

OFFICE TRENDS



Colour, creativity and innovation in the workspace by Time&Space Design.

but that the tendency is to move away from formal meeting spaces to more informal, flexible and relaxed spaces that are conducive to communication, teamwork and collaboration – much like an “internal coffee shop”. Key factors in this trend are technology and ease of use.

These trends, Jill Munger from Time & Space Design Consultants

companies prefer meeting around a table while others prefer a more relaxed lounge environment. “Boardrooms and meeting rooms are fitted with technology that allows for communication, Internet access, television access and video access, discussion and training forums, collaborative work sessions and meetings,” Munger explains.

work ideas. Meeting spaces are also doubling up as breakaway spaces and are becoming less formal. We find the less formal the space is, the more it encourages ad hoc discussion and collaboration, which in turn builds the team and encourages camaraderie.”

These changes in office design have been brought about by companies’ becoming more

shrunk by around 28%, so being smarter about your meetings and communicating cleverly is highly important for productivity today.” Her colleague, Liez’l Joubert adds that this is a result of employers and employees being more open to change and their understanding of how the business will function in the short to medium term.

“Over the last few years we

“MDS’ OFFICES ARE BECOMING MORE LIKE HOME OFFICES – THEY TEND TO BE UNDERSTATED, CLASSIC AND COMFORTABLE.”

notes, reflect a shift towards designing around individuals’ needs. She points out that MDs structure their space according to their needs and that when it comes to meeting spaces, some

Because space is becoming increasingly expensive, rooms need to be multifunctional, Munger adds. “Separate multifunctional spaces are created where team members can meet and share

flexible in designing their spaces and allowing people to work how and where they want to. Zoe van Tonder from BCS Intelligent Workspace adds, “Office designs and architectural buildings have

have seen a huge change in people’s behaviour, due to the roles that technology and the economy have played. Offices need to meet the demands of our changing work-life balance needs.



Boardroom by Time&Space Design.



A relaxed office environment by Time&Space Design.

It’s important to have a balanced lifestyle and this should be reflected in the office environment,” Edwards adds.

INTERIOR SHIFT

Offices’ interior design and furnishings have started to reflect these changes in attitude towards work-life balance. “The workplace is now governed by the worker. It is all about attracting workers so that they want to go to work in their office,” Trim explains.

Munger notes that functional furniture with simple lines and basic finishes is becoming more prevalent in offices. “There is a move towards the use of greener finishes from sustainable sources. Furniture is functional in that the form is dictated by the function and not the other way around, as seen in the past.” This emphasises how the lines between the workplace, the living space and the entertainment area have blurred, she adds.

Edwards points out that what we are seeing in modern design is a more streamlined approach, reflecting a need for speed. “Offices are becoming more modern and are simple, clean and fresh-looking. But the main factor

is that office spaces are being designed these days to increase productivity and efficiency.”

SUSTAINABILITY AND INNOVATION

Trim says one of her favourite projects was a refurbishment for Accenture because it changed the way that team works. “We were able to accommodate more than 100 extra people and give them spaces they never had before, including innovative meeting facilities and telephone booths.” The latter are among the most innovative designs her group has produced, because they give employees a place in which to conduct private phone conversations as well as a quiet space to tuck themselves into when they need to concentrate. “People know that once you’re inside the telephone booth, you can’t be disturbed, whereas if you’re in an office, people feel they can walk in at any time.”

Innovation can also be seen in sustainable design – if modern buildings are any colour, it’s ‘green’. “Green is playing a huge role, and I believe that buildings cannot be built without having green elements in mind. Green



Giant Leap focuses on functional workspaces.



An office space, by Giant Leap, shows how open plan is utilised.

A boardroom by Giant Leap.



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is paramount and it challenges me as a consumer as well as a designer," Joubert says. She adds that as people become more aware of green issues, so the role it plays in office design gets bigger.

Since the launch of the Green Building Council of South Africa in 2007, 23 certified green buildings have been built in South Africa and another 34 green-building projects are under way, with companies such as Alexander Forbes, Nedbank, with its Menlyn Maine development, and Absa,

with its Absa Towers West development, leading the charge.

"Green plays a huge role and is important to roll out with all new office designs. It is becoming more and more prominent in office furniture and is definitely an element that should be considered," Trim says.

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

Mobile technology means employees can do their jobs from just about anywhere, so the need for a fixed base from which to work has been diminished. Munger

says, "All of our life spaces have become more flexible and more comfortable. Simplicity is key. As long as we have what we need to perform our function, we are happy. This often means that we do not require an office in the traditional sense, hence the breaking of the design rules."

Trim says that employees are being given a very small space that "belongs" to them while all other internal functions are being performed in shared spaces. "Due to the cost of space, office sizes have become smaller. This is also

apparent in executive offices, where the need for large spaces no longer stands to reason."

