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© OVERTIME...

**NEW  
OFFICE  
DESIGN**

Work. The very thought of it evokes sweat, routine, labour. As ever greater portions of the world's population move into urban centres, the number of people who perform physical labour in exchange for monetary reward drops. Most of us work in comfortable, climate-controlled environments; in fact, more and more of us can work virtually anywhere, as long as we have a decent hand-held device and good WiFi. Yet the notion that work is something unpleasant, something to be endured, still lingers. That workaholics are people to be pitied. And that if the workplace was such a cool space to hang out in, well, no one would need to be paid to do their job – they would just volunteer their time.

Therein lies the rub. While naturally there are many office environments that really do seem like work if any length of time were spent within them, successful companies that value highly skilled employees understand that recruiting and retaining them is paramount to continued success. These companies invest in facilities that people want to work in. They hire specialists to delve into workplace strategies and how to best foster an environment that reflects their corporate culture – and corporate aspirations. They hire interior designers to not only plan spaces efficiently but also to carve out volumes and bring them to life with colour, materials, lighting and art, inspiring and instilling pride in the people who work there.

Work spaces may not be as sexy as hotels or restaurants – although some may argue that they are catching up fast – but for a group of people from diverse backgrounds to spend the greater part of their waking hours together, being productive towards a common goal, sexy isn't really a top priority. Despite the significant changes in office interiors, what hasn't changed over the years is the fact that well-designed offices still reflect the company's personality. The lavish corner offices with built-in bars seen in *Mad Men* allude to the heady days in the 60s when advertising first impacted spending habits. Compare them with the tasteful yet much more restrained offices of Lockhart Gardner in *The Good Wife*, where the law firm's insolvency, which entailed the occupants' giving up one of their two levels, became the driving force for the characters' shenanigans for a whole viewing season. All of the bugbears that managers and staff have always worried about still exist: privacy, confidentiality, conferencing, adjacencies, image, branding, front of house, back of house, technology and storage. Today, though, there is more of an emphasis on accountability and transparency – and that is reflected in offices that are, quite literally, free of walls or demarcation.

The open office environment suits millennials just fine. This group of 20-somethings, freshly graduated and embarking upon their first jobs, don't know a way of working that didn't involve keying or typing. The cream of their crop is whom blue-chip info tech or R&D companies try to recruit and, along with a hefty signing bonus, they are promised a

hip, urban environment where they can lounge, shoot pool or confer over cold-pressed juice. Millennials like to know what's going on; they don't mind doing everything themselves, and everything at the same time, and there are no boundaries between working and playing, as they are always online and in touch. Their increasing numbers in the workplace mean industries where they dominate are being designed to resemble sophisticated frat houses. Dedicated desks and workstations are getting smaller and smaller, while common areas such as lounges, pantries, cafes and perks such as pool tables, gyms and napping nooks are getting more real estate. With server and cloud capacities exponentially increased, files are more likely to be stored only digitally in some industries, reducing the need for hard-copy storage. While server rooms remain more or less the same size, the equipment within them is faster and more robust.

Reception and waiting areas used to be where all the money was poured, as these zones embody the image that the business wishes to project to its visitors and clients. While that is still the case in some industries – and there are plenty of reception areas with enough bling to rival Versailles – it is no longer the norm to even have a reception in others. Some firms such as publishers or e-commerce companies have done away with not only with the space previously dedicated to a reception area, but also the very position of receptionist. Other companies prefer a more informal waiting area, and have combined it with staff lounges, pantries and casual meeting tables and chairs. As employees typically don't enjoy privacy at their desks, the 'front of house' is often where privacy nooks in the form of booths for concentrated work or for confidential phone calls are found. In the contemporary office, even the front of house/back of house boundaries are blurred, as companies with flatter organisational charts allow staff to indulge in real estate with views from every inch of the space. Indeed, workspaces are becoming more like an extension of the residence; it is also not surprising that the home-office as the primary place for business is becoming more common globally. And with the games, toys and gadgets installed in some corporate spaces, no wonder employees are signing up to do overtime.

In the following pages, we explore offices from near and far, places large and small, grand and modest, across many different types of industries. They are all reflections of the businesses they house; some are in remarkable, even heritage buildings, while others are in nondescript towers of glass. Together, they show that the corporate world is a dynamic, exciting place to be in, even as the spaces' designers attempt to keep up with how fast business is changing. We also chat with some of the city's leading experts in workplace interiors, to get their perspective on how things have developed locally, within China and around the world – and how their designs have evolved with the times. The projects here illustrate that the office design discipline is one that will continue to break new ground for a long time to come.





