

Case Study

# UL Solutions Healthy Buildings Program Gives Boost to Hensel Phelps' WELL Certification Ambition



**HENSEL PHELPS**

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**Hensel Phelps**

*General Contractor and Construction*



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**Safety. Science. Transformation.™**

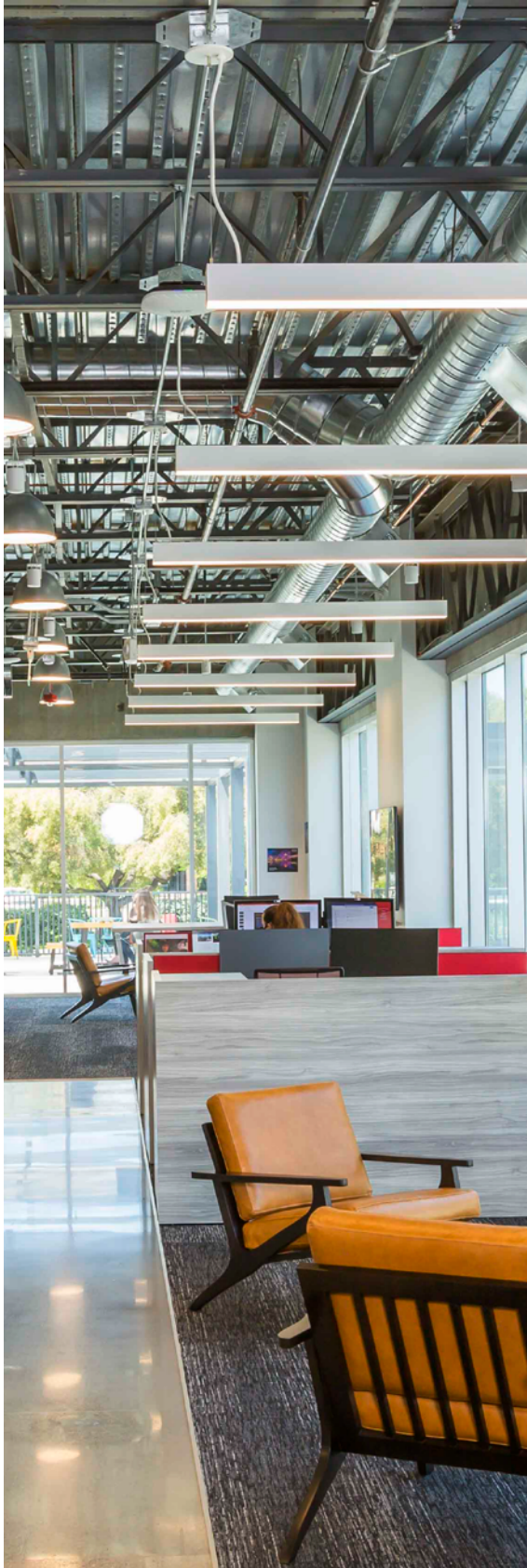


Photo by Michael O'Callahan

For Hensel Phelps' new Northern California district office, the company wanted to create a space that improved the health and well-being of all those in it. Hensel Phelps worked with UL Solutions Services for Healthy Buildings offering to help bring their vision to life, earning top marks along the way for being one of only three projects in California to receive the WELL Building Standard® Platinum certification.\*



## Introduction

For more than 80 years, Hensel Phelps has maintained a reputation for delivering excellence that has led to numerous landmark projects, including construction of San Francisco International Airport's Replacement Airport Traffic Control Tower and the Grogan Federal Building in Miramar, Florida. When the company relocated its Northern California district office from San Jose to Pleasanton, the firm's leadership viewed the move as an opportunity to create a unique, multipurpose space, benefiting their employees, clients and facility guests.

As a long-term capital investment, Hensel Phelps looked to the future, mapping out what the space meant, who it was for and what they wanted it to achieve over the facility's lifespan. Quality materials, modern design and an eye for detail were obviously high on their list of attributes, but they wanted to go even further and improve the health and well-being of their employees while reflecting the organization's core values and culture.

How could Hensel Phelps use modern design elements to give their employees a space that allows for a more productive, energized and healthier team?

