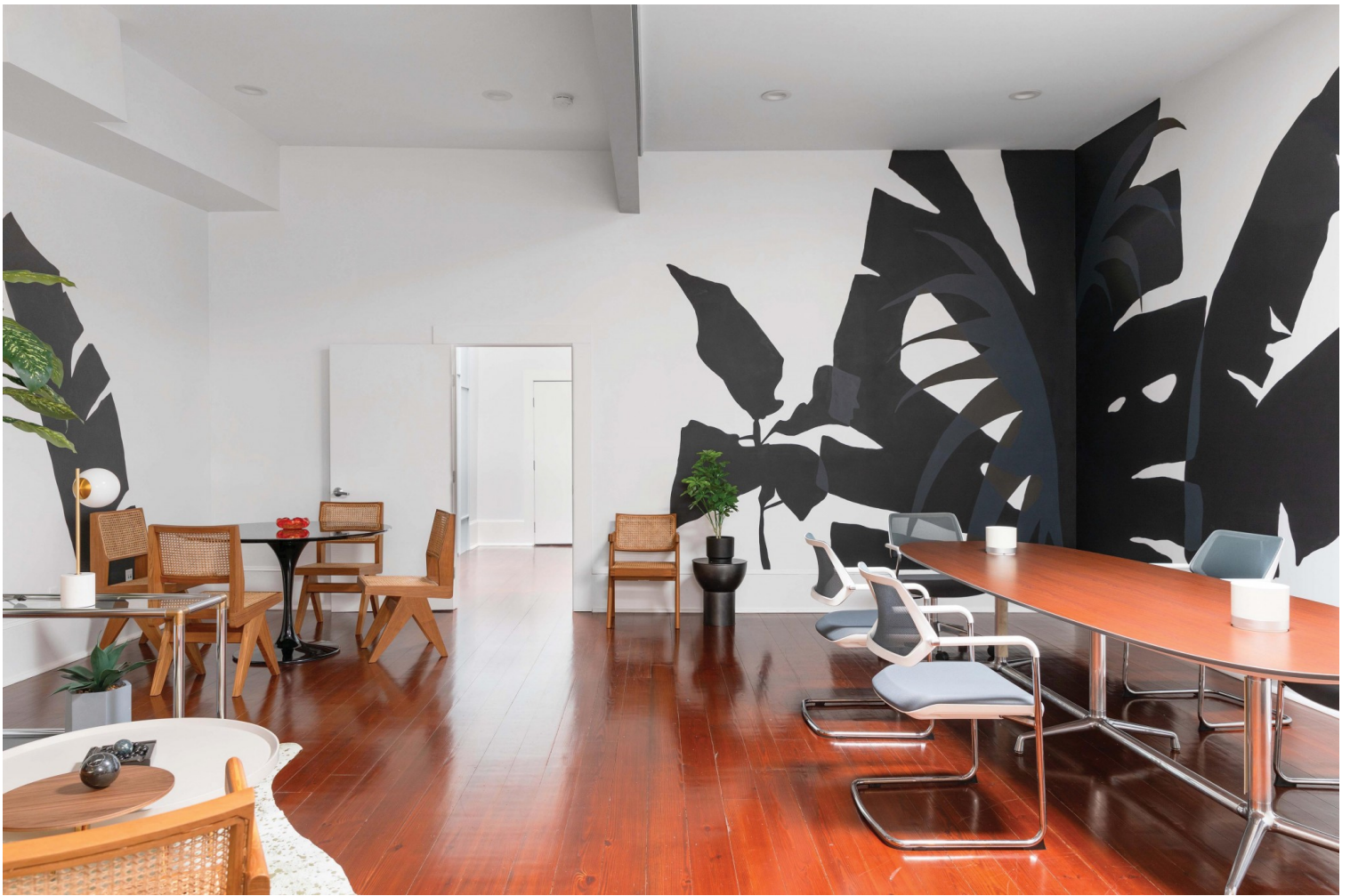




A Welcoming Space in Uncertain Times

Inspired by a famous rockstar's home, PerkUP Financial Health's new space aims for a peaceful feel that complements the company's goal to help those on rocky financial footing.