# Bank of Pisa and Fornacette

## Fornacette

### Massimo Mariani

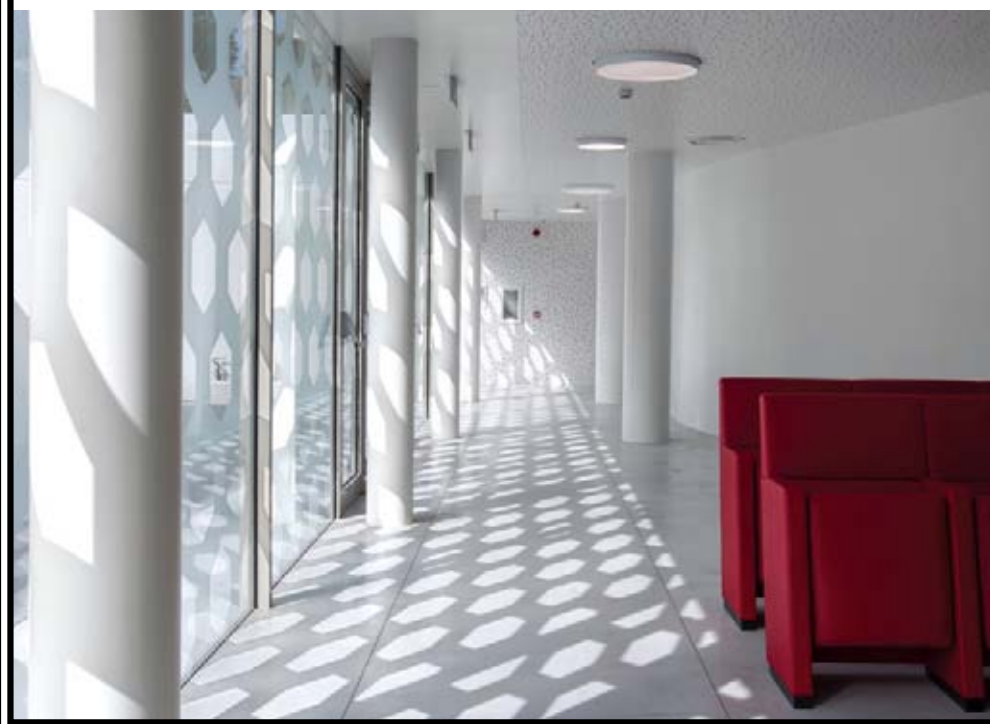
Photography by Alessandro Ciampi

Built adjacent to a twenty-year-old building by the same architect, and in order to accommodate the bank's expansion, this new structure offers 4,500sq m over three floors plus a basement, with offices upstairs and, below grade, an auditorium for 300, plus a gallery for exhibitions. The building's external articulation suggests a metallic monolith cut open on three sides by small apertures. The shape of the mass is consistent, sitting heavily on its ground plane like an armoured panettone cake box, bending symmetrically at the corners toward the diagonal. It is a curious shape, but accomplishes the goal of making a memorable image, particularly when clad so defensively. The gilded metal panels drive home the idea that a bank protects precious financial assets; the fortified aspect may not be subtle, but it is logical.

What is surprising is how lively and cheerful the interiors are. The variously toned glass windows are almost playful, and bring plenty of filtered daylight inside, where adventuresome furniture plays along, too. The interior character of the bank is set by two generous

courtyard spaces that many of the windows look onto. These open spaces feature tall, vertical gardens and are of a medium scale that promotes views across while pouring natural light into the work areas. Even the basement, which houses primary programmatic functions, enjoys natural light through an adjacent sunken parking area to the west.

Mariani has sprinkled throughout the plan a collection of small public nodes marked by colourful furnishings, feature walls or artwork. These act as easy conversation areas, breakout spaces or nooks to concentrate on something or pull aside a colleague for a chat. They tend to lighten the overall mood of the institution, borrowing a page from the startup culture of recent office design, though perhaps with a touch more specific composition involved here. These touches also make one consider the exteriors in a second reading: is this metallic armadillo bunkered down in defence against a harsh world, or is this rather a post-modernist plaything; a box of bright trinkets very little like what we expect of 'financial institutions'?



# Blueprint

## Hong Kong

### PDM International

With a client as established as Swire Properties, one of Hong Kong's premier landlords and the creator of the whole Taikoo Place business zone, the stakes for designing this new incubator and tech co-working space were high. The Blueprint concept is to provide an innovative working environment useable by tech startup companies establishing their foothold in the local scene. Each tenant signs on for a six-month programme within the two half-floors of Cornwall House. The building is already a kind of rejuvenated entity; Swire successfully refurbished and leased the older components of the Taikoo area years ago, and has long attracted creative industries among its stellar tenant list. So the industrial attributes of the raw space worked in its favour. To keep things along the right track, Swire was very clear in asking the designers to deliver a fun workspace, an "oasis from the surrounding corporate office environment". In more specific terms, this meant highlighting flexibility, transparency and privacy without walls.

