

REVEALED!

THE TOP 30 DESIGN STUDIOS IN THE UK, AS JUDGED BY THEIR PEERS

COMPUTER ARTS

DESIGN MATTERS

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IMPROVE YOUR FREELANCE FOCUS

Stay motivated and be more productive



WHY IT PAYS TO STAY SMALL

Our top five studios all have between 10-20 staff - is that the perfect size?

ILLUSTRATE FOR PACKAGING

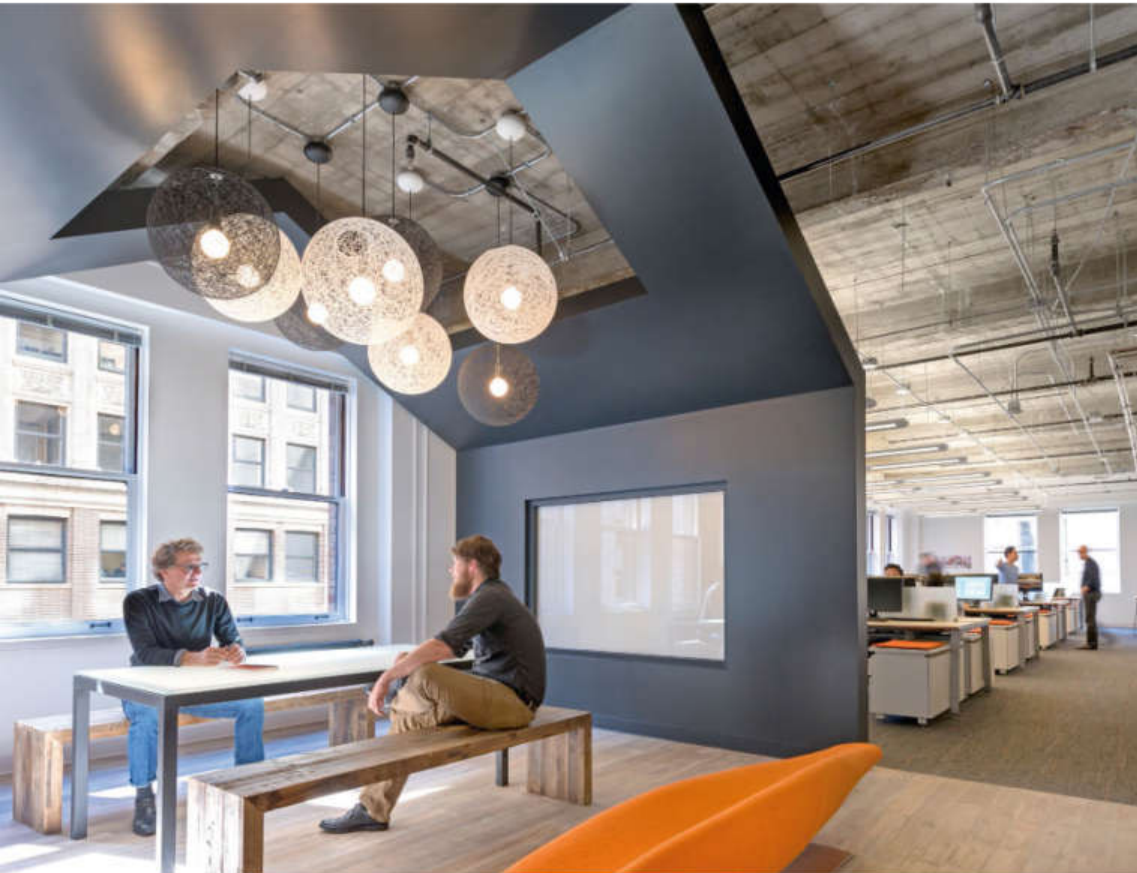
How Martín Azambuja created a series of striking labels for a New York coffee brand

Future

NEED TO KNOW

BUILD A BETTER STUDIO

Great studio spaces shouldn't just house great creative work, says Tom Dennis – they can inspire it too



Google has slides at its Kings Cross offices, while Virgin Money's new digs has a digital sky for a ceiling. These first-impression frivolities might blow most studio refurbishment budgets, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't take inspiration from them. Google's slides are there for reasons far more serious than a fun way of avoiding the stairs.

