

Genzyme Center

An Innovative Building for an Innovative Company

Genzyme Corporation, one of the world's foremost biotechnology companies, is dedicated to improving the lives of patients suffering from difficult diseases. Relying on a core set of values – innovation, transparency, collaboration and the entrepreneurial spirit – Genzyme has grown since 1981 from a small start-up to a global company with more than 7,500 employees and annual revenues of \$2 billion.

In 2000, as the company approached its 20th anniversary, Genzyme decided that the time was right to build a new corporate headquarters. The company needed a new hub for its increasingly global workforce, and it wanted a signature building that would stand as a reflection of its core values and a symbol of its established position. Three years later, the company opened the doors to Genzyme Center.

Designed by the award-winning German architectural firm Behnisch, Behnisch and Partner, Genzyme Center is a twelve-story, 350,000 square foot office building that combines innovative design and cutting-edge technology to create an exciting, healthy, and productive workplace for more than 900 Genzyme employees. With a striking all-glass exterior and a soaring internal atrium, the building is the anchor of a new urban revitalization project in the Kendall Square neighborhood of Cambridge, Mass., and is designed to be one of the most environmentally responsible office buildings ever built in the United States.

Designed from the Inside Out

Genzyme knew from the start that it did not want a traditional office building. With its history of innovation, Genzyme wanted a bold building that would make a statement about the values that have driven its success. Genzyme participated in an international architectural competition organized by its real estate partner, Lyme Properties LCC, drawing submissions from seven world-renowned architects.

Of the seven proposals, one stood out: a unique design from Behnisch, Behnisch and Partner. While six of the seven proposals focused on what the building looked like from the outside, the Behnisch proposal envisioned the building from the “inside out,” with a primary focus on creating a positive workplace for employees. Behnisch won the bid.

Working with Genzyme, Behnisch began to design the building around an internal environment that emphasized natural light, views of the outdoors, and an open “feel,” with extensive shared space that would encourage collaboration. To ensure that this space fit Genzyme’s needs, Genzyme brought in the world-renowned workspace design firm DEGW and its co-founder Frank Duffy, who studied Genzyme’s work style and helped design the interior workspace to fit with the company’s collaborative culture.

As the building took shape from the inside, the outside also came into focus; Genzyme Center would be sheathed entirely in glass, connecting the external and internal environments and making a statement about transparency. This connection with the external environment would be strengthened by a number of important employee-friendly features: operable windows, extensive indoor gardens, natural light enhancement systems, and a cafeteria with sweeping views of the Charles River and the Boston cityscape.

A New Paradigm in Environmentally Responsible Design and Construction

From the earliest stages, Genzyme and Behnisch agreed that the new building should reflect Genzyme’s commitment to the environment and the community. Genzyme registered the building with the U.S. Green Building Council under the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) 2.0 standard, a voluntary, consensus-based national standard for developing high-performance, sustainable buildings. Genzyme worked closely with Behnisch to ensure that Genzyme Center meets or exceeds the highest environmental goals embodied in the LEED standard. As a result, Genzyme Center earned the highest possible LEED rating, platinum.

The comprehensive approach Genzyme and Behnisch took toward environmentally responsible design is evident throughout Genzyme Center. From rooftop gardens that reduce rainwater run-off to a sophisticated system that uses waste steam from a nearby power plant to cool the building, decisions at every level were evaluated from an environmental perspective. Even the site of the building was selected in part for environmental reasons: Genzyme Center is built on the former site of a coal gasification plant, which had been abandoned after years of use, leaving a contaminated vacant lot in the heart of the Kendall Square community. Lyme Properties remediated the site and Genzyme is proud to return it to productive use. The site is also located just two blocks from public transportation, encouraging employees to commute to work using environmentally friendly methods.

Genzyme Center’s energy costs are estimated to be 42 percent less than that of a comparable building. Genzyme Center also uses an estimated 34 percent less water than a comparable building. In total, over 75 percent of the materials used to construct the building contain recycled materials, and more than 90 percent of all construction waste from the project was recycled.

Cost and Benefits

Cost is always an issue in environmental design and construction, and Genzyme Center did cost more to construct than a standard office building. This cost premium is the result of a number of factors, including the inherent differences in the construction methods for environmental buildings and the use of specialized materials. In the end, it is difficult to assign an exact “dollar premium” to the environmental features of the new building, as these environmental features are so carefully integrated with the building’s design. For example, is the glass exterior a design element or an environmental feature? This facade is critical to the building’s design, but it also plays a key role in the natural lighting system, allowing Genzyme to reduce the need for artificial lighting.

Genzyme is confident that, over time, the premium associated with the environmental design will be more than compensated for by associated savings from reduced operating costs and expected increases in productivity, including easier recruiting and greater retention of employees. It is Genzyme’s hope that Genzyme Center will stand as an example that it is possible to construct an exciting, beautiful, and employee-friendly building that makes both economic and environmental sense.