*\*Per the International WELL Building Institute website, the Hensel Phelps' project is only one of three WELL Platinum Certifications awarded in California, as of July 2021.*

## Building wellness — inside and out

As a construction company, Hensel Phelps naturally possessed most of what the team needed to transform the space from the inside out. Their ambitious plans for the 21,000 square-foot renovation included intentional layouts to maximize natural lighting by moving private offices to the interior and installing a sliding wall that connects interior conference rooms with an exterior conference table space.

As the company stretched the project's initial ambition to consider even more aspects of health and wellness, they set their sights on a new goal — a rating system to evaluate and acknowledge their work. WELL, with its emphasis on advancing health and well-being in buildings across the globe, was the logical choice.

Hensel Phelps engaged UL Solutions, the global safety science leader, to understand both the design aspects and policy format of WELL certification. UL Solutions West Coast sustainability operations team provided oversight for project delivery. They advised the company as it considered different design interventions, helping clarify what was feasible in terms of credits and execution strategies.

## Customizing health and well-being

The WELL framework allowed Hensel Phelps to mix and match WELL optimization features with what was most important to their employees and work culture. The project embraced healthy materials, selecting finishes with low to zero volatile organic compounds (VOC) that were high in recycled content and other environmental attributes.

They purchased a premanufactured partition system that consisted of formaldehyde-free wall panels and non-PVC seals, with custom options that saved on material costs and energy and reduced global warming potential.

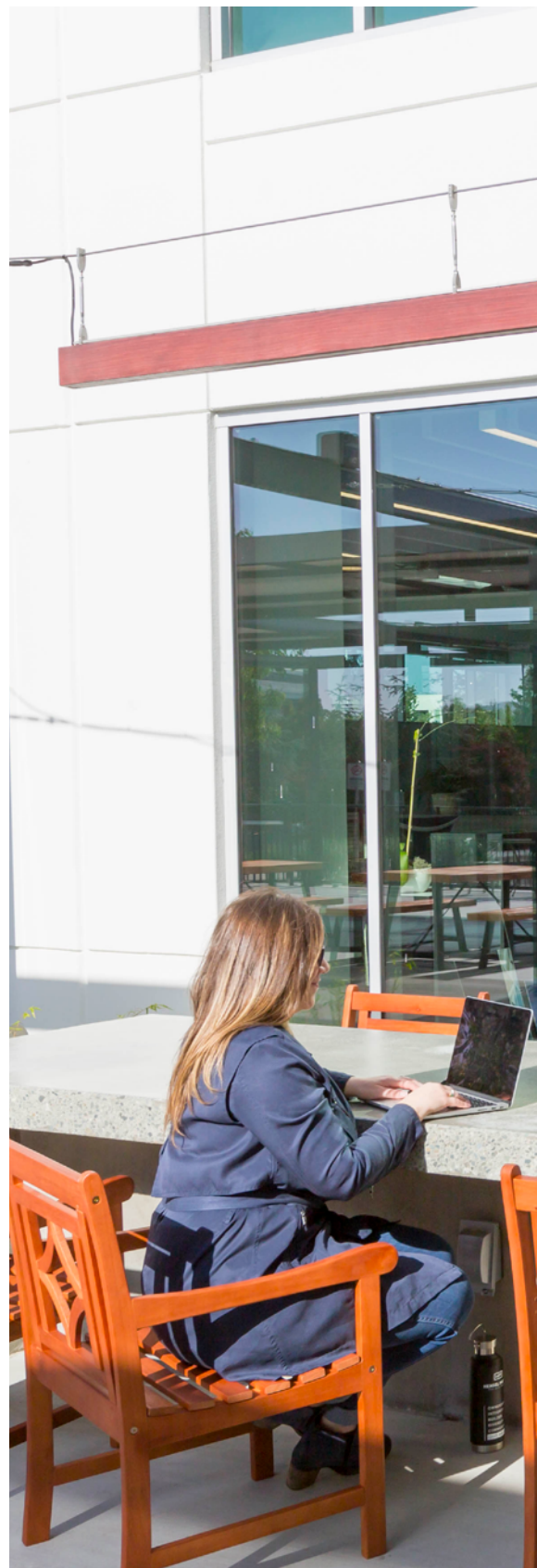


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Additionally, WELL certification pushed Hensel Phelps to formalize wellness benefits, many of which had existed verbally but not in a written policy format made available to employees.

