

ZEN DESIGN AND KENTUCKY BARN



CASE STUDY



DIVISION 9 ENGINEERED-TO-ORDER WOOD CEILINGS

Zen Design and Kentucky Barns

Abacus Wealth Partners

Roof rafters from a hundred-year-old barn built in Kentucky are transformed into a faux “roof” in Abacus Wealth Partners’ office space thousands of miles away in Santa Monica, CA.



When NBBJ’s LA office began work on the Abacus Wealth office, themes of nature, *zen* and healing were at the forefront. Architect Alex Poon reflected, “We wanted to create a space of nature, light, and serenity through materiality and form.” To help achieve the design intent, NBBJ worked with 9Wood to fabricate one-of-a-kind ceiling Grilles. The challenge for this boutique project: turn reclaimed White Oak rafter beams from a 19th century Kentucky barn into a one-of-a-kind suspended ceiling.

With such a custom material, tight collaboration was not optional. 9Wood was involved early in the process and worked with E&K Hardwoods to establish aesthetic parameters. The story of this wood was especially rich, explained by E&K’s Jill Oliver, “We have a network of Midwest ‘barn chasers’ that provide us this beautiful wood. The barns are carefully disassembled, sometimes with help of the Amish, to preserve the beams as they’re deconstructed.”

The rawness of the rafters was the perfect material, according to Poon. “We wanted to bring that raw yet

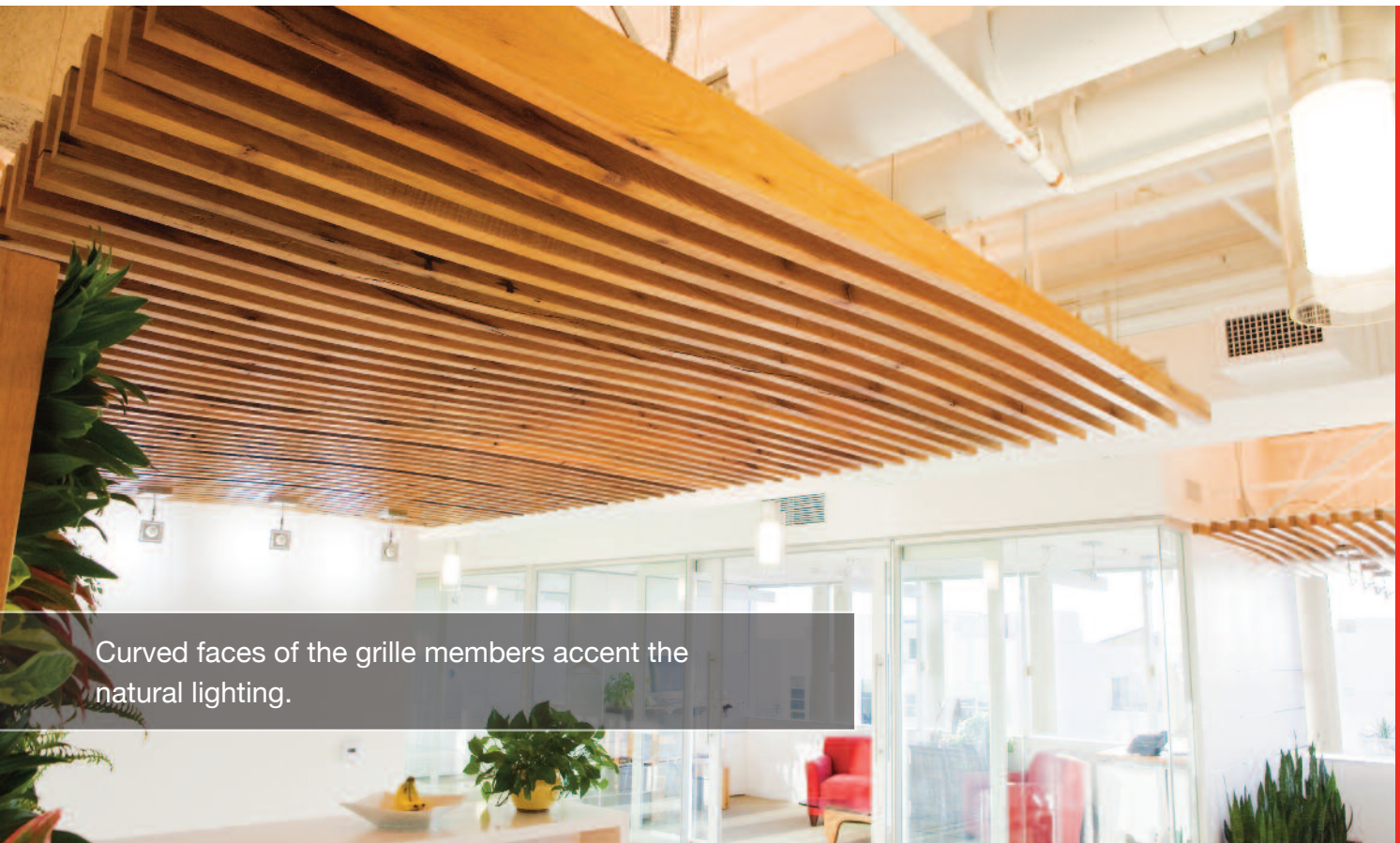
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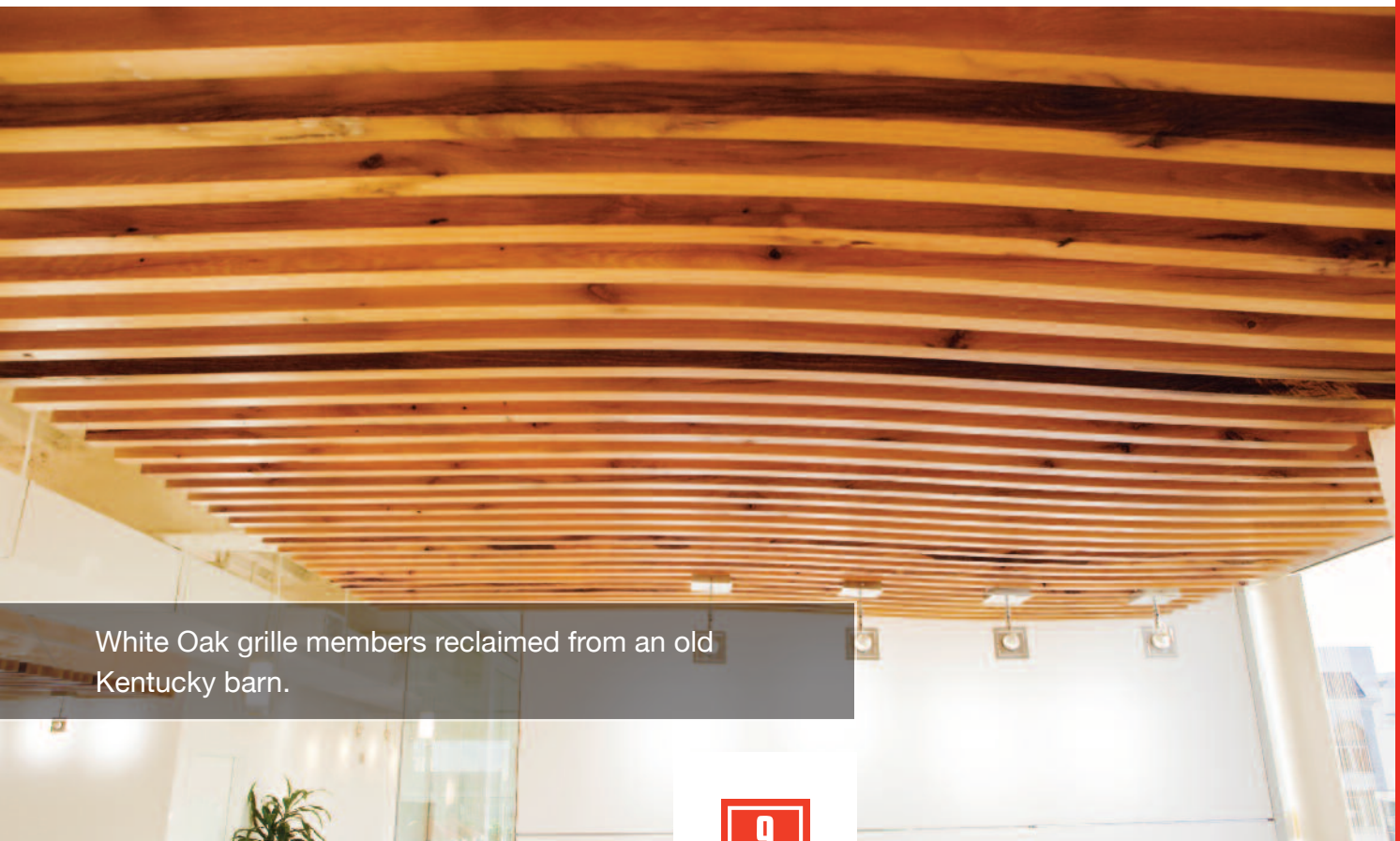
sophisticated part of nature into the space.” To show how the raw rafter material would look as a finished ceiling, 9Wood procured a sampling of the material and produced mini mock-ups. These clarified the range of color and grain to expect after fire rating and finish were applied. After NBBJ’s mock-up approval it was on to fabrication, which posed its own special challenges.

