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Vancouver design firm SSDG walks into the wild with a cabin chic interior for leading tech firm HootSuite

By Hadani Ditmars

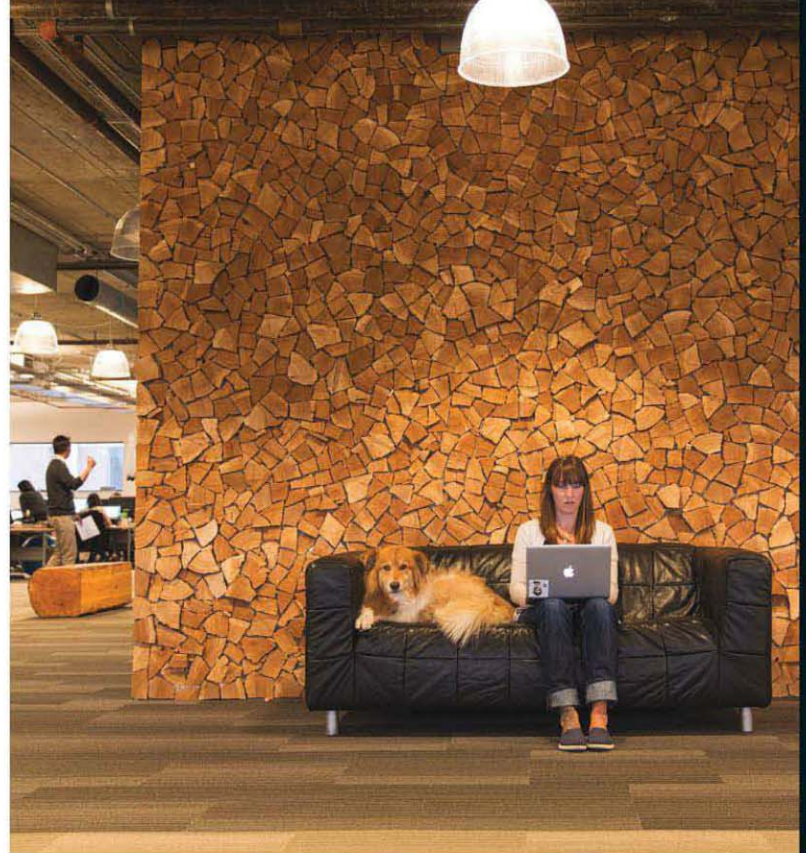
Photography by Ema Peter

**WHEN HOOTSUITE FOUNDER AND CEO RYAN HOLMES** realized that his start-up was morphing into a social media empire worth \$200 million, he decided to relocate to a more spacious environment, though his choice of buildings seemed unusual at first glance. The site of the new Vancouver head office, where some 300 employees now work, was once occupied by CSIS and later by the city police department.

To anyone walking by, the boxy two-storey building doesn't reveal itself as the hub for one of Canada's most successful tech companies. Launched in 2008, HootSuite now has over seven million subscribers using its dashboard, which integrates all forms of social media, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+, into a single screen interface. But Holmes, 38, saw potential in the fortress-like structure and brought local firm SSDG Interiors on board to overhaul the 3,066-square-metre interior, transforming it into an office with benefits.

"Designing for millennials," says Stephanie Gust, who worked with Kenna Manley on the fast-tracked project over five months, "is totally different than designing for boomers." The setting had to match the younger generation's quick-fire, multi-tasking work style. In response, the firm, which is headed up by principal Susan Steeves, opted for a sparse industrial aesthetic with exposed workaday materials, using locally sourced cedar logs as a key



