

GOOGLEPLEX: A NEW CAMPUS COMMUNITY

By John Meachem

In early 2004, with its upcoming IPO and aggressive expansion policy, Google undertook a strategic reevaluation of its workplace processes. They held an invited design competition, which we won based on our proposal to create a diversified campus environment, integrating highly focused software engineering workspace within a support system of learning, collaboration, recreation, and food facilities. These accessory functions were strategically placed along a logical "main street" which allowed for the churning of ideas among the community, while the workplaces were located to allow for more concentrated, "head down" activities.

MASTER PLAN

The first step was to analyze their existing Mountain View California campus, which Google had inherited from Silicon Graphics in 2003. This required an analytical study of existing site conditions and opportunities of connecting the 4 buildings into one community. We looked for opportunities in the existing landscaping, hardscape, connectivity of the campus, division of outdoor activities (3 unique environments) and any inside/outside connections. **Figure 1.**

We then proposed ways in which these existing opportunities could be pushed to a new level to better serve the overall goals of the community.

As we investigated each of the existing four buildings, and their relationship to each other, and the campus in general, we discovered other constraints, as well as opportunities. **Figure 2.**

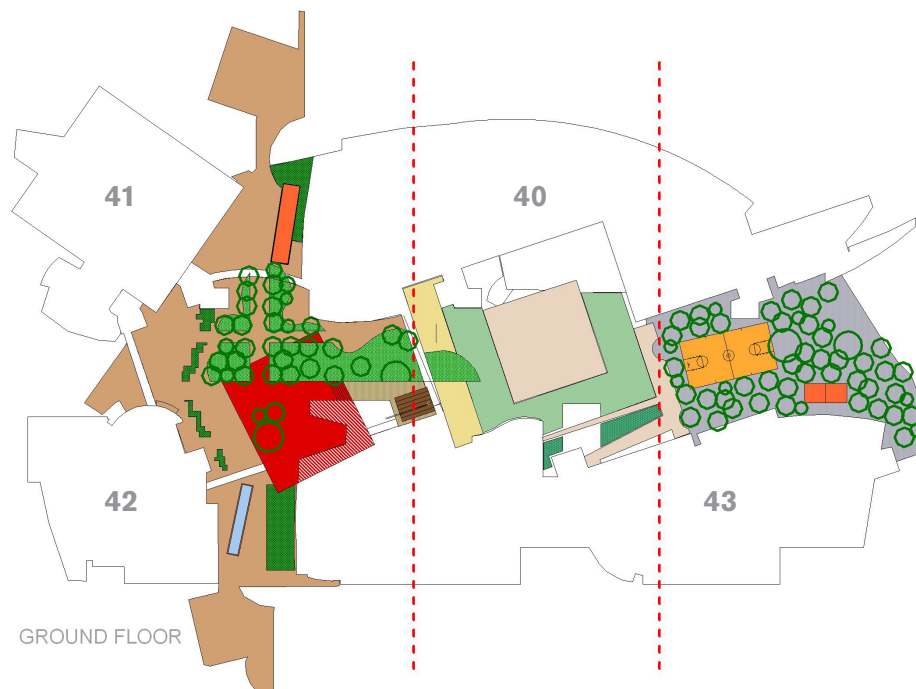
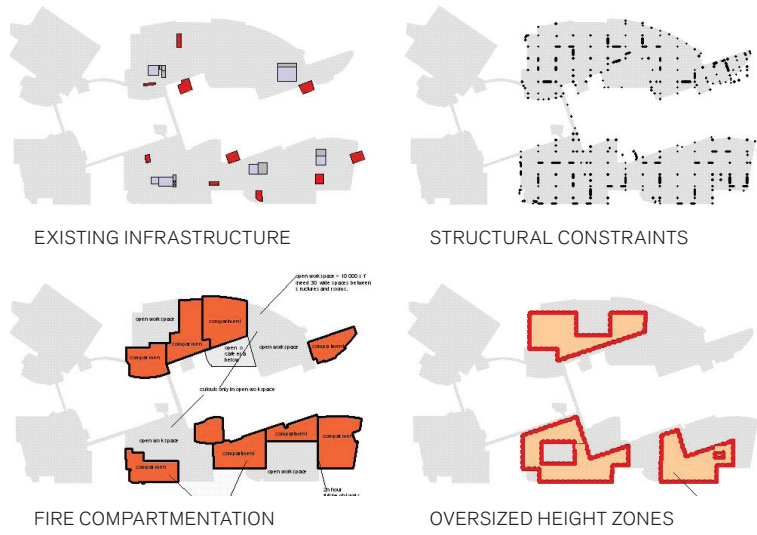


