

Federal Building — state-of-the-art green

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a lot of attention from the industry and it's one of the most popular tour events we've ever had. The architects, mechanical and structural engineers and electricians all worked together. It is an extremely green building."

The natural ventilation is controlled by actuators that automatically open and close windows on floors 7 through 18, depending on the weather. Lighting inside is also automatically determined by daylight.

"If it's successful, it's going to be very important in fighting the carbon crisis," Friedman said before walking through the detector. "The federal government was creative in trying this and San Francisco should be proud of this building."

Tours, though, are infrequent and limited to avoid interfering with the 1,500 employees at work. Most are

with the Department of Labor but other departments housed in the building are Defense, Agriculture, Health and Human Services, Social Services and the Office of Personnel Management. The Social Security office is in the annex on Mission Street, and security keeps the public from entering the tower.

The next day, I took a casual walk-around with a friend, an employee who wished to remain anonymous. After leaving the low-ceiling security area and entering the long lobby and looking to the right, the whole place opens up, vertically and horizontally. To the left, a metal stairway that becomes marble-like terrazzo at the landing turn, leads down to the conference center area. To the right on the main floor, a large information screen will be on a metal-mesh door that can be pulled across the floor to seal off the rest of the 605,000-square-foot tower.

At the west end of the main floor, another wide terrazzo stairway leads to the second floor. It too is divided by a railing and people on one side can sit on the steps and have lunch. Terrazzo, which has the appearance of marble, consists of concrete and marble bits in it. When polished it takes on a classy look. But workers polished the floors too much, making them beautifully shiny but also dangerously slick when wet. So they had to dull them down for safety, though they don't appear dull.

The public can rent the facilities downstairs after 4 p.m., including meeting rooms and an auditorium without a stage that can be divided in half, and is due for audio-visual equipment. A fitness center nearby is free for employees now. In June it will start charging membership and be open to the public. Now, without the giant TV screens it will have on its walls, it looks like a corral for machines.

Like the restaurant that the government built outside on the corner, the fitness and the child care center operations will be run by independent contractors. Those deals haven't yet been sealed.

Every floor has electric signage, inset screens at stairways or other key places, that will be a stream of communication — directions to departments, times and locations of meetings and so on.

The dull gray walls look almost fuzzy. They feel silky. One office wall had a kid art mural in colored chalk; it wipes right off.

ADA elevators go to every floor, but regular elevators stop at every third floor. So employees and the public have to use metal stairs, making them walk up and down one or two flights. Every third floor, though, has some sort of common and roomy relaxation area. Bathrooms on all floors are in the middle, not at the end of a floor.

The outer offices of a floor have grand, expansive views of the city, and the airy illusion of no ceilings. Inner offices are spacious and some will have large communication screens on their walls.

It's very quiet. Sound-masking systems are insinuated in the attractive row lighting of the outer offices.

Windows on floors 7 through 18 open automatically through green-flap actuators on the building's north side. They control temperature. The windows below are the usual kind.

Looking south, the views of the city and the bay — even through the vast scrim of panel screens — are spectacular on a sunny day. North, City Hall seems at your fingertips.

Breezy but pleasant Sky Bridges on floors 12 and 13 have no south-north walls. They connect two east-west parts of the building.

The place to hang out — and soon to party — is the Sky Garden on the 11th floor. It's like a Sky Bridge with aspirations. Roughly 50 by 60 feet, it has more southern exposure, making it warmer than a Sky Bridge. Its gaudy vending machines are tastefully hidden in a walk-in closet, too. When it gets potted trees and ferns, it will be dandy. But when it gets its surrounding neon lights turned on, it will be spectacular — and a famous nighttime vision for freeway travelers in the south.

But landscaping and completing the Sky Garden, even the use of conference facilities downstairs, won't breathe life into the place that the Childcare Center startup will.

As for air conditioning, the temperature was perfect when I was there. But it wasn't always so, I was told. Some employees earlier this year wore coats at work. Things have improved but the perfection-seeking air conditioning engineers are still making adjustments.

Even so, it's going to be one amazing federal building. ■

Mother's Day



One of my friends said to me the other day,
"Thank you for being born"
And I said, "You should thank my mom"
He said "Yeah, you should give me her number"
And I laughed.

Sometimes, I feel sad and upset.
Sometimes, I'm frustrated.
Sometimes, I'm so pissed I feel like yelling at everyone.
Sometimes, I'm full of shit.
Sometimes, I'm jealous.
Rarely, I feel fine with myself.

Life isn't so simple.
Life isn't so perfect—what is "perfect" anyways?
Thank you for giving birth to me.
It's been 26 years.

— Wakako Murata



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