A well designed, comfortable and enjoyable working environment might take investment, but it's far less costly than having a poorly laid out, glum and grey workspace. Bad studio spaces make employees less productive, less healthy and a heck of a lot less creative. Good studio spaces with ample light, and a comfortable, fun environment produce happier, more productive employees. And investment doesn't mean thousands. By adding often cheap and simple ideas and thinking about the way in which a studio space 'flows', this not only invigorates a workforce, but can even foster greater creativity.

"Environment has just as great an influence on staff productivity and satisfaction as salary does," says Michael D Bonomo, creative director at the world-famous M Moser Associates, who have created workspaces for the biggest global brands around.



Top: Breakout area in Moser Associates' San Francisco offices
Above: TBWA's New York offices; Mother London's concrete desk

“Bad environments actively degrade staff productivity, and wind up being damaging to a company’s reputation – it becomes a ‘bad place’ to work.”

In short, if you want a happy, productive workforce that attracts and keeps talent, then you need to get your house in order.

LET THERE BE LIGHT

Let’s start with some fundamental facts – there’s a direct and positive correlation between natural sunlight, and serotonin and dopamine levels in humans. These are the hormones that make us ‘happy’, by boosting mood and energy levels. If your studio has ample natural light, you can expect your staff to be more energetic, able to focus on tasks for a greater length of time, and generally be happier individuals. If the space in which you’re working has few windows and harsh strip lighting you can expect heightened incidents of eyestrain, headaches, tiredness and low mood – all of which affect morale and productivity. Our eyes have adapted to work with the changing light levels of the day, in contrast to the continuous artificial lighting in offices. If your studio space lacks any decent windows, then seriously consider moving. If you have limited window space, an easy remedy

“MOTHER LONDON’S FAMOUS CONCRETE DESK SEATS 200 AND ENCOURAGES INTERACTIONS AS IT CURVES THROUGHOUT THE BUILDING”

to improving natural light is to rip out any partitions and desk clusters or workstations that surround the windows and ‘open’ the office as much as possible.

SPACE AND BREAK OUT SPACE

One of the truisms of the modern workplace is that the only real reason to be in an office is to interact with others in person. It seems bizarre, then, that many workspaces are designed to lock people into individual work cells; even when at interconnected desks.

If office spaces are now about collaboration and interaction, you need to provide the areas in which people can collaborate and interact.

Breakout areas are one way to promote more productive interactions. They enable people to get away from their inbox for 10 minutes, or for a corridor conversation to segue into a more serious discussion. A sofa and a coffee table in a quiet area of the office is less serious than a meeting

room, and a super-cheap remedy to any restrictive office design.

If you have no option but to bind people to set desks, you have options. TBWA Los Angeles has an office design featuring open-sided ‘pods.’ These aren’t assigned, though, and hang above the main office area offering privacy and a meeting area when needed, and a bustling social area below.

Mother London’s famous concrete desk seats 200 staff, and encourages interactions as it curves throughout the building. And everyone naturally migrates from seat to seat over time.

HAVE FUN AT WORK

A study at the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota found that relaxed and ‘wacky’ offices aid creativity. “The key idea is that a non-conventional office supports non-conventional thinking,” says associate professor of marketing Joe Redden. “One of the challenges in

CREATING A CREATIVE SPACE

MM Moser Associates have created office spaces for the some of the world’s biggest corporations. Creative director Michael D Bonomo explains how

Most clients want flexibility. For our tech, media and edgier clients they are thinking of more flexible solutions that are a ‘kit-of-parts’ which allow the end-user to personally augment how their space feels and functions. For a major client in lower Manhattan, my colleagues and I had the opportunity to develop a space that was literally a three-in-one solution. Within each individual workstation footprint three different style settings could be achieved through various user modifications.

On the flip side, some clients find too-flexible settings are a maintenance headache. For more lively firms we’re providing a range of ‘controlled choice’ elements. While too much flexibility gets juvenile, some key elements can keep the employees excited about their facility, and also keep a light level of continuity and order.