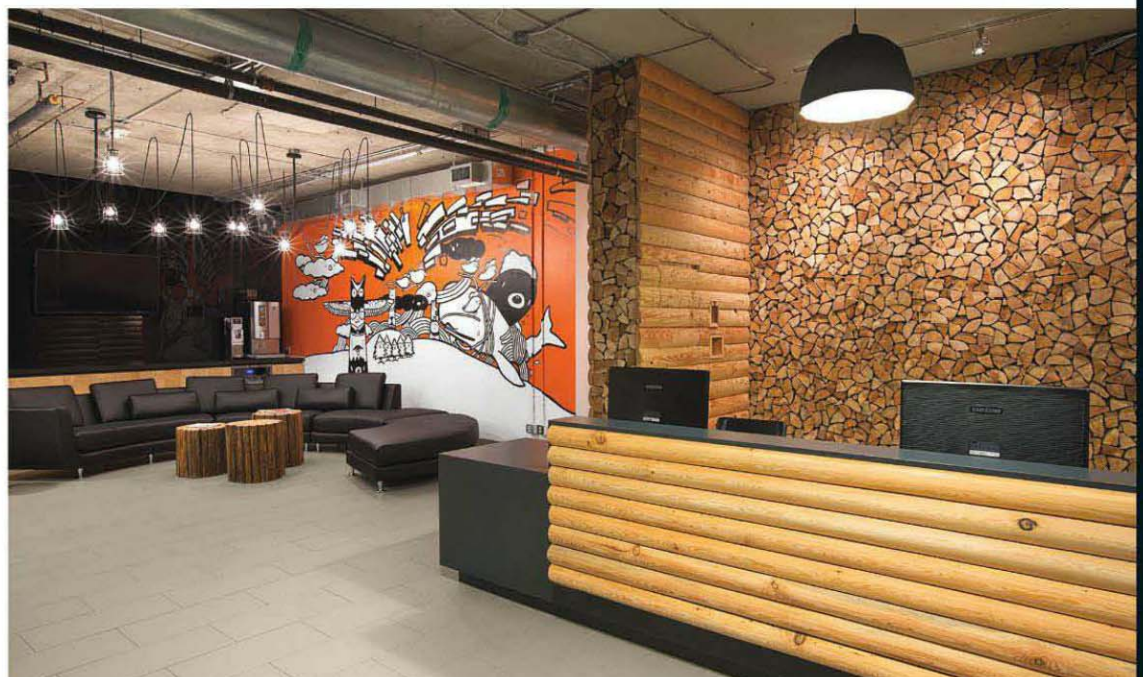


↑ Hand-painted murals, this one by Sandy and Steve Pell, riff on HootSuite's West Coast setting and the company's owl mascot.

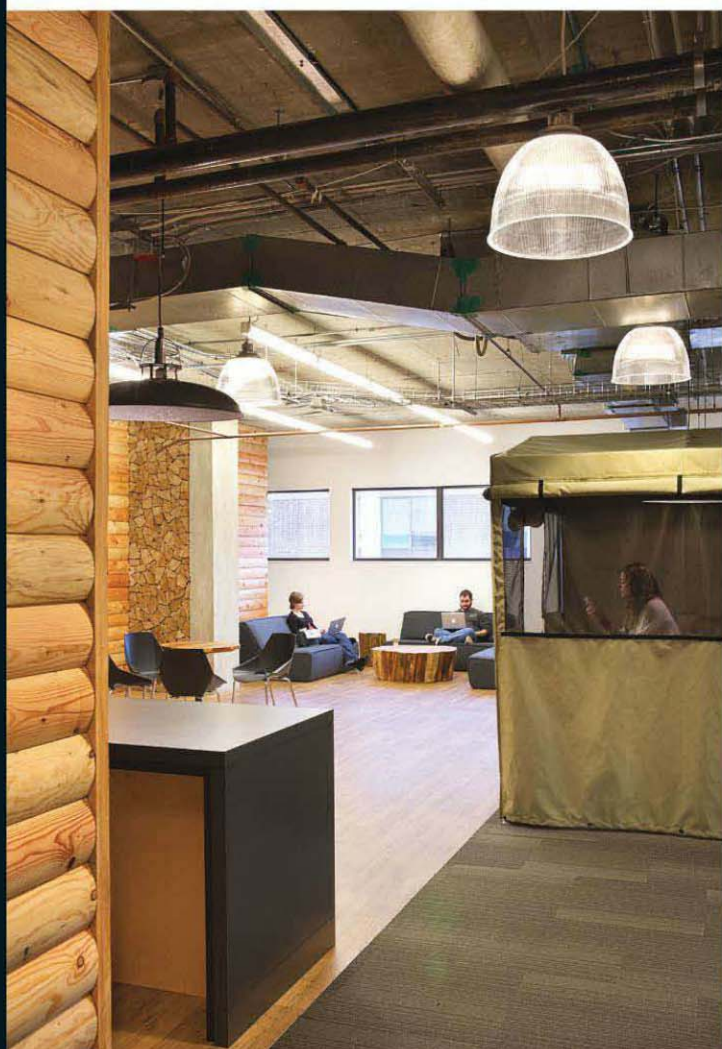
↗ A 3.3-metre-high wall at the entrance is covered in end cuts to create the look of a massive woodpile.

↗ Khaki tents have been pitched for casual private meetings.

→ The reception area. CEO Ryan Holmes grew up off the grid and has a strong affinity for nature. This is Vancouver, after all.







← The cabin-like elements were inserted within the original building's raw shell. The contrast gives the office a stage set feel.

↑ A common area with tiered steps along one wall. The added levels accommodate group gatherings and presentations.

visual effect, and bare filament bulbs in protective cages for illumination. Part laboratory and part construction zone, the office displays an outdoor scrappiness that suits the needs of a company started by a CEO who grew up living off the grid and who is now overseeing its uncharted growth. Holmes says he is currently hiring up to 10 new employees and contact workers each week.

The new digs are more like a modernist kibbutz for those rooted in the flighty realm of interconnectivity. The company's name is, like Twitter, a play on the aviary that is social media – along with a homophonic take on *tout de suite*. The new office space offers employees a 24/7 workout room, a nap room, and a kitchen with draft beer on tap, while a blurring of spatial and formal identities underlies the entire floor plan. The main floor's Great Room blends social, recreational and work functions, with rows of picnic benches off the open kitchen and Ping-Pong and foosball tables nearby. The former warren of offices and interrogation rooms is now barrier free, with clusters of workstations surrounding the common areas. To give the environment a sense of continuity, muralists from the staff, plus local design studios Chairman Ting, Company Policy and Ola Volo, were invited to riff on the company's nocturnal mascot with white, black and copper graphics that define the walls in the common areas and at reception.

Everywhere, space is maximized for spontaneous exchange. A transit area next to a core wall, for instance, is lined with a whiteboard, where software designers can pause for some visual brainstorming. Elsewhere, wall-free zones are buffered by a row of pitched khaki wall tents that provide an invigorating take on the old cubicle model. At the end of a workday, employees may be reluctant to leave this hospitable space, and when they do their brains will be buzzing with possibilities. **AZ** [ssdg.com](http://ssdg.com)