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## Office with all the comforts of home hits the right note for communications firm

### WORKING WORLD

**O**n *Ally McBeal*, the Fox TV show, much of the action takes place in the co-ed bathroom. It's a brilliant set piece, which makes the office feel more like a college dorm, where narcissistic lawyers preen and gossip. Outside TV and the line between office and home has been blurring for a while: The home has a fax and a computer; the office has a couch and a fridge. Now, interior designers suggest, employers should focus on making workplaces more comfortable, since employees who feel at home will work harder and stick around longer. That's the thinking at The Farm, a small communications com-

pany in downtown Toronto. The office's centerpiece is a long, curving kitchen counter. The office phone, with ten lines, is the one item that looks out of place, tucked between the chopping board, the sink, the toaster, the bread knives. Above are several shelves of CDs, and cool blues music wafts through the room. Below the counter sits the dish and dog-food bag belonging to Chester, the office's yellow lab. "We sit around at lunch at the counter and fight over the paper and we pick on one person," says Lori Christensen, one of the partners. "If we have clients coming for a five o'clock meet-

ing, we make margaritas. It really draws people in, as opposed to a malogany boardroom, recessed lighting and art on the walls." The office, in a semi-basement, is not glamorous: Designers McGregor Charbonneau did what they could, leaving exposed brick, black iron girders, ceiling pipes, concrete floors. In the end, it's all in the spin: "It's very sincere, it's young," says Lynn McGregor, a corporate interior designer. "You see it and say, 'Obviously they're not charging too much.' At the same time, it's hip." *Peter Kuitenbrouwer, Financial Post*