Figure 1 *Landscape Network*

1 Constraints



2 Opportunities

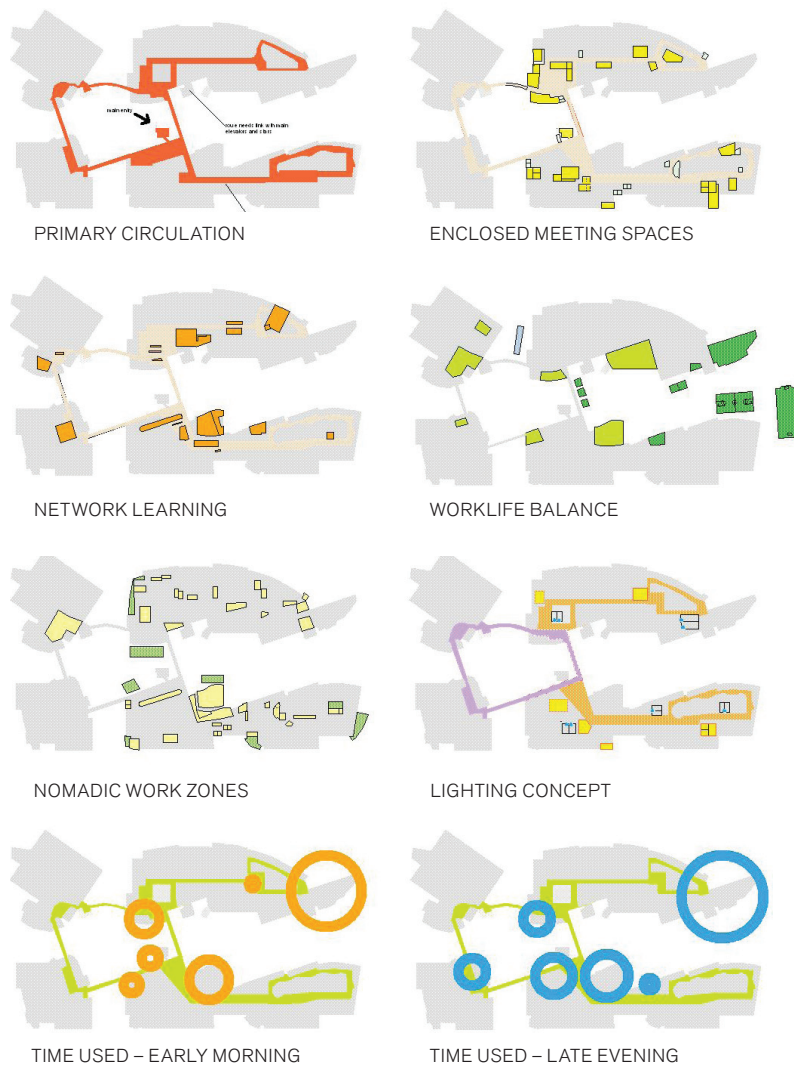


Figure 2
Constraints & Opportunities

All of these opportunities, as well as the infrastructure, were incorporated into the architectural solution for the Googleplex. The process started with a unified master plan for the entire campus which incorporated the language of a campus: outdoor sports activities, food, a commons, and a park. **Figure 3, 4 and 5.**

