

The Ampersand

Award Category: Urban Architecture

Address: 112 4 Ave SW, Calgary, AB T2P 3N3

Owner: Aspen Properties

Project Designer: Jonny Hehr

Completion Date: May 2021

The Ampersand, formerly SunLife Plaza, is an extensive ground floor and +15 level office renovation primarily focused on communal areas and connecting amenity spaces seamlessly with the public realm. This revitalization included the main-floor atrium, tower lobbies, new food market, café, library, meeting pods, fitness centre, lounge and bar, three new tower entries and redesigned public plaza complete with a dynamic LED feature sculpture.

This renovation builds community within the complex and surrounding urban realm, gathering people while challenging traditional office design and attracting diverse new downtown tenants.

Enlivened Public Realm

Transparent glass and multiple access points draw pedestrians in from the street level. The Ampersand's social stair spills out from the +15 level, visible from the street welcoming pedestrians into the atrium, Lil' E coffee shop and interior food trucks. Centered on the active plaza, dynamic portal tower entrances enhance street edges, blurring lines between interior and exterior spaces. The Ampersand's amenity-rich and socially-stimulating design style seeks to optimize retention and attraction for its tenants – transforming office space into a desirable location where occupants flourish in all facets of their lives. Amenities activate the exterior and interior context. +15 connections are flanked with views of the gym and lounge. Overlooking the carved basketball court and various public spaces, the main floor opens into the food truck rally and acoustically softened library where guests are welcome to explore and make themselves at home in the space.

Reclaiming Architectural Excellence

Treating this "pavilion" space among the towers, our team worked to brighten and celebrate the existing skylights, expose steel structure and create landscape continuity with existing varied floor levels with natural materials and finishes. The Ampersand's programmatic elements reflect Calgary's tech start-up rush. A vibrant translation of this vision, The Ampersand draws spectators and visitors of all ages while targeting our Client's market demographic: young entrepreneurs calling for a de-formalization, encouraging collaboration and creating a fresh and social environment conducive to both productivity and work-life balance. This collaboration-focused space opens up, offering intimate gathering spaces within the larger body of the space for group activities and functions like live performances. The Ampersand embodies its name, offering a multitude of varied-scale spaces and activating both public and private users.

Connecting Calgary

Technology is integrated throughout The Ampersand through A/V screen ribbons for wayfinding and others for client and tenant advertising and exhibiting space for digital art. Modern features are integrated through natural materiality. A living wall, indoor planters and tonal wood finishes throughout bring biophilic connection to this downtown office space, fostering positive psychological impacts for visitors and tenants alike. These biophilic elements create continuity between indoor-outdoor experiences, drawing people in from street-level to explore this atrium as more than a corporate lobby, place-making through community activities, gatherings, and other public events. Lighting and technology blend throughout this project. Exterior lit portals, customizable colour lights on the "&" sculpture for those Instagrammable moments, and landscape lighting and integrated social stair lighting make for safe and attractive occupiable spaces from day to night.