

INTERIOR DESIGN YEARBOOK 2017



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Trend: Office design

By Nick Stringer
Co-Founder, **Shed**

Shed are a group of award winning interior designers and architects who've been designing and delivering environments for some of the world's leading companies since 2000. The team includes straight talking, smart thinking creatives who work across residential and commercial markets, specialising in branded interior design. Above all, they focus on originality and innovation in everything they do. Shed are passionate about the creative process and love to make things happen. Most recently, they have completed Level Shoes Men in Dubai, ISSA womenswear in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, MEAT Liquor restaurants in Singapore, Brighton, Leeds, Bristol and Islington as well as Hotbox restaurant and 46&Mercy bar in Spitalfields. Here, Nick embraces the cross-over in office design trends, from hotels, to home offices and back again.

The most common client request for commercial office design we get is 'we want it to look like Soho House!' That's sometimes without an understanding of the careful process involved to create the comfortable and casual look and feel.

Another request is 'it can't feel like an office'. So anything but the dullness of basic carpet tiles, fluorescent luminaires and white walls. Clients want somewhere their employees feel proud to work. Potential employees can now sometimes view their potential workspace on a design blog, and this can be a draw. Clients want to reflect recent moves towards collaborative spaces. Also to update finishes to be more contemporary. Office



Above: KUDOS productions



Above: Angel square project

design refurbishment cycles average around seven years. We have been a constant part of one of our client's stories; Freuds, designing their first, second and third offices all seven years apart. Clients are now seeing more of a value in interior designers compared to architects in this field. Projects require a thorough understanding of interior spaces as well as finishes, fabrics, furniture and colour. Suppliers are embracing customisation, which is now making everything more individual without prohibitive costs. I'm taking advantage of recent launches such as Bolon By You, custom wallpapers by Milton & King and custom printed fabrics by Creation Baumann. In terms of FF&E there's a lot of high quality affordable furniture and lighting coming from the

young Danish companies, a movement surely started by Hay, and continued by &tradition and Menu. These brands represent a clean style that is still fun and relevant, which fits neatly into many of our design projects. The Hay New Order shelving system for example is being used in lots of office projects right now, and for good reason, with its simple good looks, contemporary finishes and modularity. We like to take materials and finishes out of context to create something new. For our recent Angel Square project for The Office Group, we used an industrial resin coating from Altro on floors and walls, in a seamless 'tray' design, giving a hard wearing finish in our unique colour mix. After 30 samples (each composed of three colours of paint flake), we settled on

pastel pinks and mid blues, which really pop against the 'typical office' white walls. It shouldn't be necessary anymore to plaster the interior of an office with corporate identities and brand colours. It's far more important to convey the attitude and culture, with a deeper understanding of how the organisation works and who they want to be. This is innovation in this sector and it continues apace, with clients understanding developing as they come to embrace a different sense of identity. Some suggestions for clients at the beginning of an office reinvention would be to involve staff, but not too much! Everyone will have their own ideas but it's essential to entrust the interior designer with overall responsibility, otherwise the final

NICK STRINGER

scheme will not make sense. Dedicate some resource to improving lighting, especially in public spaces. Focus on the lighting effect not just the light fitting. Some pretty pendants actually give off hardly any light. A selection of wall lights and spotlights on dimmer switches will always provide great value. For other designers, I'd say spend some time within the clients' organisation and observe how they currently work. What are the patterns and habits, and where are the opportunities for improvement? The challenge is to balance the current trend for extreme openness and freedom with an individual desire for quiet time and private space. The solution is to include work zones at different paces, heights and levels of privacy. Some of the nicest small offices are essentially apartments with desks; every sector is inspired by another. There is a blurring of the lines here. Offices are designed to feel residential,

residences are designed to feel like hotels and hotel lobbies are now co-working spaces. This generates a wider spectrum of feelings inside interiors. Perhaps this is why we at Shed like to design projects in all sectors. An office design might include a bar and banquette seating, for which we draw on our experience designing restaurants and bars. For Kudos television production studio, the producers were always out and about, away from the office. We then designed their office as a home-from-home to balance this, with patterned kilim rugs and reclaimed 19th century maple flooring running throughout. The most interesting office spaces seem to be made by people who aren't 'office designers'. Likewise, the most interesting furniture for offices is not made by 'office furniture' suppliers.

For 2017 we are seeing a move away from gimmicks. With Google as the poster-child, the slides (used in the likes of high-

tech companies and start ups) and bright colours of the previous few years already feel dated. Natural, tactile textures will permeate across office design. This works with a further casualisation of the workplace, moving away from stiff formal spaces, as is happening in the restaurant industry. Interior planting will go to the next level. In the past there may have been one or two plants in the corner but we will start to see lush jungle scenes. These will be best maintained by external specialists. Planting is particularly beneficial to office spaces, as interest in air quality increases. Co-working will continue to rise, with spaces popping up everywhere. The ones that thrive will be those with a community, which give freelancers and start ups a reason to leave their bedroom, to be part of something bigger than themselves.

www.shed-design.com



Above: KUDOS productions