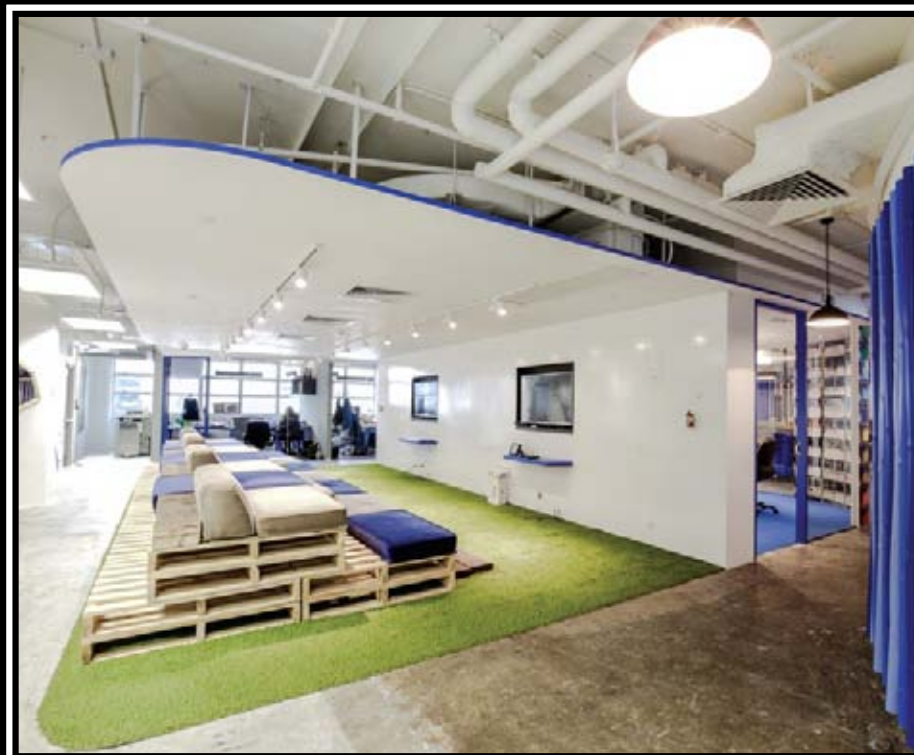
By now, the startup and incubator culture has established its own formal language the world over, and Blueprint hews to it, more or less. The kinds of people who work in these spaces tend to be young, demanding, open-minded, environment-conscious, and in need of 24/7 access. Recycled elements were incorporated, including diverse 'souvenirs' of some of Swire's own brands, such as Coca Cola, Cathay Pacific Airways and so forth. However, these weren't rammed in with a hamfist; they appear as whimsical moments scattered around the 20,000sq ft of space. Reclaimed timber becomes tabletops and doors. A recycled shipping container becomes a meeting room. Recycled bamboo scaffolding – painted namesake blue – becomes screen walls to divide spatial areas. Phone booths sport doors from

Cathay airliners. Tabletops are made of repurposed Coca Cola material. Even some of the lighting fixtures are reclaimed from old building sites owned by Swire. PDM had fun scanning the 'archives' of their client's considerable legacy to find old spare parts and discarded detritus, then imagining what it could become at Blueprint.

To take the archival theme further, even elements of the story of this specific project made their way into the final design. Or should we more accurately say, remained in the space. The plans and architectural documents that PDM produced for the space, as well as floor set-out markings were left visible on the concrete floors. At the entrance door, the project assignment from Swire becomes a sidebar panel to the door. And in a break from Taikoo precedent, a rare outdoor meeting room was added, with fully operable windows, for chats beyond the air-conditioning. In Hong Kong, no less! Wonders never cease.

The colour blue runs lightly throughout, as a subtle brand identifier and unifying string. The quotations from Swire's airline are most regular, with clever uses of hangar doors or airplane wing references eased into the breakout cafe spaces or thresholds between different work zones. All in all, it becomes a little bit like a puzzle game: recognising the various symbols, reused components, and connections to the landlord's long and storied corporate tale. But for most of the occupants, busily toiling away to create their very own new entities, much of this will go right by them. They care more about the ample natural light, the upbeat aesthetic mood, the nooks to sip their coffee in, and the general energy buzz PDM International, and Swire, have so skilfully provided them.







# Learning Centre

Sydney

Hola Projects

Photography by Danny Kildare

Multitasking is clearly one of the traits of the 21st-century office. Millennials who grew up doing a dozen things at the same time bring that talent into the workplace, and, with real estate in urban centres steadily increasing in value, office space also has to do double or triple duty sometimes. Hong Kong-based Hola Projects recently completed the learning-and-conference facility for an international bank in Sydney. Its brief was to design a suite of flexible training rooms that could be used for longer-term functions and sporadic large meetings of up to 150 people, as well as acting as conference overflow for adjacent office areas. The space takes up the western end of a high floor within an office tower and is hampered by deep windowsills, which ate into the square footage. Hola was able to capitalise on that depth while giving the learning centre a breezy, contemporary aesthetic that went with its chameleon-like qualities.

