

architecture

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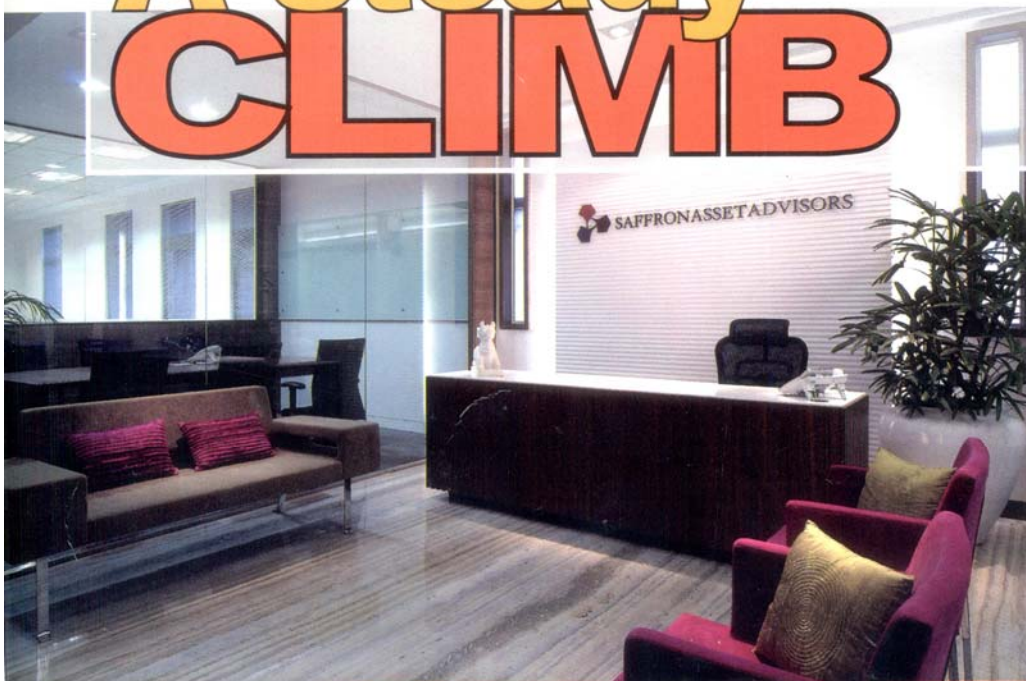
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A steady CLIMB



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OFFICE INTERIORS GUNNEBO INDIA

Creating a design definitely needs vision. With vision, one can add to the order and sophistication of a typical monotonous office design more welcoming and interactive kinetic spaces. One can always have a vision but it needs to be supplemented with proper plan of action. Without which the entire process will fall flat on its face, according to Kalhan Mattoo and Santha Gour Mattoo from Mumbai-based Planet3Studios, which won the Honor Award from DesignShare, USA, 2007, apart from a string of other awards.

Kalhan and Santha, who hope to enable design and architecture to play a role in business strategy, are bringing innovation into the design and process of architecture. An example of their approach to novel office architecture is their project for Gunnebo India, an international

Mumbai-based Kalhan and Santha Gour Mattoo of Planet3Studios were faced with the challenge of designing a space that exuded safety and security for Gunnebo India's new corporate office. They tell Renu Rajaram how they went about the task

security group operating in 30 countries providing integrated security solutions to their customers. Planet3Studios started their work on the project in January 2008. The architects disclose how their hot design is freeing up considerable amount of space in the office for informal uses such as library, wi-fi zone, *Baithak* and swing chairs.

Rectifying past wrongs

Gunnebo India was moving its corporate office from the decrepit Mazgaon premises in Mumbai to Thane. This move was part of an overall strategy initiated by the new management committed to developing suitable business processes for the future. Its rapidly growing business in the security solutions segment required greater manpower and space to expand.

The move was laden with promise of a new beginning. Building a suitable new office space presented the opportunity to remedy past wrongs. It was immediately understood that the right architectural solution would speak to stakeholders, employees and customers more eloquently than any policy assertions.

Employee-centric programme

Gunnebo is in a conservative line of business. It provides security solutions. To its clients, it had to present an edifice that exuded safety and security. Within the workspace area, it needed to focus on efficiency and open interaction and for the cabins, it had to look at comfort and convenience. But the programme became interesting with the introduction of 'employee-centricity' as a requirement. The design had to discern and respond to the needs of the staff of about 200, that went beyond standard built, comfortable workspace.



Project



Crucial insights

Designers from Planet3Studios squatted in Gunnebo's existing office space for a few days. By talking to employees across the hierarchy, they were able to gain crucial insights about the company's corporate culture, interpersonal relationships, tangible and intangible wants and needs and more.

SNAPSHOT

Project: Gunnebo India Ltd's new corporate office for 200 people

Location: Thane, Maharashtra

Architect: Planet3Studios, Mumbai

Team: Santha Gour Mattoo and Kalhan Mattoo assisted by Dimple

Area: 20,000 sq ft

Estimated cost: Rs 2.5 crore

Date of commencement: January 2008 Likely completion: 2008-end

The architects understood, for instance, that the most interesting and creative ideas in the organisation emerged not in the board rooms but in the casual interactions between employees at the water cooler or the vending machine! "We were surprised to know that some people in the sales team spent on an average about 15 minutes in the office everyday and preferred the flexibility of working at any place where they could hook up their laptops to the server," says Kalhan. This opened up 'hot-desking' possibilities and potential reduction in the number of dedicated workstations.

"We did not question their need for formal workspaces. We managed to fit in the requirements as described by them in the most efficient manner and consequently freed us a large bit of space that could be used for something else," says Santha.

Most of the construction material used for the project was plywood and

the finishing materials used included veneer, laminate, paint, duco, fabric panelling and so on.

The design provides an entire zone that becomes a breakout, hybrid use space. The transition from formal areas to this informal zone is effected through a cluster of meeting rooms. Sitting on a raised podium, these meeting spaces carry the same wood grain material palette as the rest of the formal office. Only that the partitions warp and peel off to reveal what is inside. This cluster playfully breaks down the strict formality of its surrounding. Graphics and artwork add to change. Colours associated with productivity and harvest like green for vegetation, blue for water sources may be preferred to browns while golds are associated with the dormant season.

Further out, the offerings become more interesting. Low height benches with attached bookshelves for easy reference, a proposed interaction space in the form of an Indian *Baithak*, swings that face each other to create a discussion zone, huddle space, vending machine, common use workstations, and ample greenery. The walls have caricatures of



employees painted on them! This space opens up into the most colourful and vibrant space in the entire office, the café. The design of the café is in complete contrast to the formal office. . . . It is meant to offer a total change for the employees. On the other side of the office, an outdoor passage has been converted into a green terrace with landscaping that filters the view to the outside. Effectively, it acts as green buffer and smoking zone! Sloped ceilings, trellises, and overhang structures supported by pillars can create symbolic tree canopies.

With this office project, Planet3Studios has proved that architecture designed in a logical way can save space and money. ▲

