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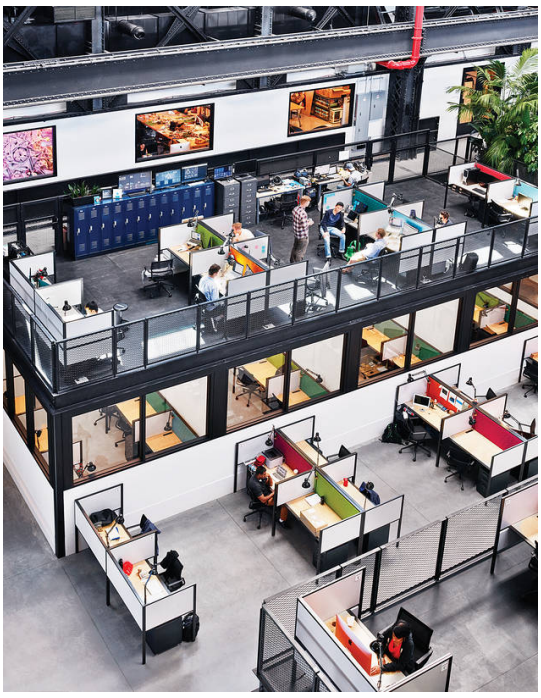
THE FUTURE OF EVERYTHING

Brooklyn's New Lab Is an Inventor's Paradise

How an abandoned building in the Brooklyn Navy Yard became a hub for pioneering startups



Short leases encourage a constant influx of fresh ideas at New Lab. PHOTO: NEW LAB

By Elliott Krause
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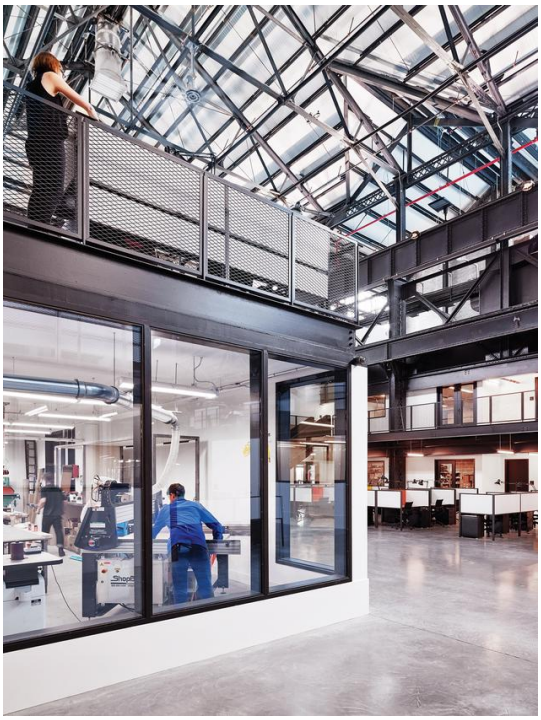
Today's Manhattan rents act like a moat, keeping out inventors with big ideas and tight budgets. But thanks to a $30 million renovation (a mix of public tax credits and private investment), an abandoned building in the Brooklyn Navy Yard was transformed into New Lab, a sprawling, 84,000-square-foot collaborative workspace designed to foster innovation in robotics, aerospace and energy.

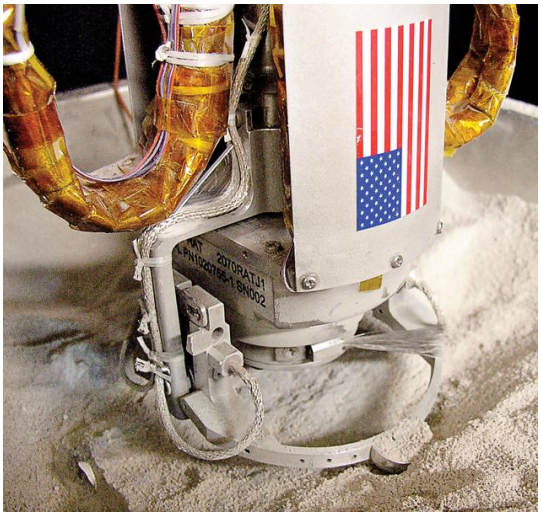
The inventors' playground opened last month with 41 growth-stage companies, all of which have access to a product-development team, four prototyping labs with 3-D printers and a woodshop. The table saw is not exactly new technology, but this batch of innovators—unlike many of their West Coast counterparts—is building more than apps. New Lab tenants create tangible goods: a Hot Wheels–size robot that inspects municipal pipes for gas leaks; a floating shelf that harnesses magnetic energy to levitate out from the wall. BioLite's smokeless stove, which converts excess heat into electricity, was originally designed for charging campers' smartphones, but it's now being exported to the developing world—where pollution from indoor cooking kills more than four million people a year. To build prototypes and tweak design, these inventors need access to multimillion-dollar machinery that no bootstrapped startup could afford on its own.

At New Lab, StrongArm Technologies, which builds "ergoskeletons" to protect factory workers and other manual laborers, can 3-D print a prototype, show it to the full-time



New Lab offers over $2 million worth of shared machinery. PHOTO: NEW LAB

development team and incorporate its feedback into the next design—effecting a one- or two-day turnaround for a process that would otherwise take weeks. New Lab has even lured established companies like Honeybee Robotics, a 33-year-old space-technology firm that builds robots for NASA that have been to Mars. Not bad for a borough best known for its craft beer and thrift shops.



Built for NASA, Honeybee's Rock Abrasion Tool landed on Mars in 2004. PHOTO: HONEYBEE ROBOTICS