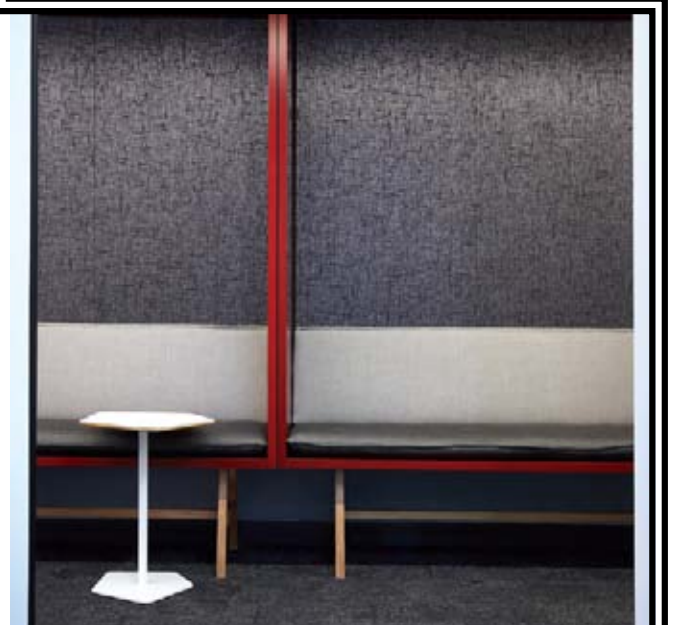
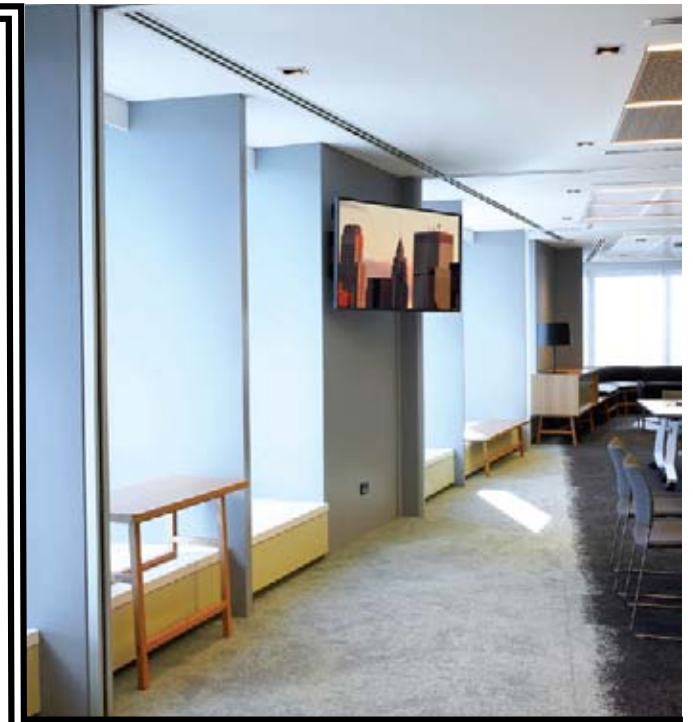
Led by director Chris Lalogiannis, Hola created a gang of five meeting rooms to seat 16 to 18 students, and a lounge separated by adjustable full-height panels. When the panels are completely demounted, the rooms transform into one large space; the rooms can also be configured to assume a variety of sizes in between. Furnishings include tables that can be grouped into a large conference table, a standard classroom, or a U-shaped classroom setting. Each room contains built-in storage and climate control. In addition, three smaller meeting rooms on the south side can double as temporary private offices for visiting staff with non-dedicated workspaces. The lounge on the north side of the site is adjacent to a pantry, which can also work as a standalone kiosk. Rounding out the facilities are three dedicated spaces: one for the bank's

human resources division, another for international workshops conducted via videoconferencing, and a new banking technologies training room.

"The existing tower architecture posed limitations for the ambition of the project, but [those limitations] were quickly turned into advantages," notes Lalogiannis. "By extending the mullion, a brise soleil was created to reduce the need for sun shading. [This] also allowed connections to the operable walls in a seamless way, visually extending the rooms. The deep sills were conquered by custom seating and consoles that allowed the rim of the space to be populated." Hola's selection of furnishings included pieces deliberately chosen for their residential scale and opportunity for colour exploration beyond the conventional greys and blues. Mid-century modern-inspired cabinets and consoles, frequent use of timber, and comfortable, varied seating give the learning centre warmth, along with one or two distinguished pieces of art.

Along the lengthy corridor that links the main training rooms, Hola has created a series of niches that allow trainees to nip out for an urgent phone call, to catch up on their emails, or to engage in a hushed tete-a-tete. The sofas are separated by blocks of red, and dotted with the occasional side table. "The set of nooks allow visual privacy yet maintain a small footprint at the fringe of the primary circulation route," explains Lalogiannis.

For a space intended to be a great many things to a relatively large number of people, it is commendable that Hola Projects was able to imbue it with such a strong sense of personality. Then again, transforming chameleons are always fun to watch.





## Workplaces: Global With Moira Moser Founder and Chairman, M Moser Associates



Originally from California, FAIA architect Moira Moser founded M Moser Associates in 1981 with three people in Hong Kong. Today, the firm has 15 offices around the world and employs 750 people. Throughout her firm's 34 years, the focus has been on adopting a design-and-construct approach. The practice specialises in facilities for 'knowledge-workers', as in corporate interiors, labs, R&D, and private hospitals. "We engineer and build what we design – and take responsibility for the total project," says Moser. "Clients who are focused on the end result rather than the process really appreciate that. They don't want to deal with different parties. There is no 'us and them'; we're all one team. We have evidence that our approach saves money for our clients and time on the project. And we ensure the quality. We are passionate about helping the entire industry move this way."

The firm's expansion has been organic; as its clients grew and opened branch offices in major urban centres, M Moser grew with them. With its 'workplace strategy' approach, the practice seeks to create an environment that supports a company's effectiveness – which in turn is translated into the client company's interiors. Moser has seen a number of trends impacting how spaces are designed today, with technology being one of the most significant influencers.

