

Etsy Headquarters, NYC

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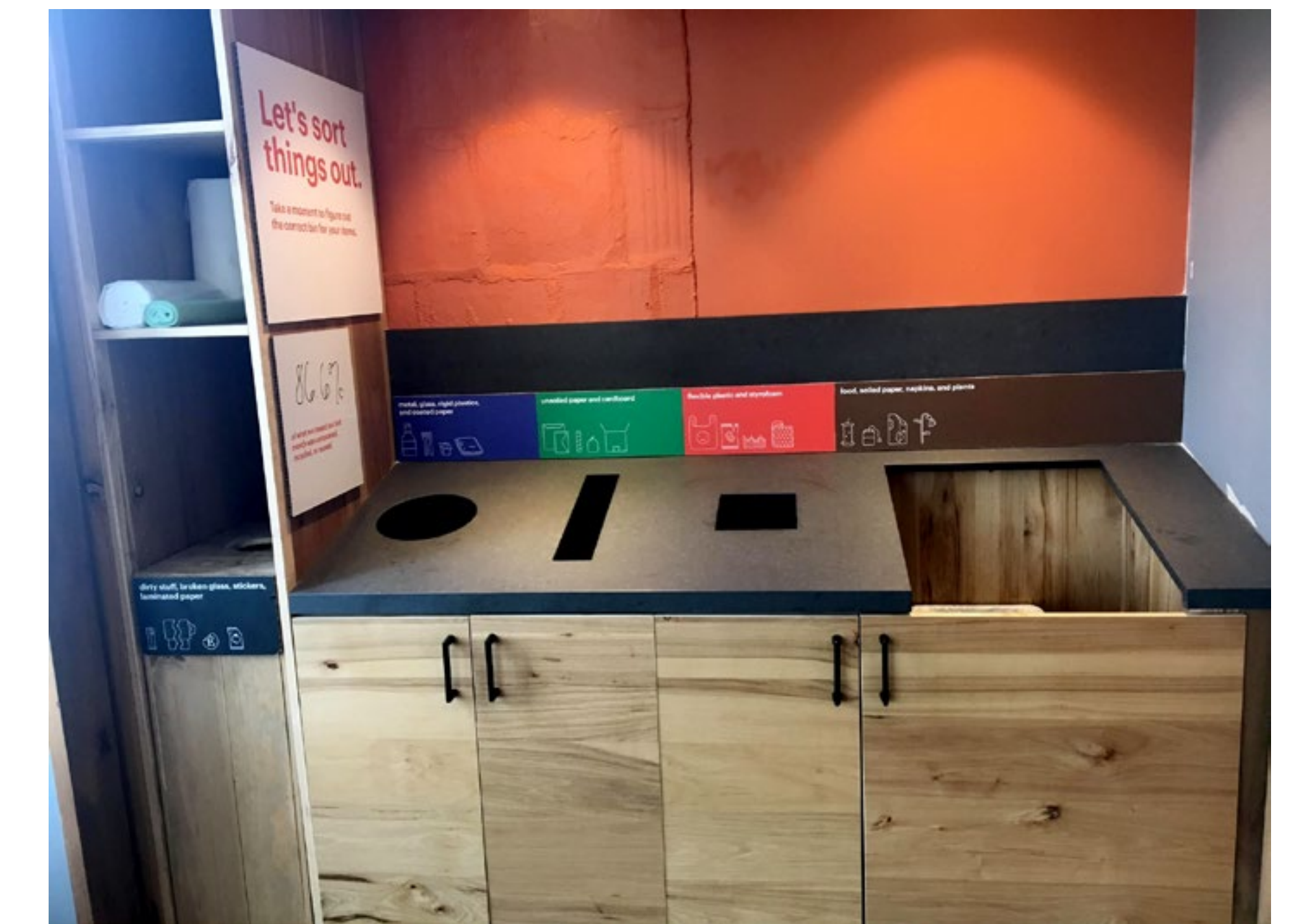
- Commercial Typology 3: Elevator to Shared Storage
- Construction & Demolition Waste Case Study

Best Practice Strategies (Buildings)

- 2.01 Determine waste streams and quantities
- 2.02 Plan a route
- 2.03 Design storage space
- 2.04 Plan for collection
- 2.05 Consider staff procedures
- 2.09 Provide equal convenience disposal
- 2.10 Provide clear visual cues and signage
- 2.11 Provide opportunities for feedback
- 2.12 Develop awareness and education programs
- 2.14 Design for occupancy
- 2.16 Reduce material consumption
- 2.18 Facilitate donation and reuse
- 2.20 Design to incorporate transparent pricing by stream

Best Practice Strategies (Construction & Demolition)

- 2.25 Maximize asset utilization through programming
- 2.26 Design to optimize material usage
- 2.29 Reuse building and materials on-site
- 2.30 Use reclaimed components and materials
- 2.31 Specify recyclable materials with high recycled content
- 2.32 Require a construction waste management plan
- 2.34 Separate construction waste on-site



Etsy's workspaces and central waste station

Summary

Etsy's Brooklyn headquarters occupies 200,000 sq ft of a nine-story building constructed in 1924. The renovation, by Gensler, was designed to be zero waste within both its construction and its ongoing operations.

