Insights:

THE FUTURE OF OFFICE DESIGN
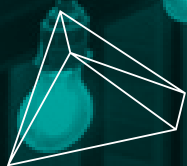
CHAPMAN TAYLOR

OFFICE

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WORKING PRACTICES ARE EVOLVING AT AN UNPRECEDENTED RATE, AND MANY COMPANIES' OFFICE ENVIRONMENTS ARE BARELY RECOGNISABLE COMPARED TO 30 YEARS AGO. OFFICE DEVELOPERS ARE HAVING TO BE VERY RESPONSIVE TO THIS PHENOMENON, AS CLIENT REQUIREMENTS CHANGE CONSTANTLY AND DESIGN BEST PRACTICE CONTINUES TO EVOLVE. IN THIS INSIGHT PAPER, CHAPMAN TAYLOR INTERIORS DIRECTOR **JON GRANT** ANALYSES THE LATEST THINKING ON GOOD OFFICE INTERIOR DESIGN AND LOOKS AHEAD TO WHAT WE CAN EXPECT IN COMING YEARS.

There are a multitude of factors which must be taken into account when thinking about what makes for a successful office design. From the purpose of the space and the nature of the surrounding environment, to the type of people who work there and the ways in which performance and efficiency can be maximised, office design must be multi-dimensional and forward-thinking.

With the rapid pace of change in how we work as individuals and as companies, workplace interiors need to be able to adapt quickly and inexpensively to rapid changes in technology and working practices. Remote video conferencing, email and internet access are enabling remote-working opportunities. Correspondingly the physical office space needs to develop into more of a place that allows people to meet and greet and less of the "workhouse" predominant in the current offer.

Office design will often require a mix of workspaces and types, and a combination of open-plan, semi-private and enclosed spaces can provide choice and flexibility. Layouts might incorporate acoustic pods, breakout areas, lounges, noise-cancelling zones and brainstorming barns instead of expansive swathes of desk bays.

Effective workplace design also makes space for ever-evolving technology, such as Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, LED walls and internal servers, as well as for potential advances such as Li-Fi (using LED light as a vehicle for data). Sensory recognition software - programmes that respond to voice, handwriting, fingerprint and optical input - can all play a role, as can nano-technology and "intelligent" building materials, which notify management when an element is about to fail.

Efficient space planning needs to take place at the very outset, and the more data that can be collected to inform this process, the better. Intelligent analysis of how a space works – where it is busiest, or where it is adds less value, can lead to much-improved return on rental or purchase investment. In addition, collaboration spaces need to be at the heart of the design, allowing for a cross-fertilisation of ideas, skills and knowledge. This collaboration can be between employees of one company, or between multiple institutions sharing one space.

The needs of the people who use the space will be paramount in any good workplace scheme, and those needs will not just be confined to their function as workers – their happiness and their physical and mental health are crucial components of a successful business. There are a number of ways in which the needs of workers can be catered for, some of which are discussed below.

Most importantly, office interior design must be bespoke – suiting the individual context. One size does not fit all, and what is successful for one company might be unsuitable for another. No two projects are the same, even within the same building, the same company or the same industry. We will usually evolve a brief with our client, and this brief will guide how we work; however, there should be no preconceptions about how the brief will be met, or about what the building or space will look like in advance of knowing, in fine detail, everything about the purpose and context.

That's why it is useful to study and understand the latest ideas in workplace design, but to remain open-minded about whether those approaches are suitable for a particular context. The golden rule is to always design specifically for the needs of our client and the end-users according to each specific circumstance.

Below are some of the most pertinent ideas about the future of office interior design:

- **Biophilic design** – creating a more effective working environment and more contentment among workers through the use of natural materials, natural light and extensive use of plants. There is a move towards combining natural materials in new and interesting ways.

- **Third spaces** – using previously wasted space is becoming much more common as digital technology allows us to work from nearly anywhere. These 'third spaces' can be open, semi-open or enclosed, and can be configured in a number of ways. As lettable space costs money, it makes sense to optimise the use of all available space.

