

Toyota Connected's Office Proudly Honors the Past and Embraces the Future

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A true wine aficionado could put on a blindfold, take a sip, and tell you exactly where the grapes were from, whether Napa Valley or perhaps Texas's wine country, and perhaps even when the wine was bottled.

For the rest of us, a good blend is perhaps more flavorful – and more enjoyable. A grape from here; a note from there; that little peppery flavor on the tip of your tongue to awaken some of your taste buds. Rather than focus on provenance, a blend pays homage to the best without being beholden to it.

Much like that blend, Toyota Connected borrows from the best parts of Toyota and Silicon Valley startups to create an open, software-first collaborative environment – but, with a proud sprinkling of Texas flair.

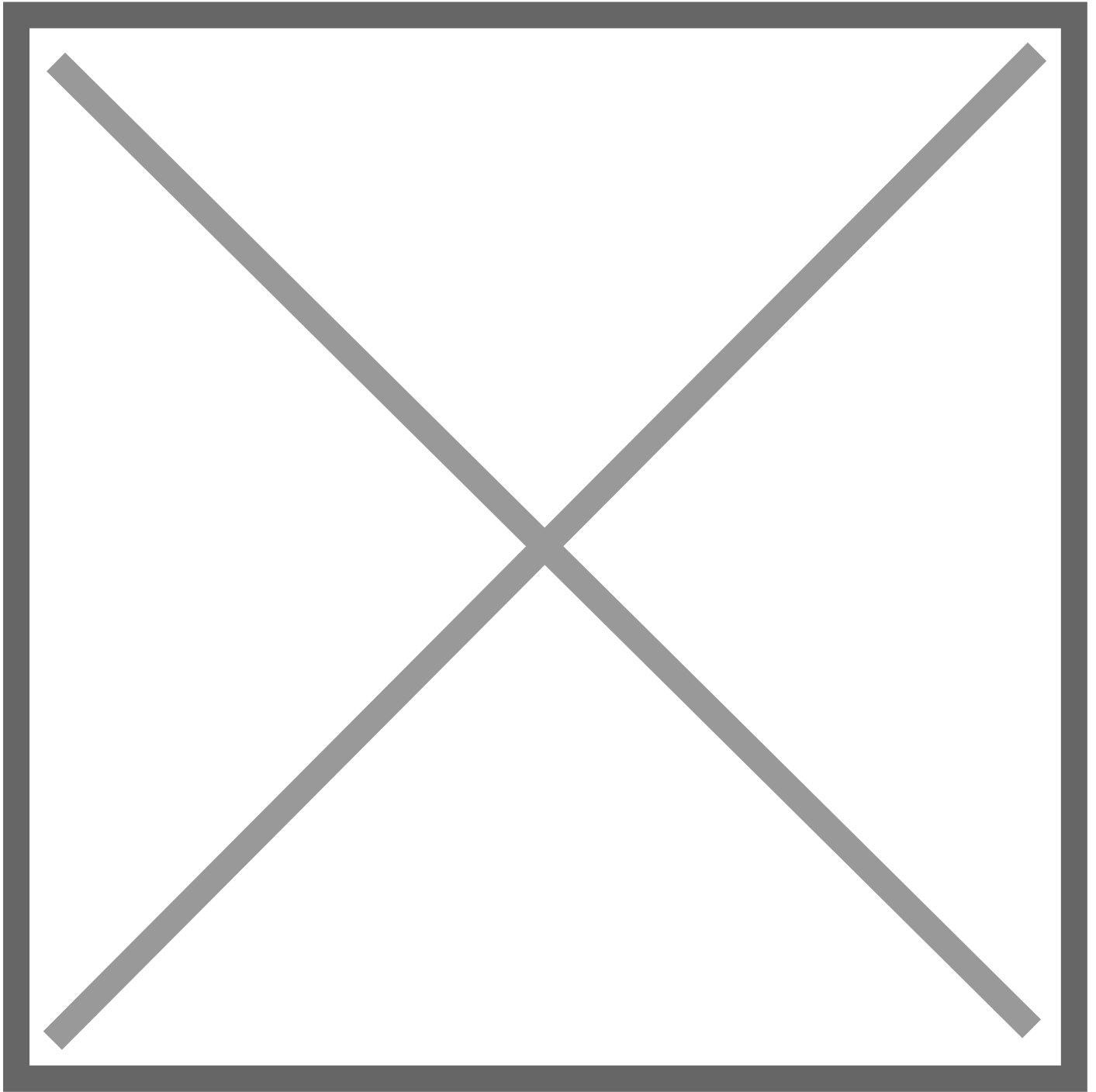


Of course, a work culture starts with people, but it doesn't end there. Collaborative spaces need to be intentional to drive fresh thinking and "aha!" moments of people coming together to solve problems in new ways.