Etsy formalized its zero waste vision in 2017 by publicly announcing their commitment to run zero waste operations globally by 2020. Since then, the office has also been certified as a Zero Waste Facility at the Platinum level. The project also achieved Living Building Challenge Petal Certification. The project was envisioned as an opportunity to instigate change, set a new standard for sustainable construction and design, and create a space reflective of its values, especially those focused on community, craft and sustainability. The building strives to be not just a self-sustaining workplace but also an asset to the community, enriching its Dumbo neighborhood.

During construction, the project diverted over 90% of waste from landfills, with excess materials sent to nearby building projects through a partnership with Big Reuse, a local nonprofit. An inventory of the existing Etsy offices and the new project site identified early opportunities for extensive salvage and reuse, including more than 750 furniture pieces, food service equipment and art commissions inspired by—and incorporating—legacy materials (such as employees' old hand-painted desks). From the new project site, more than 1,150 linear feet of reclaimed wood from water towers and ten industrial doors honor the building's legacy as a printing and publishing house. Reclaimed local wood scaffolding accents the pantry areas and coat closets throughout the project.



Floor plan with waste stations highlighted in red

In the company's previous location, the absence of a dishwasher meant the twice-weekly lunch program was served on single-use, compostable dishware. In the design of this building, space was assigned on each floor for dishwashers and the storage of bussing bins, along with an accessible freight elevator to move the reusable dishes throughout the building's nine floors.

To help diminish the volumes of trash and recycling as well as the time building staff spend moving waste, there are no individual wastebins under desks. Employees bring their waste to one of the three or four per-floor custom-built recycling stations, sited beside central pantries.

The stations are designed to change the behavior of staff members. The opening of each receptacle indicates the specific waste stream: There's a small square opening for trash (labelled 'landfill'), a very large opening for organic waste and a long slot for cardboard and paper products. Clear signage, with illustrations accompanying text, spells out what can and cannot be disposed of in each stream. The onboarding tour of the facilities for new employees includes education around the company's sustainability commitments, as well as a visit to the waste stations to ensure proper sorting habits. The sustainability team operates a Slack channel employees can use to find out if a particular material is recyclable or compostable.

The design of the renovation considers the movement of waste from the point of disposal through to setout. Maintenance staff transports the waste in tilt trucks from recycling stations to the freight elevator, which opens directly onto the first-floor loading area. Storing all waste there allows for ample, well-labeled storage and convenient collection.

Built-in bulk storage was provided to allow for smart consumption. Integrating adequate storage for kitchenware, food and janitorial products allows for bulk purchasing, both in unit size (e.g., 5 gal. hand soap versus 12 oz bottles) and purchase frequency, reducing waste from packaging materials. Food and drink also come unpackaged: Drinks are on tap and employee snacks are stored in glass jars. Lunch, offered twice a week in the dining area, is served on reusable dishware.



Clockwise from top left: Hamper with scale and tablet with divertsy software; Reusable to-go cups; Central pantry

To reduce the amount of building waste, Etsy implemented Divertsy, a system to track outgoing material streams such as landfill, recycling, compost, e-waste and donations. When the staff collect waste from the stations, it is weighed in the tilt truck, and staff record the numbers on a tablet. The data is used to track progress and explore ways to reduce waste across streams. Divertsy also allows the company to cross-check data with invoices from waste haulers, to confirm their charges are fair. In an effort to engage employees and motivate behavioral change, the company has live data dashboards throughout the office, which display feedback on waste diversion. Employee engagement events such as clothing swaps are held; there's also an annual dumpster dive, in which employees sort through the day's waste.

Challenges

A major source of outgoing waste streams, the company discovered, was the packaging from local food purchases. Now employees exiting the building are offered reusable mugs, with secure tops that turn them into to-go coffee mugs (photo). The employees return the mugs and covers, which are washed in their dishwasher. Employees are regularly reminded—via e-mail and on the internal communications platform—of local coffee shops that offer discounts to those who bring a mug.



Employee engagement events: clothing swap and organic waste from annual dumpster dive