- **Wellbeing** – the physical and mental health of workers is crucial to how productive and creative a workforce is. Biophilic design has a role to play here, as does creating a workplace where people are encouraged to move around, yet with designated private spaces to relax and recharge batteries.

- **Mixing uses** – we are increasingly seeing the incorporation of F&B and hospitality spaces into workplaces, creating a more dynamic building and a more attractive environment for those who work there.

- **Fluidity** – the cutting-edge workplace needs to facilitate agility, so that people can move around easily and combine flexibly as required.

- **Made-to-measure** – what's currently trending might not suit your needs; not everyone wants open-plan offices or WeWork-style co-working space, and design must carefully cater to specific requirements in each and every case.

People spend a large portion of their lives in the workplace, and the design of workplace environments has a key role in determining their happiness and productivity. Good office design can play a part in good physical and mental health, aiding creativity and job satisfaction and, ultimately, a company's success. Making an office scheme feel like a home-from-home, providing a comfortable and enjoyable environment, can play a part in this.

Employees are therefore very useful when it comes to workplace design – it makes sense that those who inhabit a space are the most valuable sources of detailed information about what creates the most efficient and dynamic office environment – a form of data-driven design.

It is central to Chapman Taylor's design process that any workplace design is future-proofed and its potential value maximised. Our Interior Design team has a wealth of knowledge and experience in delivering dynamic and complex design solutions, and the resources to implement them. We create bespoke, flexible workspace which can adapt quickly to the rapid pace of change in the sector. Central to the success of any office design is that key principles are followed on any project:

- The specific context informs everything

- We use data-driven design to create the optimal configuration of space for maximising performance and adding value

- It is important to us that our client owns the design

- There is no egotism – our clients' requirements fully shapes our designs

- We are involved from end-to-end, from RIBA Stages 0 to Stage 6 – we are available whenever needed, including post completion.

Chapman Taylor's commercial awareness is second-to-none – we know how to create maximum value in our designs. We have substantial experience across sectors, including workplace, leisure, F&B, hospitality and retail, which proves very useful to developers and owners now that retail, hospitality and F&B provision is becoming increasingly integrated in workplace developments. Whether incorporating other uses into a new-build project, or cutting and carving existing space to add those uses, we are ideally placed to do it.

With a blend of talents available, Chapman Taylor has the creativity and expertise needed to create a cutting-edge workplace environment suitable for the needs of clients and occupants alike.
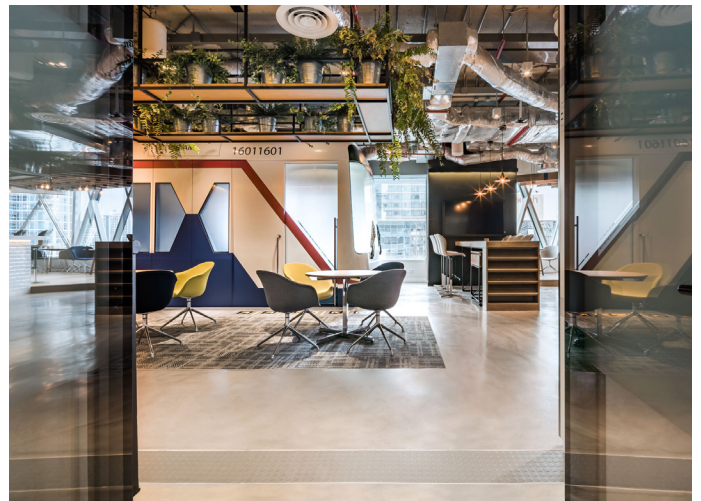
Google Office Expansion

About the author

Joining our London studio in July 2017, Jon has returned to the UK from running our Bangkok studio. When he was in Asia, Jon worked on both Architectural and Interior design commissions across the region in China, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar and Malaysia.

Jon has over 15 years' experience working in Asia with design expertise in high-end interior design projects across the hospitality, F&B, residential and retail sectors.