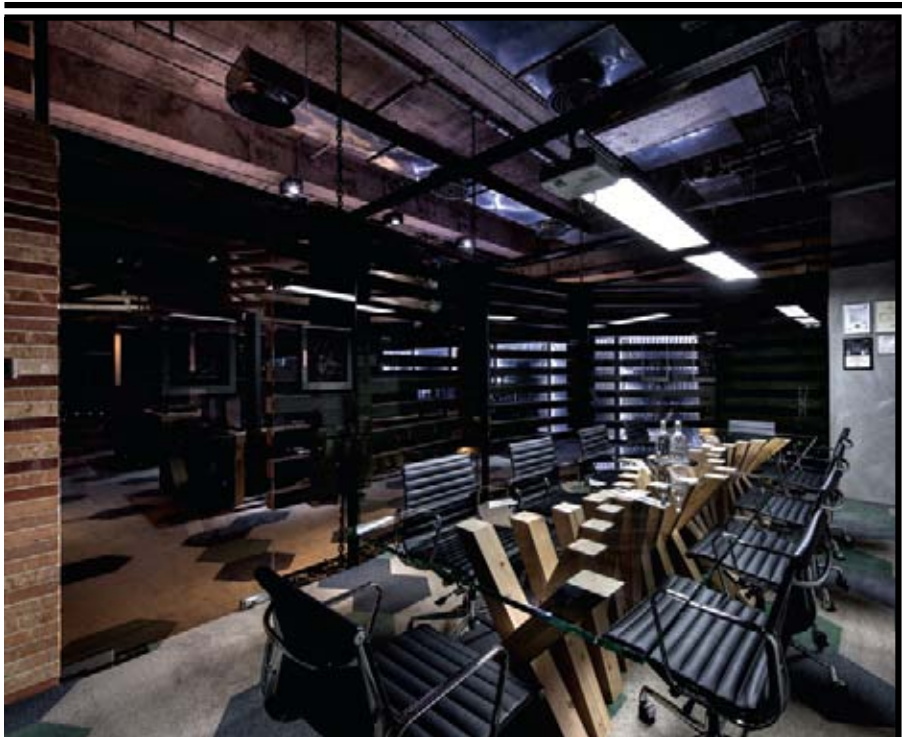
"It has allowed a greater freedom of movement. People can work from home, in a coffee shop or any part of the office. At our office, we're set up so that some colleagues don't have dedicated stations and sit in the group they are collaborating with at the time. Remember adjacencies? They take on an entirely different meaning if this department no longer has to be beside that department. Activity-based workplace (ABW) supports various ways of working – teams, individuals, informal groups. The old standard rows of cubicles don't work anymore.

"Millennials are key drivers of change. The majority of people working in their 20s and 30s grew up with technology and multitasking. They want a flexible environment with choice and some of their lifestyle at work. Breakout spaces are informal, where they can work if they like, or talk about projects.

"Repurposing is another trend we are seeing. Our office, for example, was formerly an industrial space. This is happening in the US, China and Hong Kong. Tencent Guangzhou is a great example. Repurposing leads to greater consideration of sustainability as spaces are modified for new uses.

"We have been a LEED Proven Provider and leader in China. Now, we have Asia's first Well-authorized person on board: Dr Christine Bruckner. The Well approach is concerned with supporting the health and wellness of occupants: for example, monitoring carbon dioxide and monoxide levels and the toxic chemicals in the air. It's beyond just the physical space; it's a combination of chemistry and an extension of ergonomics and activity.

"While branding has become more global, graphics and artwork references are local. In Islamic countries, it's important to have a prayer room in the office. Feng shui is less important in Hong Kong than it used to be a decade ago, and not as important in the rest of the world, but it is still very important to the head of trading in financial institutions here. What's more important is what feng shui is based upon: a healthy environment. For the best use of materials, we look at what that region or country does well. For example, there are levels of sophistication in metal in the US that are not to the same degree in India. We interpret the design so that it can be finished and installed well. Colour is typically a response to climate. In India, they are brighter and more varied than in the UK."