07/01/2021 by Melanie Warner Spencer (<https://www.bizneworleans.com/author/melanie-spencer/>),
Photos by Sara Essex Bradley (<https://www.bizneworleans.com/author/sara-bradley/>)



(<https://www.bizneworleans.com/content/uploads/2021/06/y/p/lens-workspaces-01-scaled.jpg>)

For the interiors of its Howard Avenue offices, PerkUp Financial Health worked with Nomita Joshi-Gupta, of Nomita Joshi Interior Design. Joshi-Gupta designed the large graphic mural, painted by muralist Liz Kamarul. The look of the space was inspired by the home of rocker — and former occasional New Orleanian — Lenny Kravitz.

The mural is what brings it together. It gives it a kind of a tropical feel appropriate to New Orleans. It's very vintage as well.

Ben Allen, PerkUp president

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LENS_Workspaces_02

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Financial uncertainty is especially stressful for anyone in the midst of a crisis or for those who are vulnerable. So, when Ben Allen, president of PerkUp Financial Health, was making design decisions for the company's new, 2,500-square-foot New Orleans offices on Howard Avenue, he took that into consideration.

"Ben told me he wanted an inviting space for his clients that did not look branded and [felt] more like a home," says Nomita Joshi-Gupta of Nomita Joshi Interior Design, "especially during the pandemic. He wanted a peaceful and warm, stress-free space for his staff and clients."

PerkUp Financial Health began five years ago as part of Dolphin Debit Access. The company delivers a wide array of products and services designed to provide a financial safety net for lower income workers. Workers connect to PerkUp's online technology platform to access financial coaching, innovative savings products, emergency cash grants and free emergency loans, all of which are made available by their employer and a collaboration of nonprofit partners. The platform enables PerkUp to connect employers and employees to a network of nonprofit organizations across the country. Employees in seasonal jobs and sectors that experience a lot of financial instability are PerkUp's audience.

"We partner with large companies and in New Orleans, we focus primarily on hospitality," Allen says. "Right now, we are working with seven or eight companies in New Orleans [and] some of the largest hotels and restaurants in the city, [including] Hilton Riverside, Windsor

Court, Hyatt Regency. Some we've been working with for five years, but a large number of companies we started working with last year actively as part of relief and assistance during the pandemic, related to COVID."

In addition to large corporate entities, PerkUp works with Allen says the company is working on a pilot program for the New Orleans hospitality sector that wraps up at the end of 2022. It is funded by grants from JP Morgan Chase and the Conrad Hilton Foundation.

"The goal is to establish a model that we will roll out to Fortune 500 companies next year," Allen says. "So, we are really experimenting with this model right here in New Orleans."

Prior to the pandemic, Allen says PerkUp employees were already working in a hybrid in-office/remote model that is now common to many businesses. PerkUp employees work in-office two days per week and two days remotely, with Fridays off (but they are on-call if needed).

"If there is something you need to get done [on Friday], you do it," Allen says. "But [staff members] don't need to feel guilty about going swimming or to the park. We have standing group meetings that every day we are in the office we're we spend time going over everything we are involved with to make sure we are strategizing and communicating."

To create the peaceful, airy office space, Joshi-Gupta focused on residential design elements.

"I was inspired by Lenny Kravitz's home in Brazil with large murals, and came up with my own 'super graphic' concept, which I had muralist Liz Kamarul paint," Joshi-Gupta says. "I also used natural materials for partitions and designed partitions for office area and storage. Greenery and lamps add to the calmness."

The bold graphic serves as a focal point to the space.

"The mural is what brings it together," Allen says. "It gives it a kind of a tropical feel appropriate to New Orleans. It's very vintage as well."

At a Glance

Location

805 Howard Ave., Suite 201

Date Company Founded

January of 2020 as PerkUp, but it was a business unit of another company for five years prior

Date of building

Circa-1920s

Move-in date

January 2020

Square footage

Approximately 2,500 square feet

Person in Charge

Ben Allen, president of PerkUp Financial Health

Number of employees

6

Interior designer/firm

Nomita Joshi-Gupta of Nomita Joshi Interior Design

Furnishings

Authentic reproductions of pieces by Pierre Jeanneret and Le Corbusier created for the modern city of Chandigarh in India for its city hall in the 1953. Made and imported from Bangalore

Art

Graphic concept by Nomita Joshi-Gupta and painted by Liz Kamarul

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