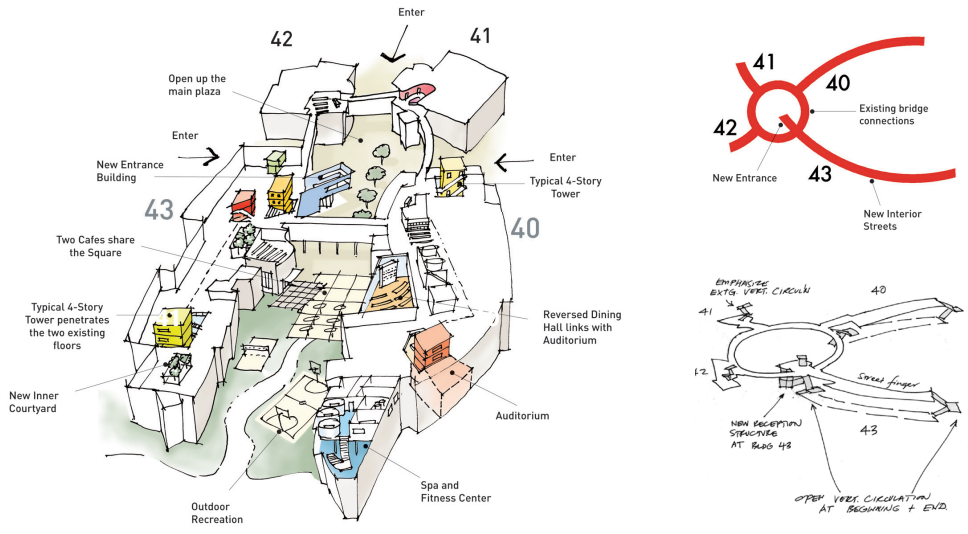
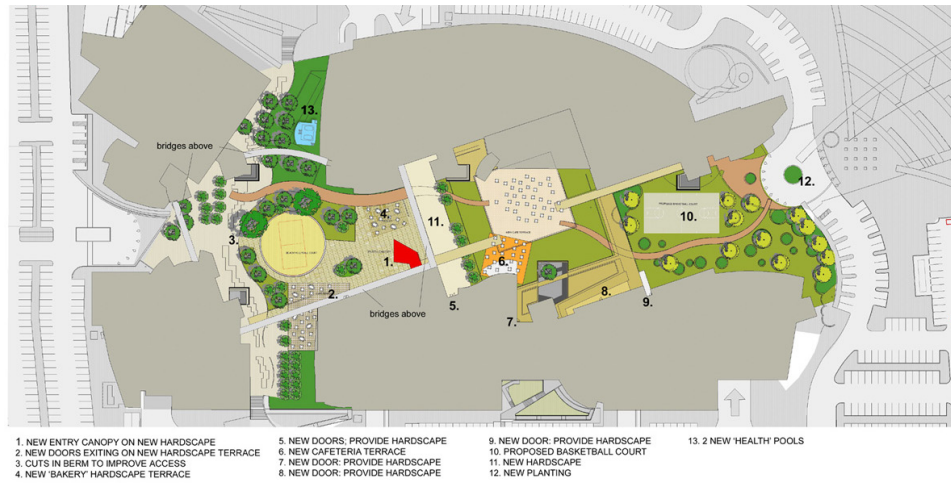


Figure 3: Top Masterplan: Site Plan Landscape Scope

Figure 4: Bottom Left Campus View from the East

Figure 5: Bottom Right Hub and Spoke—4 Buildings Joined

THE CONCEPT OF EDUCATION IN THE WORKPLACE

A primary vision was to merge the idea of workplace with the experiences found in an educational environment into a new way of working and maintenance of an edge. The reasoning for this was the idea that within the loosely structured university system, there are resources available to allow the individual to conceive, investigate, and execute the impossible—and that is how Google was originally conceived.