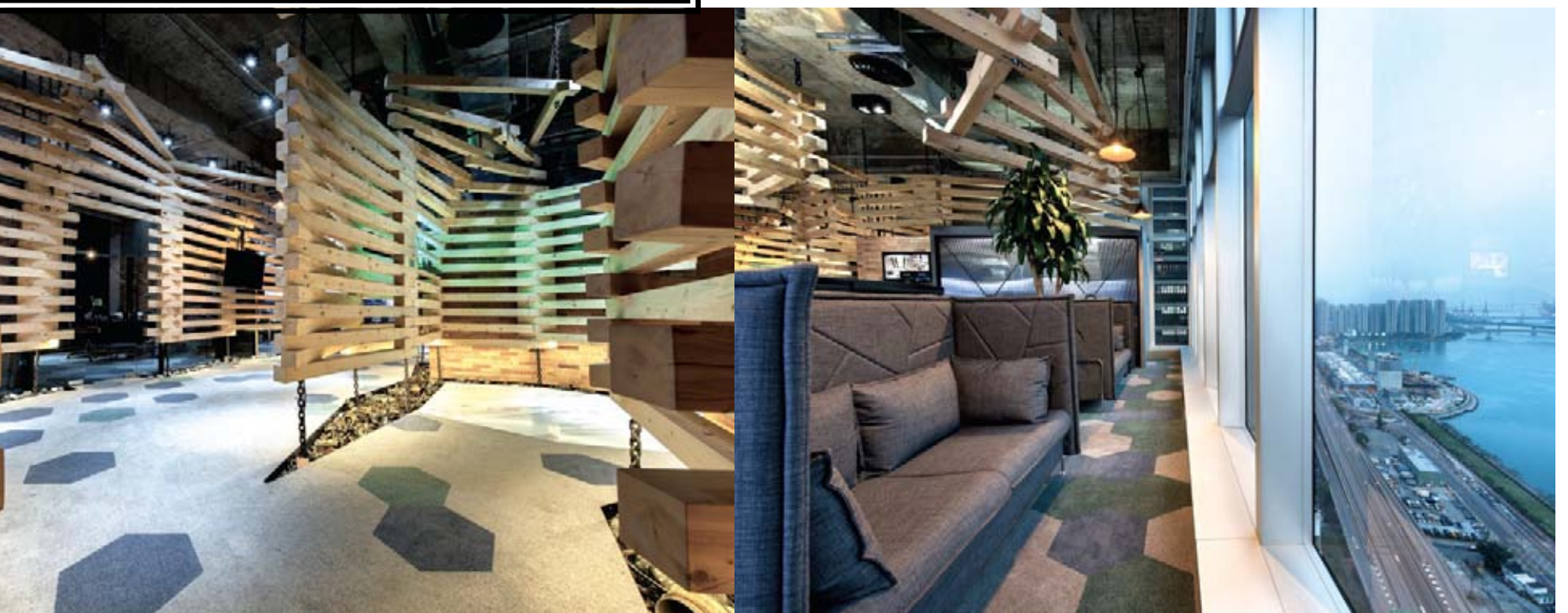
# CNA Metals Group Office

## Hong Kong

### Atelier E

This 2,500sq ft office in a Tsuen Wan tower with sea views plays on the client's core business: recycling. Using reclaimed timber and metal components, Atelier E inserted a kind of slatted 'snake' wall around the space, in turn creating different areas for reception, open office, pantry, meeting and management. Furniture is also formed out of reused materials. The building's own structure and mechanical systems are left exposed, to further the theme. In places, the new carpeting is cut away to allow glimpses of a kind of 'raw' ground plane underneath, which is filled with suggestive metal leftovers. The winding slatted fence is a clever tool; it enlarges the modest overall space by simultaneously subdividing it and allowing visual leakage. You can see glimpses of other spaces, as through a screen, without knowing quite where they end. This allows the office to be understood both as one large space and as numerous smaller spaces. The unstained blond timber of the slats provides a soothing, warm informality to the whole project, even as it 'tidies up' and unifies the inevitable detritus of a small, active business. Other colour tones tend toward dark, which assists in the scaleless reading, and gives the sense of individual pools of work being done quietly. It also allows the harbour views to stand out better.

The theme of 'alchemy' – the making of something precious and powerful out of raw, found metals – gave the designers a potent thematic starting point. They have elaborated on it through to the finished place, from the large-scale planning down to the details and flourishes. CNA Metals Group Office may be something of a one-dimensional story in the end, but in this instance, it works to an advantage, since there is a moral to it, and the tale is well told.





# Red Bull

## New York

### INABA

Photography by Naho Kubota and Greg Irikura

Energy drink giant Red Bull wanted its New York office to be, of all things, laidback. Given that the company is an established sponsor of what is euphemistically referred to as 'extreme sports' (more realistically, 'death-defying stunts'), its attitude toward its premises may seem surprising. But then 'under the radar' has been the Austrian-headed firm's mantra from day one. For its Big Apple branch interiors, it looked to Brooklyn-based INABA to help translate that attitude into 16,800sq ft of offices. Rather than telling a narrative or highlighting other on-trend concepts, however, Jeffrey Inaba trod softly upon Red Bull's two storeys in Manhattan's Chelsea district.

