



COMMISSION

THE FUTURE OF THE WORK PLACE

WE ASKED 13 DESIGNERS SHOW US THE FUTURE OF THE OFFICE. WE GOT A REIMAGINING OF WHAT IT MEANS TO WORK.

BY ZACH BOWMAN
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We are made to work. Sure, our thoughts might wander to the languid summer afternoons of our youth, we may pine for the empty hours of vacation, or resent the grinding minutes of our ceaseless weekdays. But humans are most fulfilled when we are at task. The desire to produce is

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a gift of genetics, an heirloom passed from parent to child across our eons. It is the ceaseless engine behind our dominance as a species.

Stop and consider the fuel. Tally the hours spent in the arms of a lover, the days wandering a far-flung metropolis, holding your father's hand, being immersed in Tolstoy or Steinbeck—the sum total will pale in comparison to the ocean of time put toward earning a wage. We spend more of our conscious lives at work than doing anything else. The common number is 90,000 hours. One-third of our total existence.

No wonder occupation is wrapped up in our sense of agency. Jobs often define us, place us in history and society, and become a shorthand for who we are. Especially for creative types. When it's good, our work is an expression of all our skill and experience. Who can verbalize the brilliant wholeness of seeing a project to completion? The feeling of a final period on an essay, the last stroke of a paint brush, or definitive swipe of a plane. It goes beyond pride.

But right now, we are struggling. Struggling to understand the evolving nature of work, and our growing dissatisfaction with it in the digital age. There hasn't been such a drastic, irreversible change since the Industrial Revolution. And, like the generation caught in the wake of that great shift, we wonder what exactly the future of work will mean for us. For our friends. For our children.

Looking for answers, Surface asked a dozen forward-looking designers and architects to imagine the workspace of tomorrow. The guidelines for this commission were intentionally lax, allowing for maximum creativity. The brief: "We want to see a visionary, provocative idea about where and how we will work in the future. Everything from sketches to physical models are fair game. Don't think five years ahead. Think fifty."

The results range from the academic to abstract. Some of them, like "Labor Galleries" from Andy and Dave, feel acutely optimistic, emphasizing collaboration and cohesion. Other proposals, namely the brilliant and biting "Gestalt Intelligence Device" by Material Lust, express our anxiety over the push for productivity and profit. These designers seemed to agree on only one thing: the profound effect that work has on our quality of life.

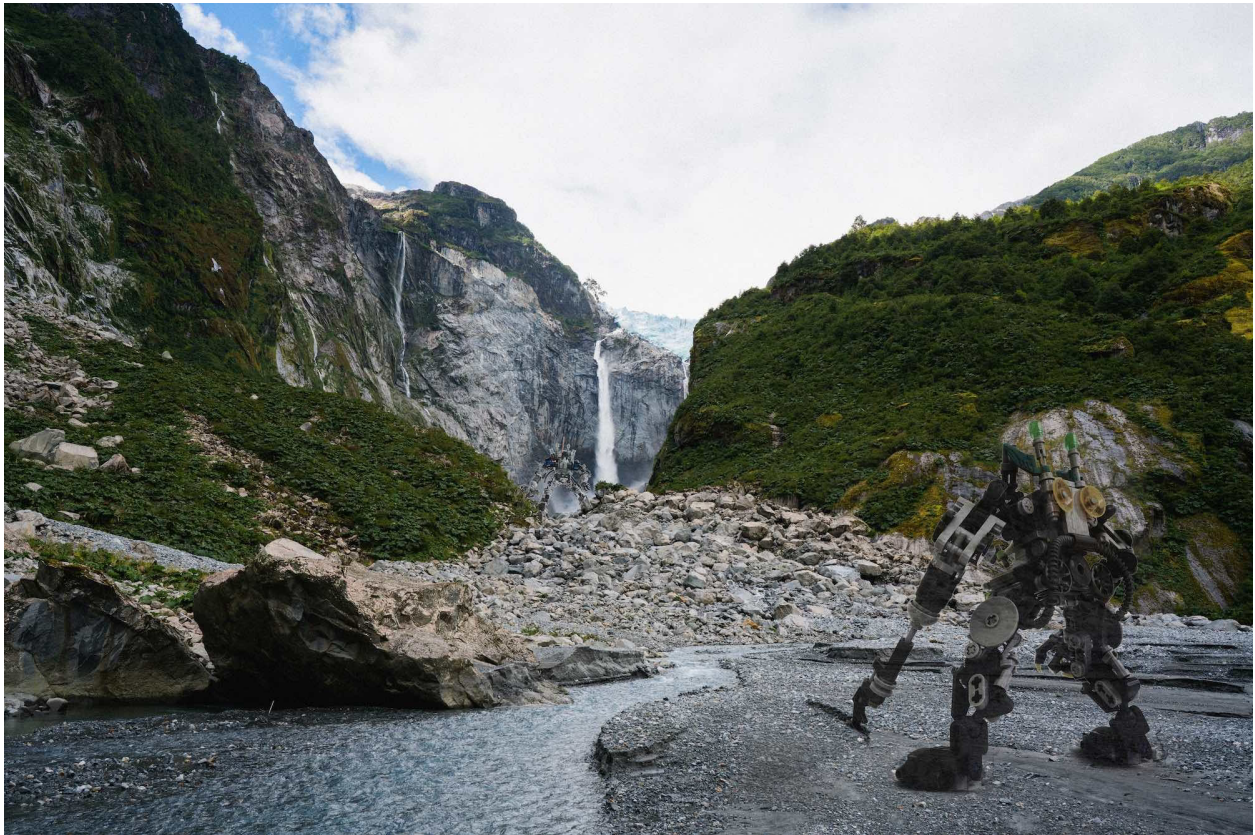
So what will tomorrow's office look like? Delightfully unrecognizable or aching familiar? Stark and utilitarian or warm and nurturing? Will it recall the communal augmented reality of Rafael de Cárdenas's "At Large Indoors," or be constructed from the wild, biodynamic materials of Wang & Söderström's "Ultra black 3kxPorouSuperFoam"? Perhaps a bit of both. Or something else entirely.

(Left: Eero Saarinen's Bell Labs building in suburban New Jersey photographed by Weston Wells during a renovation by Alexander Gorlin Architects.)

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Makerscapes

By GT2P

In 50 years, we'll share the world with our children, grandchildren, and possibly great-grandchildren. We'll work only 10 hours per week. Renewable energy will preserve the planet's balance, allowing us to travel to the antipodes in minutes. But what about our work?

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Surely, many of the jobs that we currently know will be replaced by bots. Still, according to futurist and theorist Kevin Kelly, inefficiency and non-rational decisions can never be replaced. As a result, jobs in the creative field will continue to exist, although in different ways.



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