Edwards points out that as they keep up with technology, companies are working harder, faster and smarter, and thus are finding it more important to be in touch with their teams. This explains the need for open-plan offices. She adds, "It's also important for the employer to have happy employees, and thus the office needs to suit the needs of the employees and their unique job functions." ❖

the executive seventh floor. The finishes reflect the layering of time the company has operated in the financial services sector. The spacious volumes were also designed to show off the significant art collection that the company has gathered over the last 78 years. Fraser explains that the executive and client interface areas have similar finishes in that they have a warm tactility and draw their references from nature. "This has resulted in more open planning and, in this case, more space per office worker than was originally anticipated. Companies often talk about an open office culture, but this actual office design reflects implementation." Alexander Forbes chose a furniture fit-out that challenges traditional perceptions of the financial services sector, says Fraser. The furniture is sophisticated, to inspire clients' confidence in the firm,

yet at the same time it reflects a certain playfulness – the couches are colourful, Tom Dixon lights add style, and technical details, such as the portal junctions, add elegance to the space. Alexander Forbes was committed to creating a work environment that its employees would enjoy working in; as such, the new head office features light, bright and colourful pause areas. Sustainability and innovation were also essential to the design brief. Fraser says, "Green design will eventually become the norm in designing buildings. However, in this project it was manifest in a number of areas, including energy consumption, recycling and lifestyle, matter choice and product specification." The green elements of 115 West Street include low-energy motion-sensitive lighting that turns off automatically when not in use. Waste bins are placed only at pause stations for organic-

115 WEST STREET, SANDTON – A VERY NICE PLACE TO WORK



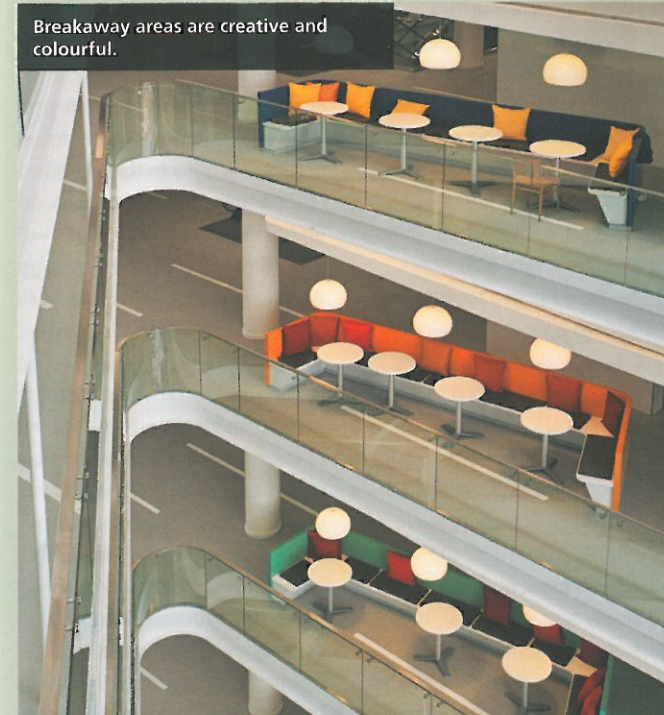
An bird's eye view of the reception area at 115 West Street.



Areas for employees are spacious and comfortable.

One of the most recent examples of modern office design is the new Alexander Forbes headquarters at 115 West Street, Sandton. The building was recently awarded a Four-Star Green Star Rating from the Green Building Council of South Africa and includes a grey-water reticulation system, passive heating and cooling systems, and sustainable systems for trapping and dispersing light and, in turn, saving on electricity.

"Interior architecture is an area that strongly reflects the ethos of a company, especially in new architectural work," Hugh Fraser from Paragon Group explains. "The CEO of Alexander Forbes, Edward Kieswetter, was keen for the building to reflect the transparent character of their company." With this in mind, Paragon Architects ensured that the light and flowing volumes of the six lower office levels continue seamlessly onto



Breakaway areas are creative and colourful.



Colour and light are utilised in employees' breakaway areas.



Open plan is a very big part of the new building.



The reception area in Alexander Forbes headquarters in Sandton.



The design of the interiors is warm, drawing elements from nature.

waste recycling, and print stations encourage paper recycling. "In products specification, bamboo was specified extensively as a renewable material, and low-VOC paint was used widely in the interiors," Fraser says. Paragon Interface, the group's interior architecture and space-planning division, took its inspiration for the Alexander Forbes building from a number of sources. Fraser says they looked at building on Frank Lloyd Wright's ideas for the Johnson Wax Factory

of 1938, which incorporated an egalitarian approach to office space. They also looked to the interiors of Macquarie Bank, in Sydney, which incorporates the bank's security and technology needs. The Paragon Interface team, headed by Marilize van Dyk, were also inspired by the Hermès store in Paris: "Formerly a swimming pool, the space has been reinterpreted using warm materials and exploiting computer modelling to generate intriguing forms to occupy the space," Fraser says.