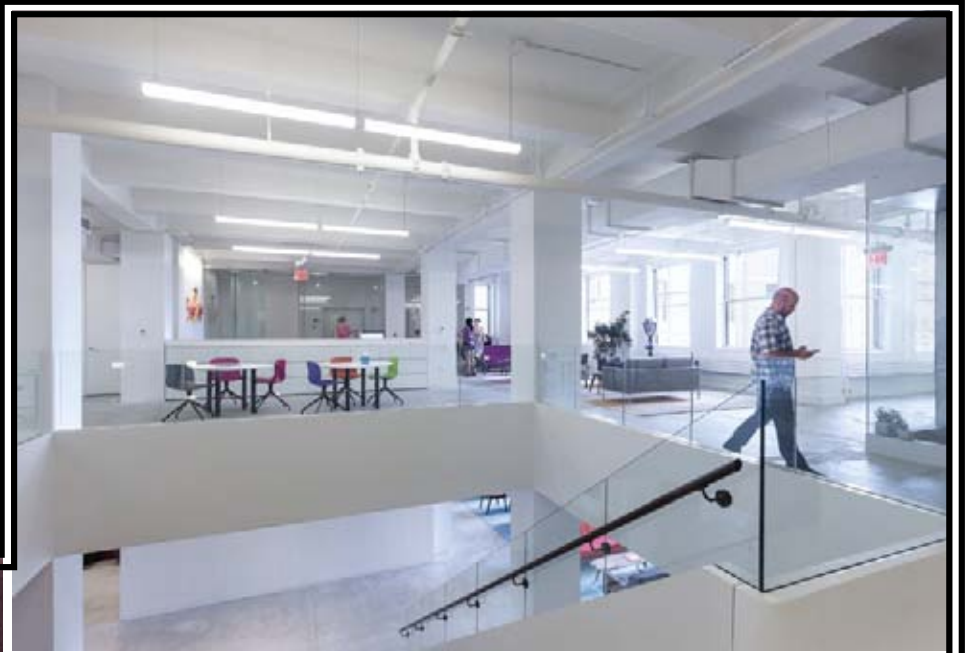
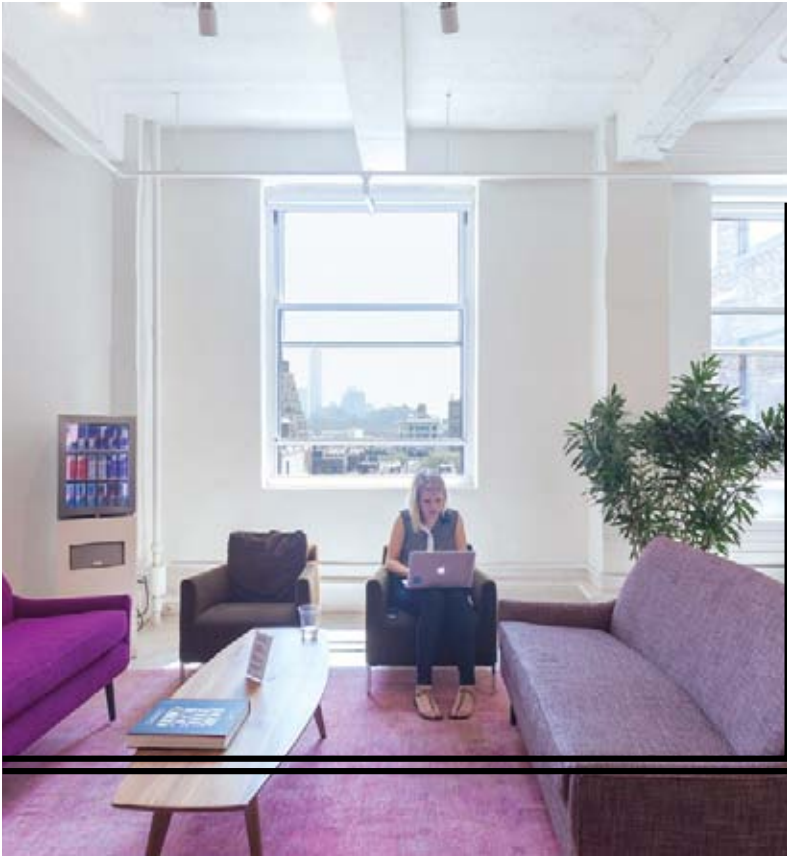
"There isn't a reliance on storytelling or graphic imagery; the space is dialled back to reset the focus of the experience on the basic architectural qualities of scale and light," notes Inaba. "Acknowledging that offices and technology are evolving quickly and the future functions of the work environment are unpredictable, [we] composed a layout of spaces with distinct, fixed features. The three types of spaces are large open zones, medium-sized enclosed areas, and small rooms. They are used now as open office seating,

conference areas, and small meeting/workrooms, respectively. Designed to be unique in size and daylighting and not to any particular functions invites people to invent new uses for them in the future."

INABA treated the space as a big white canvas, which it painted in swathes to represent the three different zones. It then zoomed in on each zone to carve out specific yet flexible functions. Anchoring the sea of space is a wide central staircase that allows long sightlines in all directions as staff ascend or descend. Surrounding the steps are lounge areas with loose furnishings that look like they came from someone's (tasteful) grandparents' estate sale, and open-area benches for dedicated staff occupancy. More formal meeting and conference rooms occupy some corners of the two floorplates, though a few enclosed spaces are merely suggested with a curved full-height wall or a series of glass panels.