Another rise we’re seeing globally is the significant increase of standing height work. Sit-to-stand adjustable design for work, conferencing at standing height, and highly mobile zones supportive of the onset of the on-demand FaceTime and Skype culture. Take out the ‘No place is sacred’ and all places are ready for a meeting.

When the ‘home office’ is becoming as appealing and more acceptable, the actual workplace must compete. Why go to work if I can work from home on more current personalised tech devices and wear a T-shirt, not a tie? These kinds of questions are what we are up against as design leaders today. Casual areas are a must-have, more and more that is where colleagues connect, eat, build trust and foster culture.

More of our clients are providing special amenities than ever before as a way to keep their teams engaged in and to the workplace and its brand. Fitness rooms, yoga and nap rooms, smart bars, onsite concierges and bike storage are among some elements that 10 years ago we would have chuckled at had we been asked to include them. They’re now expected by the workforce. Why work at tech company A if company B gives you a gym, healthy snacks and a place where you can drop off your dry cleaning?

www.mmoser.com



Left and below: M Moser & Associates' designed offices for McAfee, Bangalore; Hudson Rouge, New York City
Far left: Ogilvy & Mather offices, Tokyo



FIVE SIMPLE WAYS TO ENHANCE YOUR STUDIO ENVIRONMENT

Improving your creative space doesn't have to cost the earth. Try these tips...

Lighting

Harsh strip lighting can be replaced with softer LED lighting, which mimics more closely natural sunlight. Full spectrum desk lamps are available from specialists like www.thenaturallight.com.

Workspaces

Clustering desks into 'teams' is counterintuitive. Instead, giving each staffer a work area which they can modify to their needs helps meetings to actually happen in meeting areas, while work happens in work areas. Modular desks like the ones available from Steelcase.com should do the trick.

Music

Invest in a decent office music system and a streaming service, and let anyone add tracks to an ongoing playlist. Not only does this keep things diplomatic, it also means you're less likely to see individuals hunkered down in headphones isolation.

Plants

Nuke the CO2 in your office by introducing some oxygen-boosting ferns and other greenery that's scientifically proven to boost energy and mood. Pick robust, low-maintenance plants, like a spider plant for instance.

Food and drink

Good coffee and teas, a kitchen area for preparing food and the necessary cutlery and crockery to enjoy it with are an absolute minimum. Informal meetings happen when co-workers stop for a drink, which often inspires more formal and productive ideas and interactions later on.

"A LARGE COMMUNAL TABLE GIVES EVERYONE THE CHANCE TO SIT DOWN TOGETHER FOR A NON-WORK RELATED INTERACTION"

› being creative is to break out beyond the typical way of thinking. A less organised office helps people do this."

So how do you 'un-organise' an office environment to make it more creative? Well, whether that involves adopting a Google-style playground office with slides or simply buying in a pool table, some pot plants and a well-stocked bookshelf - the key is to create a working environment that allows people the space and time not to work.

STAFF WELLNESS...

Creating a work environment that places emphasis on wellness is a cornerstone of a successful working environment. Whether it's yoga and meditation classes at lunch, space where employees can nap, or even bring-your-pet-to-work day, introducing small-time stress relievers can have a significant impact on stress levels and productivity, and encourage a friendly, open and honest mindset amongst employees.

"There's one rule we do enforce," says Bonomo. "No eating at your desk." Why? Well, it keeps things much tidier, and unless you have the luxury of an

office that keeps clients on the other side of the factory floor, then you'll want to present a picture of neatness and calm - not of biscuit crumbs and empty sandwich wrappers. A communal eating area makes implementing this rule easy. Whether you insist everyone lunches together, or simply offer a big table, away from the workspace where workers can chat and eat, a large communal table gives everyone the chance to sit down for a non-work related interaction.

Buying wooden picnic tables, nailing them together and painting them is a cheap and easy way of building office wellness in an instant. Finally, exercise keeps your staff happy and healthy, so why not support - nay, encourage - their participation. This can be as easy as having a bike lock-up on site, or go the whole hog and install a gym, changing rooms and showering facilities. It may seem a costly outlay, but a fit and healthy workforce working in an environment which makes them happy is what will make your business a success. ●

Next month: We explore how design can help build - and rebuild - communities.