The project scored exceptionally high marks in WELL's wellness benefits and resources category for offering employees access to a private wellness room, onsite showers, bike storage stations, healthy food with whole grains and limited sugars, filtered alkaline water and wholesome drink options.

## It's all in the details

To allow for maximum impact, the UL Solutions team suggested design changes that incorporated different wellness elements into the project. For example, selecting lighting that mimicked natural daylight, purchasing window shades that minimized glare and choosing acoustically sound wall materials to maximize concentration.

The UL Solutions team also documented the wellness attributes built into the renovated space and reviewed the design documents to confirm that everything had been built according to the drawings and that all policies were implemented as they had been originally written.

"As this was our first WELL certified project as a company, we wanted to make sure we were doing everything right," said Mark Rothman, design services group leader, Hensel Phelps. "We felt comfortable working with UL Solutions based upon the experience and knowledge that they brought to the table."

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*"Every workstation is a sit-stand desk, and employees can choose between a balance board or an antifatigue mat for their space,"*

*"What we're seeing is that employees are now putting sit-stand desks in their off-site construction workspace. This remodel has inspired change well beyond the office, contributing positively to all of our Northern California projects."*

*- Natalie Wheating,  
Sustainability Manager,  
Hensel Phelps.*

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Photo by Michael O'Callahan

## Exceeding expectations

The Hensel Phelps team had set their sights initially on WELL Gold certification. However, their commitment to present employees with a high-quality space — along with the team's persistence in using healthy materials throughout the space — allowed them to exceed their original expectations.

The Green Business Certification Incorporation (GBCI) validated Hensel Phelps' efforts when they certified the project WELL Platinum, which is the highest level achievable in the WELL certification framework. As of July 2021, their project is only one of three WELL Platinum Certifications to have been awarded in California. The WELL Building Standard is third-party certified by the GBCI, which administers the LEED certification program and the LEED professional credentialing program.

With their achievement, Hensel Phelps demonstrated that it is possible for the construction industry to design, build and document well-being initiatives that meet the highest standards.

"It's a powerful thing when a large contractor, who is responsible for shaping the built environment, transforms their space into a leading example of wellness-oriented design and operation," said Mark Klein, West Coast operations sustainability leader, UL Solutions. "The more Hensel Phelps got into the project, the more they pushed to make the space healthier and more enjoyable for their employees."

Finding the correct products is essential for WELL certification and requires project teams to use clean and green products throughout the project space. Hensel Phelps maxed out the available points in the materials category, and, Klein said, even scored extra points for innovation.

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*"The great thing about the space is that the impacts are observable; you really feel that you're in a high-quality space that is good for your health and well-being,"*

*"You're not just preventing yourself from feeling sick, but you feel well set up with the resources needed to be productive."*

*- Mark Rothman  
Design Services Group Leader,  
Hensel Phelps*

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## CASE STUDY

By engaging UL Solutions Services for Healthy Buildings program, Hensel Phelps' Northern California district office has now set a high bar for future remodeling efforts.

"Everyone who passes through this space sees it as a model of inspiration for other project teams," Wheating said. "They can use the ideas and design strategies we built into the Pleasanton office for their construction workspaces and for future office designs."

"By providing our employees with the best environment for them to work in, we're positively impacting stakeholders across Northern California," Rothman concluded.

For more information, visit [UL.com/healthybuildings](https://ul.com/healthybuildings).

## Hensel Phelps

*General Contractor and Construction*

**Project Location:** Hensel Phelps' Northern California District office, Pleasanton, California

**Project area:** 21,000 square feet

**Project scope:** UL Solutions Healthy Buildings Advisory Services for sustainability programs/WELL

**Project outcome:** WELL Certified Platinum

**Engagement:** 2019 to September 2020

## About WELL

Managed and administered by the International WELL Building Institute (IWBI), the WELL Building Standard® is a performance-based system for measuring, certifying and monitoring features of the built environment — air, water, nourishment, light, fitness, comfort and mind that impact human health and wellbeing.

WELL Certification requires a passing score in each of the seven categories of the WELL Building Standard. WELL Certification is awarded at one of three levels: Silver, Gold and Platinum.



To earn Silver, a project must meet all the preconditions.



To earn Gold, a project must earn 40% of the applicable optimizations, as well as all preconditions.



To earn Platinum, a project must earn 80% of the applicable optimizations, as well as all preconditions.

Source: The International WELL Building Institute (IWBI).



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