Unlike the traditional office, the higher education experience offers many opportunities. In a university environment, you typically have the option of self-directed work, a selection of work styles or work environments and independent study subject choices, either private or within a group. For example, a lesson learned from Stanford University was that coding engineers worked best in groups of 3 to 4. In addition, a typical campus environment offers the concept of self containment, so within the immediate area, all of your basic work/life needs can be met and the possibility of casual encounters with fellow “students” for collaboration or recreation is possible anytime during the day or night. At the university level, these opportunities are to support the goals of personal education, with a focus on each individual’s interests, but when these interests become common to a community, the results can be very powerful.

In addition, “tech-talk” and formal lecture areas were provided where learning or teaching could occur in an organized fashion, but there were also common white boards and glass walls located along “main street” for the impromptu discussions on the problems of the day.

The concept was continued through the design of 13 individual environments, which re-created environments, usually found on a college campus, and were systematically integrated into the overall design of each building by the use of a hot and cold diagram: Hot areas being more public and active zones, while cold being more secluded and private. These zones were defined by location along the primary and secondary circulation corridors. **Figure 6.**

The result of providing an environmental backbone support for the combination of independent study, along with the opportunity for community accomplishment offers the best of all possibilities: one which satisfies the needs of the individual as well as the collective, and results in the success of both.

