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INTERIORS

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OFFICE 2008

Some aesthetic new age offices that offer a stimulating and conducive work environment.




- The A to Z of Innovative Building Materials
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Cool Workplaces

JANAKI KRISHNAMOORTHY looks at new-age offices in 2008, spaces where form and function go hand in hand and offer a stimulating and collaborative work environment for any organisation.



Offices have had a makeover... from dreary rooms with dull desks to vibrant spaces housing elegant furniture and smart equipment.



Changes have been driven both by technology and the breakdown of hierarchy.

Offices are not what they used to be. Just like almost everything in modern life, they too have undergone a 'makeover', evolving from lacklustre rows of dreary desks, cabins and dull passages to vibrant spaces that encompass smart workstations, elegant furniture, compact storage systems, efficient lighting and affable common and leisure areas. The breakdown of hierarchies in the professional environment has spelt the end of the closed-cabin era – now workspaces flow more seamlessly into one another with less definition and segregation.

In a nutshell, today's office interiors are simple, soothing, functional and contemporary in terms of operation and aesthetics. These changes are driven by technology as well as a growing need among employers to augment the efficiency and motivational levels of their workforce through an enabling, stress-free working environment. The good news is that these new workspaces are not confined to multinationals but are becoming increasingly popular among Indian companies too, both large and small. The catalyst is evidently a change in mindset owing to the competitive environment created by globalisation, rapid economic growth, and changing employer-employee equations. Another factor is the concept of internal branding, which is assuming great importance in business today. Indeed, a good office ambience speaks of a company's skills as a good employer and reflects the company's brand like little else can.

DESIGN TRENDS

"Five factors have shaped design trends for offices," explains Kalhan Mattoo, Director, Planet 3 Studios Architecture Pvt Ltd in

time. "Concern for the environment has yet to percolate down from corporate policy documents to actionable programmes," says Mattoo. "Some enlightened clients are demanding environmentally sensitive solutions and even LEEDS certifications, but only for very large projects."

The responsibility of promoting and executing the concept rests equally on designers, believes **BK Katyal, Managing Director, Pheroze Kudianavala Consultant Engineers Pvt Ltd** in Ballard Estate, Mumbai. "Clients have become more conscious of environment-related issues but their perspective is very general," he says. "It is for the designer to get it properly translated and executed. Therefore, we designers have a very responsible role to play here." Katyal maintains that his company's designs always take cognisance of environmental factors. "We recycle whatever can be recycled, and use energy-efficient materials and appliances right from the external façade to fittings and fixtures inside," he adds.

Today, there is no dearth of products and materials that enable a green office – energy-conserving low-power computers, compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs), automatic dimmers and occupancy sensors to adjust air-conditioning and switch off lights when no one is in the room; water-saving low flow faucets, dual flush tanks; environment-friendly, low volatile organic compounds and toxic-free paints, finishes and adhesives; natural floor surfaces such as tile, timber and linoleum. The list is endless.

SECURITY AND SAFETY

Safety and security will play an equally important role in future offices. Electronic access controls, security gadgets, fire detection and fire-fighting equipment will become a routine part of office design.

"Creative ideas emerge not in the boardrooms but in the casual interactions between employees."

- Kalhan Mattoo, Director, Planet 3 Studios Architecture Pvt Ltd



DEFINING OFFICE 2008

"Advanced technology, ergonomic environment with lot of interesting gathering and leisure spaces for staff"

- Zubin Zainuddin

"Embracing change"

-Kalhan Mattoo

"Green offices that value environment"

-Ninad Tipnis

"Efficient, safe, friendly and inviting"

-BK Katyal

"There are always wrongdoers and people who wish to make a quick buck," says Katyal. "Then there is terrorism. Hence, security and safety will assume greater importance in future. Apart from securing the workspace with an electronic access control mechanism, special meeting spaces for outsiders near the lobby and reception will be created." Zainuddin adds, "Fire safety measures will also be vital. With so many electrical and electronic gadgets and wiring systems and high occupancy, fire detection and fire-fighting systems have to be of high standards and maintained in working condition."

TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIALS

Technology, which has created wonders in office design, will continue to dominate the scenario in 2008. "Several technological innovations have already drastically changed the dimensions of office interiors," says Zainuddin. "The introduction of LCD screens, a dramatic development in office spaces, has made desks less cluttered. And there will be many more innovations in future that will be integrated in office design."

Material innovations too have influenced office design trends. Today, both locally manufactured and imported materials are used in offices depending on the needs and budget of the client. While traditional materials like

wood, glass, metal, laminates and veneers continue to be popular, some designers are getting experimental. "We like to use Corian material by Du Pont in high-end offices," reveals Zainuddin. "It is expensive but very easy to maintain and can create free-flow furniture where joints are not visible." However, not all clients are open to change. "Many clients still remain conservative with material choices," says Mattoo. "The brave few who choose to look beyond standard glass, wood, steel and occasional colour are usually the ones who have a compelling business requirement to think otherwise. Recently, we have specified fabric walls, polycarbonate partitions, tensile ceilings, steel-mesh screens and form-finished concrete for various projects."

