Though separate, the building is connected to the main space by an exterior courtyard and walkway.

**CONNECTING THE DOTS**

For the architect, challenges included creating an exciting and colorful atmosphere without it being cliché or tacky. For the lighting designer, obstacles were a bit less abstract. The largest lighting hurdle involved the structure of the campus’s anchoring features—the central atriums. “Big skylights brought large amounts of daylight into the spaces, but they took up most of the ceiling, making it difficult to locate fixtures,” Salmons explains. LDA crafted a custom solution using an existing ceiling beam, but the process involved some finagling. “We were able to work with the design team to increase the size of the beam, which allowed us to recess several three-headed adjustable fixtures within the beam,” Salmons says, adding that illumination from the beam lights both atriums without compromising the skylights’ construction. “Without surface mounting or suspending fixtures from the skylight, we were able to keep the architectural lighting as minimal and unobtrusive as possible.”

Over open workspaces, 12-ft linear fluorescent direct/indirect pendants provide general illumination at an average of 30 footcandles. The large pendants (Axis Lighting) are dimmable and connected to the building’s daylight harvesting system to maximize energy savings. Throughout, LED downlights (USA Illumination and Wila Lighting) provide additional illumination. “With the exception of the linear fluorescent fixtures, almost everything in both buildings utilizes the most advanced and efficacious LEDs on the market at that time,” Salmons says.

In small offices and conference rooms, LED downlights and wall washers (also by USA Illumination) provide task lighting, with decorative LED pendant fixtures—custom-made in various shapes, sizes and colors—placed above tables to add a unique look to each individual space. In some conference rooms and private offices, linear fluorescent cove fixtures (Litecontrol) provide extra diffuse lighting. Across the way, the second building’s two-story open offices are lighted by large, pendant-mounted 9,500-lumen LED high-bay fixtures from Beta-Calco. Similar to the main building, designers supplemented the pendants with LED downlights throughout. These fixtures are also connected to daylight sensors, and lighting levels are adjusted depending on the amount of daylight present. Across the campus, all fixtures are linked to one control system. “The networked control system allows the facilities manager to monitor and control both buildings from a single location,” Salmons says.

**USE OF LEDs**

Use of LEDs, daylighting and controls brought the project in at approximately .7 watts per sq ft, and the building complies with California’s Title 24 energy code. The office was also selected for a 2015 National American Institute of Architects Award for Interior Architecture. Most importantly, Salmons says, the space reinforces the company’s original reputation, as well as its growing character. “Beats’ unique style and branding has now transformed their product into a fashion accessory and statement. The highly stylized and modern interiors and architecture of the headquarters mirrors that energy and excitement, and is accentuated by the lighting.”

**FAST FACTS**

- Beats by Dre’s open-office headquarters accommodates 650 employees.
- Two industrial buildings were repurposed to create the HQ.
- The campus uses mostly LEDs, coming in at .7 watts per sq ft.