In 2016, Toyota Motor North America consolidated its main headquarters from Southern California with several other office locations across the U.S. and moved to Plano, Texas to do the same.

Yet, Toyota Connected hadn't moved from anywhere to get to Texas; it was a new company with little legacy but plenty of ambition. Its goal would be to integrate data and Software as a Service (SaaS) in order to better

serve Toyota and its customers. To do this, it needed agility and autonomy, so founders Zack Hicks and Steve Basra sought a location close enough to TMNA to collaborate but far enough to have its own identity. Plano's Legacy West proved advantageous, just a mile down the road from TMNA's U.S. headquarters.



Next up, the founders wanted a startup environment; they also wanted something rooted in Toyota's heritage quality and constant improvement.

Enter Gardner Vass of design firm Perkins&Will, who served as interior project design principal on TC's office space.

"We took the time and learned from Hicks and Basra and their past experiences coming from the West Coast to another part of the country," Vass said. "What were the memorable things they appreciated living there and wanted to bring to their new home in Dallas?"

"What we found was a lot of what they really appreciated in older buildings – the character, the nuance of light, texture, and just the honesty of the buildings – they wanted to make sure that was represented in their new space. That's why most of what they employ is very reminiscent of the old manufacturing mills of San Francisco or some other metropolitan city where you would find the brick, the steel, and the concrete. That was a big component. On top of that, the next additional layer was this amazing story of innovation, how Toyota started with looms and evolved to current technology. Then, we developed our concept."

Large, open collaborative spaces are the hallmark of any Silicon Valley-style office, flanked by surface hubs and large screens with up-to-the-minute diagnostic reports. Marble tables in some spaces were designed to evoke the distinctiveness of a boutique hotel. Wood and leather elements brought forth some "howdy" of the Dallas Metroplex.

And, finally, Japanese maxims and graphics on the walls, slatted wood elements, and a wool sculpture completed the aesthetic, with passersby able to look through the fibers to see walls adorned with a 1937 Toyota AA on one side and digital graphics on the other – a nod to the past and future. A similar digital motif is on the opposite wall with baby pictures of many TC employees – a reminder that when you're a baby, your ideas are only limited by your imagination.

The entire space is orthogonally shaped, similar to a long parallelogram, which Vass challenged his team of architects to create a layout that didn't isolate one side of the office from another. Rather, they wanted a natural flow from one end of the office to a large meeting space at the other end where people could share ideas.

"There's an element of hospitality, informality, right at the heart, so putting the kitchen and bar in the middle was always the plan," Vass said. Vass likened the lighting fixtures to jewelry, given the way they glimmer, and said they sparkle as one would wander throughout the space and draw officegoers into conversation spaces.



“The special part of it that really excites us is that there’s all of these little elements and nuances, and everybody has their own emotional feeling and attitude toward it,” Vass said. “But I think throughout the day or months, in the time that one spends within the space, we’re confident that everyone is going to feel a certain amount of emotion, depending on where they are and where most of their work activities take place – within the area.”

Vass continued: “We wanted to provide an environment that allows people to be gratified.”

“It was important for us to create an environment that had some familiarity, whether it’s a material that they can reference or what they’re more familiar with, whether it’s some of the amenities that they’re used to, having access to daylight, being able to be outside, the flexibility, and so forth. Most importantly, it’s just the gratification of knowing that whatever you’re working on, it’s contributing to a kind of a larger outcome.”

Perhaps Toyota Connected really is like a wine, feeling familiar with its notes and flavors, yet completely new. And like any good bottle of wine, it’s meant to be shared.