Before milling reclaimed wood, it is critical to do metal detection to find fasteners and other foreign matter. If not, the blade certainly will! The raw planks were metal detected with airport security wands; however, as can happen from time to time, fragments remained. “We hit some

nails with the saw blade. It was not good,” remembered 9Wood’s production lead. Fortunately no *(continued on page 4)*



Curved faces of the grille members accent the natural lighting.



White Oak grille members reclaimed from an old Kentucky barn.

one was hurt, but it did “spark” excitement and remind everyone to be careful. And they were not all straight cuts. NBBJ specified a serpentine cut for each 2x6 slat. “The curves were to suggest inward movements into the lounge zones,” said Poon. Fortunately, these challenges were overcome to fabricate the Grilles according to spec.

The final step was getting these monster panels suspended. Each of the 10’ long panels weighed 50 lbs. “Everything went together just as we planned,” recalled the installing sub-contractor. “They were heavy though, and they wouldn’t fit in the elevator so we had to hike them up the stairs.” As unwieldy as they were, G&S Acoustics was able to get them carefully suspended in their proper, showcased place.

The end result is a custom Grille with a striking balance of elegance and rawness; large, rustic White Oak slats accented by a repeating gentle curve. It’s truly an eye-catching feature and met NBBJ’s design intent of “floating wood clouds”. The history of this reclaimed White Oak offers another twist: roof rafters from an old barn built in Kentucky over a hundred years ago are again serving their purpose. This time they are a faux “roof” in an office space thousands of miles away.



Project Details

Abacus Wealth Partners
Santa Monica, CA

Total Scope: 280 SF

Product: 1100 Cross Piece Grille

Architect: NBBJ

Contractor: G & S Acoustics



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