



## Green Commercial Development

### Marks, Thomas Architects

**Location:** 1414 Key Highway, Baltimore

**Number of Employees:** 27

**Cost of going green:** \$35,000

**Green savings:** \$750 a month in energy bills

**Green tip:** Green office space doesn't have to look weird to be effective.



NICHOLAS GRIMER | STAFF

**Tom Liebel, the associate principal at Marks, Thomas who led the firm's green movement.**

# Green by design

*Marks, Thomas Architects decided it needed to go green first, before convincing clients to consider environmentally friendly spaces*

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**T**he folks at Marks, Thomas Architects in Baltimore figured that if they were going to talk the talk, they had to walk that walk.

That meant they had to go green.

As more of Marks, Thomas' clients asked the firm to help them develop sustainability and energy-efficiency plans for their offices and new buildings, the firm's leadership decided to lead by example. Before moving into its new offices at 1414 Key Highway in May 2008, the firm plunked down about \$35,000 to outfit the 12,000 square feet with some features straight out of the environmentally friendly textbook and others that are not-so-noticeable.

The second floor of the former

King syrup and molasses plant is among the first offices in Baltimore City to earn gold certification for commercial interiors by the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design rating system. But it won't be the last, said Tom Liebel, the associate principal at Marks, Thomas who helped spearhead the firm's green movement.

"We've seen demand for green building elements increase the past few years," he said. "So we figured we had to make the investment to become a leader in this area."

Stroll through the former Mangels Herold Co. building, and you'll see where Marks, Thomas incorporated its green design elements. There's the bamboo floor in the kitchen, the \$300 Energy Star dishwasher, floor-to-ceiling windows and the direct/indirect lighting throughout the space, cutting down on office "hot spots" and

helping to save energy, Liebel said.

The architecture firm also purchased so-called grab-bag carpet, which is simply extra cuts of carpet that the manufacturer stitches together and sells at a lower cost.

It also outfitted its conference room with motion-activated lights and linoleum panels that are cheaper than huge dry-erase boards.

Marks, Thomas also invested in a few higher-dollar green design components you may not notice. The office's energy recovery HVAC system uses heat already generated within the building to warm outside air moving through the system. At \$15,000, it was the most expensive piece of Marks, Thomas' green experiment.

Then there's the waterless urinal in the men's bathroom. "That was a hard sell," said Gilbert Thomas, one of the firm's principals.

But Liebel and his team, which included Nancy Liebrecht and Jen

Lyon of Marks, Thomas, sold the firm's patriarch on the green components by justifying their return on investment. When they planned the office move with the green components, the architects figured they would begin saving money on the plan within five years. But, more than likely, it will take no more than three years to notice the return, Thomas said.

Marks, Thomas already saves money on its monthly energy bills. At its previous space — a 10,000-square-foot office also in 1414 Key Highway — the firm spent about \$1,000 a month on its electric bills. Now it pays about \$250 a month.

Buoyed by Marks, Thomas' experience, Azola and Associates Inc., the office building's owner, already is planning to incorporate some of the firm's green design elements throughout the facility, Liebel said.