



Nearly 400 southern yellow pine glulam beams, columns, and trusses in lengths of up to 34 feet were used to help support façade and ceiling areas. Glulam components dramatize the strength, suppleness, and beauty of natural materials, contributing to a warm, staff-friendly environment. Here the interior courtyard is pictured through the two-story glass wall that separates it from the central lounge. Flanking office wings form a U-shaped structure, sheltering the courtyard. Note the role of glulam columns as exterior and interior structural and design elements. Louvered wood sun shades and rooftop overhang work to help mitigate solar heat gain and glare while maximizing interior daylighting.

# Wood: Transforming Workplace Health & Wellness

Hidden in a nearly forgotten woodland glade in the heart of Wilmington, N.C., the 36,000 square foot Live Oak Bank headquarters sits lightly in the arboreal splendor like a shimmering Tolkienesque “cathedral of wood.” New and tenured bank staff now claim a workplace that’s second to none for personal performance, comfort, and efficiency.

*Question: When is a bank not a bank?*

*Answer: When it’s the Live Oak Bank in Wilmington, N.C.*

This acclaimed, remarkably successful commercial bank is headquartered in a 36,000 square foot, \$10.8 million, two-story U-shaped structure. Because the bulk of the Live Oak Bank’s business is transacted and serviced online, you won’t find a marble lobby, teller windows, or drive-up ATMs.

What you will find is an emphatic emphasis on employee health and wellness with abundant natural light, easy outdoor access, fitness and dining amenities, broadly-accessible technology, all cast in the natural warmth and familiarity of wood.

## **LEADING WITH WOOD**

“The bank’s senior leadership wanted a bank that reflected the natural beauty of North Carolina,” says project architect Laura Miller,

AIA, LEED AP of regional architectural firm LS3 , headquartered in Charleston, S.C., with five regional offices including one in Wilmington.

“The people that work there are some of the smartest I’ve ever met. They work long hours. Employee retention and happiness also weighed heavily in the owner’s requirements.”

Wood’s leading role in crafting a winning aesthetic was never in doubt.



The dramatic play of wood provides a relaxed, unbank-like setting to help attract and retain top financial talent to the Wilmington area. Meeting all fire safety regulations and other code requirements wasn't an issue. In fact, city of Wilmington officials were openly excited by the project according to the architect, and "thrilled with the way the owners respected the land and the design character of the Wilmington area."



Low daylight-friendly custom-milled workstation panels and the ceiling's wood-laminate panels and glulam support beams create an inviting workplace where nature is never far from view. The project cost fell well within the budget allocation, even allowing for the extra level of presentation effect the owners sought in headquarters design and construction.

## NATURAL ADVANTAGE

"The owner wanted the headquarters to feel like it had always been there. Cypress as the cladding material offers this rich, warm tone that silvers-out over time. Like the forest around it, the building will naturally age.

"The building interior features wood laminates in the ceiling with custom millwork for the workstations. Oak is used for the flooring and southern yellow pine is used for the exposed glulam columns, beams, and trusses," Miller observes. Large, exposed glulam columns serve as major design and structural elements across the building's exterior and interior.

Glulam (glued laminated timber) was chosen because it is stronger and stiffer than dimensional lumber. Pound for pound, glulam is stronger than steel. For example, glulam beams can span long distances with minimal need for intermediate supports. This strength advantage offers designers nearly unlimited design flexibility for long-span projects. Southern yellow pine was specified because of the species' inherently denser, more robust physical characteristics.

The LS3P design team worked closely with the general contractor from the beginning, helping them coordinate specification details with the glulam manufacturer and millworks. "It was a team effort from start to finish," Miller notes

## STAFF-AFFIRMING

Today the naturalness and tranquility of the building still gives the designer pause. "Many times when I go over there, none of the lights are on, except for task lights. Controlled natural light is all they need. The overall feeling is just lighter and happier. The proximity of nature and the use of natural, locally-sourced wood lift spirits and enhance productivity."

## SIGNATURE LOOK

The bank's senior leadership endorses that view: They just took delivery of a second, larger facility also clad in cypress with southern yellow pine glulams used throughout.

"The bank's senior leadership knows what it takes to attract and retain top talent. This facility sets out to not only do that, but also raise the bar for other Wilmington-area businesses." A rising tide of design excellence helps lift good fortune for all.

**Owner** Live Oak Banking Company

**Architect** LS3P Associates, Charleston and Wilmington

**Civil Engineer** Norris & Tunstall Engineers

**General Contractor** Clancy & Theys Construction Company

**Structural Engineer** Woods Engineering

**Mechanical Engineer** CBHF Engineers

**Plumbing Engineer** CBHF Engineers

**Electrical Engineer** McFadyen Engineers

**Landscape Architect** LACC International

**Photographer**

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**Location**

1741 Tiburon Drive  
Wilmington, N.C.

**Awards**

WoodWorks Wood Design Award  
(2015 Jury's Choice Award)

AIA Wilmington (Design Excellence Award)

IIDA Carolinas DesignWorks Awards  
(Corporate Award)

Lower Cape Fear Stewardship Development  
(Outstanding Stewardship Award)