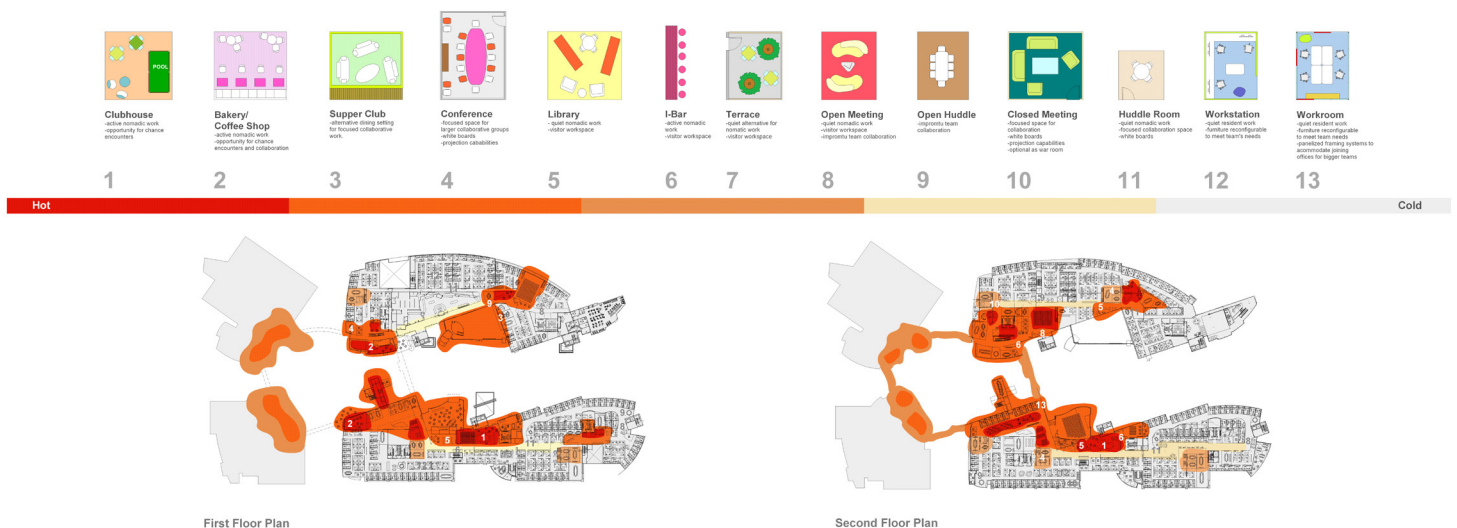


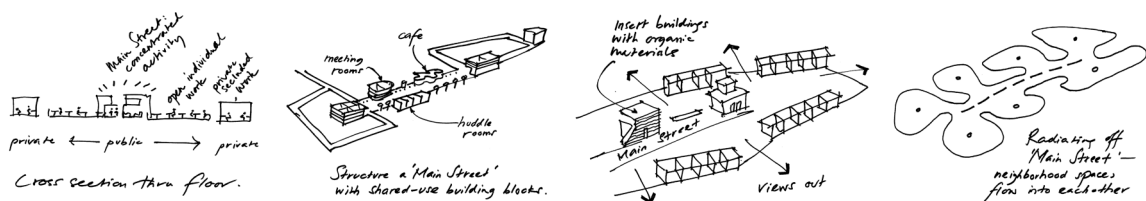
Figure 6: Below Google Work Settings

PHASING

Google's process was linear: decide on a master plan which organized the entire development of the campus, and from there, focus on and renovate Building 43 as a test case and proving ground for the campus whole yet to come.

PHASE 1: BUILDING 43

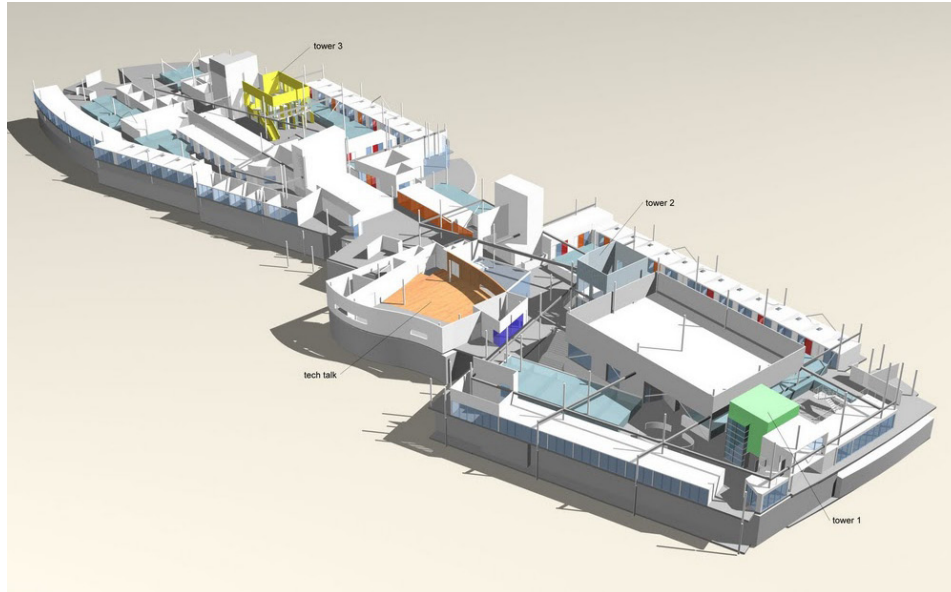
Our focus then moved to developing the 180,000 Sq. Ft. Building 43, which started, as did the master plan, with a pragmatic analysis of the existing structure and its opportunities and limitations. Building 43, like the other 3 buildings on the campus, is a two story steel structure, above an underground parking garage, with floor to ceiling glass at the perimeter. In addition, at the second floor, there were clerestory windows as well as an interior court garden. These images are some of the results of our study:



We studied the required, "head down" work styles which ranged from individual open cubicles to closed, team oriented, work environments, much like engineers used for research at Stanford. Since these teams were critical to Google's success, they selected the area along the windows for their location, in a traditional hierarchical way. To bring more democracy to the environment, we suggested the use of colored glass to enclose all these team "offices". That way, the light and outside view could come into the interior, but the teams would be afforded the privacy they needed and the identity of color. The sound absorption, artificial lighting, and air conditioning was provided through a custom ceiling made of upholstered acoustic fabric. **Figure 8.**



Figure Top Building 43 Space Goals
Figure 8: Below Conference Rooms



The resultant building plan follows a simple distribution of work 'neighborhoods' along a 'Main Street' circulation plan. All shared resources are located along this street, and range from meeting rooms, to tech talk spaces, to micro-kitchens and library lounges. **Figure 9.** We took advantage of the high ceiling areas and made penetrations through the second floor to connect the spaces, which connected the community.

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Figure 9: Top Building 43