



John Langs of Fraser Milner Casgrain in his 'cockpit' at First Canadian Place in Toronto. PETER J. THOMPSON / NATIONAL POST

## How many lawyers can you cram in a cockpit?

New design allows  
20% more staff  
in office space

By JAMES COWAN

Feeling cramped? Before you complain you should speak with John Langs. Mr. Langs, a senior partner at Fraser Milner Casgrain, used to have a roomy corner office overlooking downtown Toronto. But that was before his firm hired interior designer Lynn McGregor to find a way to cram more lawyers in to their digs.

Ms. McGregor took Mr. Langs' space, melded it with the neighbouring office and split the room into three. Now Mr. Langs no longer has an office. Instead, he has an ergonomically designed "cockpit" that is built for maximum efficiency.

"It was a question of using the space we had," he says. "Our offices were originally designed in 1972, and in the current environment, it's far less common to meet with your clients in your office. We tend to use boardrooms instead."

Mr. Langs says he didn't feel cramped moving in to a smaller space. "I find it very functional," he says. "If you've got a bigger office, you just make a bigger mess."

Fraser Milner Casgrain is one of a number of companies, including one of its competitors, Davies Ward Phillips & Vineberg, that have hired Ms. McGregor in an effort to reduce overhead. Ms. McGregor says she can increase the number of lawyers that can be fit in a firm's office by as much as 20%.

If her skills catch on, the spacious office will no longer be one of the prime perks law firms will be offering top producers.

"There is movement toward smaller spaces for lawyers," says Ms. McGregor, "which is very controversial, because there are some

lawyers who have worked their whole life to earn a large office."

The secret to a successful lawyer packing is to eliminate the meeting areas contained within lawyers' individual offices, and then establishing small conference rooms that can be shared amongst the staff.

"Instead of a client being escorted into a huge office that's strewn with paper and other clients' files," explains Ms. McGregor, "they're shown into a meeting room that's ready for them with coffee and muffins."

"In the past, individual offices had a sofa and a conference table and chairs for visitors," she says, "but now an office is more of a production centre. The workstations can be very sexy with beautiful woodwork, but they also have lots of space for paper and filing, which helps the lawyers stay efficient."

The elimination of the traditional office has forced firms to find other rewards to mark a lawyer's passing from associate to partner to managing partner. "You don't necessarily get more square footage," says McGregor. "But special lighting may be added or you may receive an extra special desk chair."

In addition, a partner's cockpit may be personalized to help them function more effectively. "If a lawyer likes to stand while he reads," says Ms. McGregor, "than there would be a high surface with a leg support so they can do that without suffering back pain."

She concedes there are some who are resistant to giving up their hard-earned office space.

"There's an old guard who believes square footage is the only way to designate status," she says, noting that even the passing of the more established lawyer is taken into account in the modern law firm.

"We design their offices so that when the lawyer retires," concludes Ms. McGregor, "the office can be quickly subdivided to double the number of lawyers in the space."

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