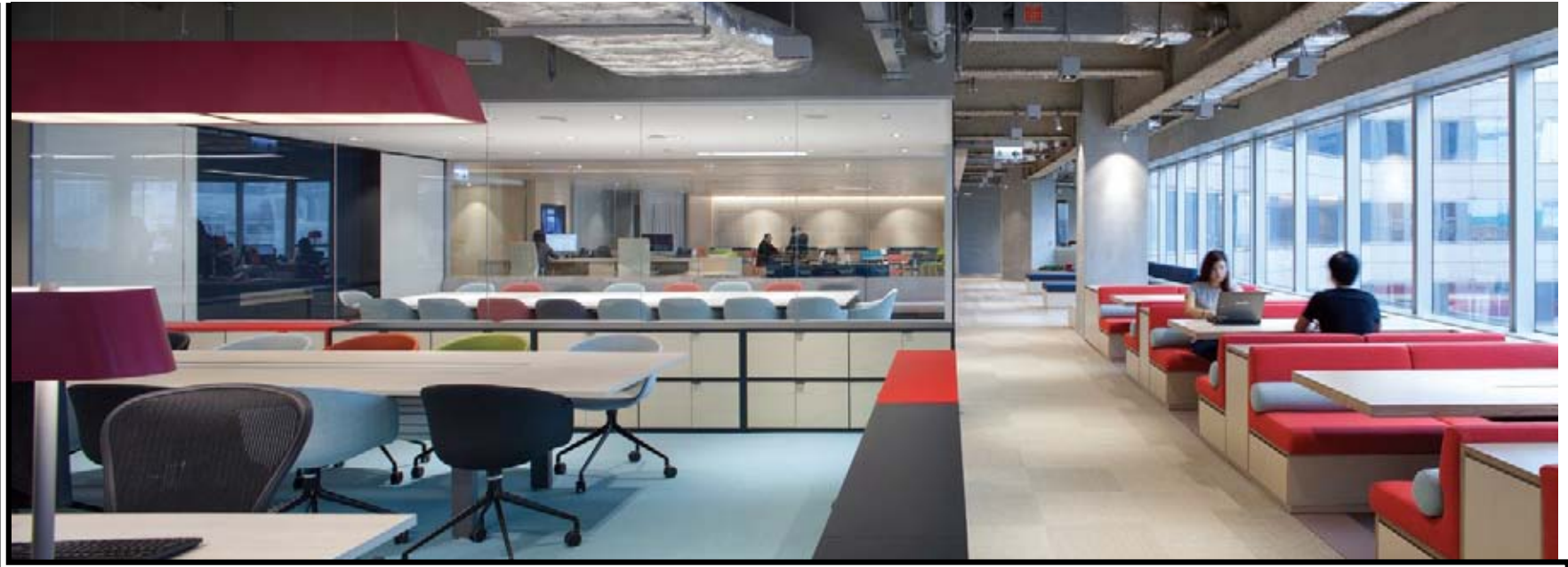
As in an art gallery, all of the architectural components – walls, ceilings, staircase and fixed cabinets – are white, with a light-grey sealed concrete floor. Colour, and quite a bit of it, is inserted through furnishings, area





rugs, the pantry's backsplash and contemporary pieces of art hung here and there. Not a single logo or hint of branding is evident anywhere. Architectural interventions are kept to a minimum, as if Red Bull's occupants and possessions could vanish overnight without a trace – or a section converted into a sublet for, say, an online startup. In keeping the design to the minimum without being minimalist, INABA lets the period building speak volumes and allows daylight to permeate unfiltered, washing over the space's rainbow hues of comforting forms.

At a time when bespoke design has become the new black, INABA's quiet conversion for Red Bull may be the most prudent way to tackle the Big Apple's volatile real estate market without compromising aesthetics. Now that's refreshment worthy of the energy drink's promise.



# Education First Asia HQ

## Hong Kong

### CL3

This new office space on Hong Kong Island, the Asia headquarters of a Swiss company that specialises in English-language travel studies, takes full advantage of its core urban location and sweeping views of Victoria Harbour. Local design firm CL3 Architects, led by William Lim, followed a pair of directives from the client and created a space that is open, flowing, light-drenched and contemporary. There are a few hints of 'young company' culture here, but they are ever so subtle. Mostly the space projects a sense of quiet competence, energetic activity... and success.

The brief demanded open space with no private offices, and CL3 delivered: the space flows from entry through reception area, meeting rooms, a central auditorium, and workstations. Ample use of clear glass helps the sense of continuous flow, of course, as does a practical and cheerful circular zone that can be partitioned with a curtain to serve as an auditorium for up to 100 when needed. With the curtain pulled back it is transformed into a sanguine, casual meeting or work space. Bright-toned cafe-style chairs further enliven the atmosphere, the use of blond timber flooring and ceiling cladding, too, keeps things bright and young in character.

The second item on the brief was something that probably seemed

obvious: exploit those harbour views. It goes together nicely with the open-plan concept, eschewing the age-old practice of reserving prime perimeter views for senior management. Nowadays, the lowliest assistant gets a desk as nice as the CEO's, at least in theory, so the EF offices provide working spots throughout the space, most with unobstructed visual access to the horizon. This isn't just about democracy; by minimising internal partitions, the entire space seems larger and brighter – a definite advantage in a city like Hong Kong, where many offices seem like punishments.

Lighting is still another aspect of this, not surprisingly. Gone are the old-time soffits of blanketed fluorescent glare. At EF, Lim kept the ceiling exposed and dark, to maximise height and tone down the overhead brightness. Pools of lower, desk-level lighting makes up the difference, casting the space in a warmer, more intimate glow. Natural light also does its part. The furniture throughout is top grade, and interjects understated tones of colour in complementary tones of red, grey, black and, sometimes, brighter hues. Vitra, Knoll and Hay are some of the first-class names CL3 convinced the client to spring for, and the results speak for themselves. EF HK is a space any number of companies would envy. Working rarely looked as good.