AND FINALLY

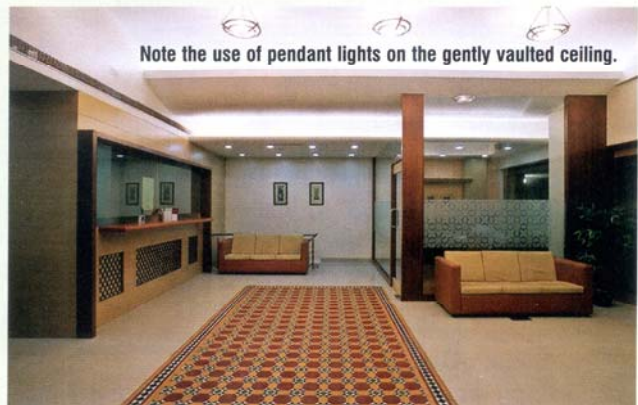
Ultimately, it's all about the image the client wants to project. While some multinationals prefer to ensure that all their offices across the globe look the same in every aspect, right from the ambience and amenities to the furniture, colours on the walls and carpets, others prefer a new look, reflecting the individual ethos of each city where the office is located. Whichever the approach, it is clear that in years to come, transformation in office spaces will be an ongoing process. Apart from existing trends, the need for a collaborative work environment, meeting and leisure spaces for employees, safety and security and green building culture, as discussed above, will play a significant role in determining office interiors in 2008, and beyond.

We now showcase some swank offices that epitomise the new age look.

Unit Trust of India (UTI), Crawford Market, Mumbai



This colourful carpet is the most striking feature in this bank.



Note the use of pendant lights on the gently vaulted ceiling.



The jaali pattern on the glass is derived from the balustrade of a nearby building.

Architect: Planet 3 Studios Architecture

Business: Retail banking

Requirements and challenges: This new branch is housed in a modern building at the end of the Fort precinct and the beginning of Mohammed Ali Road. Designing a retail banking outlet in an architectural environment rich in tradition and acknowledging end-user demographic posed a peculiar challenge. This coupled with the organisation's requirement to maintain a certain degree of design consistency over various locations and the need to reiterate the core brand identity demanded a carefully calibrated response. Eventually, the project demonstrated that standard cost and time-bound build of retail banking can also accommodate innovation and sensitivity.

Highlights:

- The design solution evoked the character of the neighbourhood environment through strategically inserted elements, interpreted in a modern way. While staying true to acceptable planning and finish parameters of UTI branches elsewhere, we took a few key departures.
- A carpet of Bharat cement tiles was laid down in the central hall which became the most striking feature of the space and also gave it an authentic look of the past.
- Privacy requirements of the bank (exterior façade and interior glass partitions) were addressed with frosted film cut to a jaali pattern, the motif of which was derived from a nearby building balustrade.
- Teller counter apron and table fronts continued with variations on the theme.
- Gently vaulted ceiling with pendant lights completed the look.

Gunnebo India, Thane

Architect: Planet 3 Studios Architecture

Business: Security solutions

Requirements and challenges: Gunnebo was moving its corporate office from its decrepit Mazgaon premises to Thane as its rapidly expanding business required greater manpower and larger space. Wanted an edifice that exudes safety and security, an employee-centric environment, efficiency and open interaction within workspace area, and comfort and convenience for cabins. Interaction with employees revealed that the most interesting and creative ideas emerged not in boardrooms but in casual interactions between employees at the water cooler or vending machine! Some members of the sales team spent only an average of 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. This opened up 'Hotdesking' possibilities and potential reduction in the number of dedicated workstations.

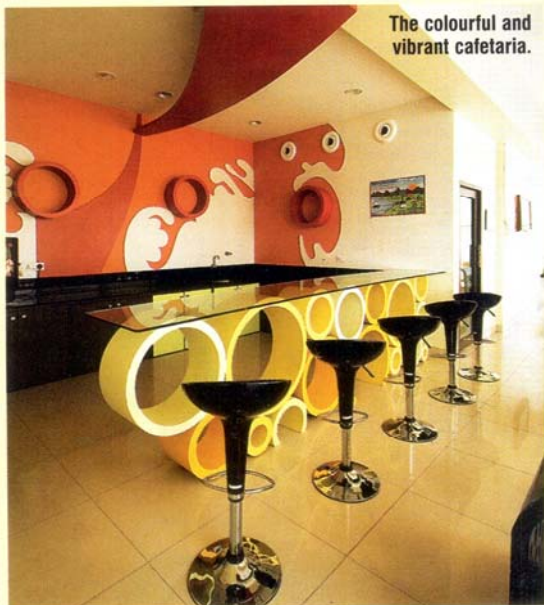
Highlights:

- Apart from formal work areas, created an entire breakout zone.
- Transition from formal areas to this informal zone is effected through a cluster of meeting rooms.
- Located on a podium, the meeting spaces carry the same wood grain material palette as the rest of the formal office. Only the partitions warp and peel off to reveal what is inside. This playfully breaks down the strict formality of its surrounding. Graphics and artwork add to the ambience.
- Low height benches with attached bookshelves for easy reference, 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.
- This space opens up into a colourful and vibrant cafeteria whose walls have caricatures of employees painted on them.
- On one side of the office, an outdoor passage has been converted into a green terrace with landscaping that acts as a green buffer and smoking zone.



Meeting rooms (left) form transition zones dividing formal and informal zones.

The reading room overlooking the open office.



The colourful and vibrant cafeteria.



'Hotdesking' has made it possible to limit the number of dedicated workstations.