

Architecture Research Office: The Architect of Knoll New York

With a new space in Midtown Manhattan selected, Knoll sought an architecture firm that could creatively and innovatively define the company's New York home for years to come. "We wanted someone willing to use materials in a creative, modern way, while solving the unique challenges of connecting three office floors and creating a showroom narrative," said Benjamin Pardo, Executive Vice President of Design.

The answer was the Architecture Research Office, known familiarly as ARO. Founded in 1993, ARO is helmed by partners Stephen Cassell AIA LEED AP, Kim Yao AIA, and Adam Yarinsky FAIA. Combining thoughtful research and inventive design on everything from planning studies to built work, the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Award-winning firm has earned a reputation as an imaginative practice "as much a laboratory as a design practice."

Their practice famously built Times Square's Armed Forces Recruiting Station, a miniature building with big impact. Other New York area projects include an addition at the Princeton School of Architecture, the long-awaited Donald Judd Home & Studio in SoHo, Congregation Beit Simchat Torah for the LGBT Jewish community, and varied residential, commercial, and educational projects. Their work also includes planning and strategy studies for universities, urban sites and museum exhibitions including a well-received submission for MoMA's *Rising Currents: Projects for New York's Waterfront*.

In a recent *Metropolis* magazine interview, Stephen Cassell, collaborating principal on the Knoll project said, "Before we put mouse to pad, we have a really good understanding of how people will work in a given space and what the pragmatic and conceptual goals are."



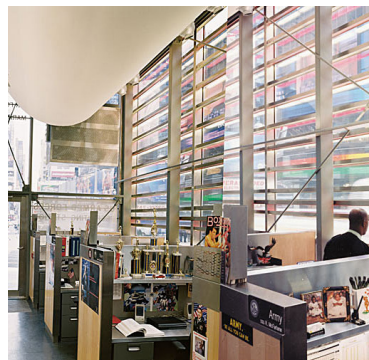
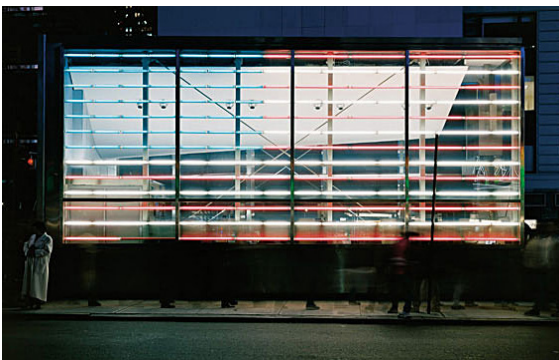
ARO partners Stephen Cassell, Kim Yao, and Adam Yarinsky

Yarinsky continued, "We're information-driven. We don't come in with an a priori idea."

For Knoll, this open-minded, research-led approach, combined with ARO's experience across genres, was what drew the company to the design firm. Kim Yao, partner in charge of the Knoll project, said, "Many of our clients are facing similar rent increases and spatial squeezes. But it's not all about square footage. We studied vertical connections, efficient paths, and the difference in psychology between the previous and new space."

ARO fit Knoll's programmatic needs for collaboration space and punctured staircases through the office to enhance interactions

between floors. And from the Florence Knoll-inspired showroom to the material-showcasing staircases, Yao and her team imbued a unique sense of place for the new office. "We used Knoll's own textiles and products to make the space their own and not feel like a typical Midtown office," Yao added. The result is in line with much of ARO's work—a highly functioning, problem solving, well-considered destination space. ■



Top: Times Square's Armed Forces Recruiting Station, exterior and interior

Bottom: The Princeton School of Architecture; Project for MoMA's *Rising Currents: Projects for New York's Waterfront*