Moments

#5

The next-generation
workplace

Spacestor

Spacestor Design Centre, Park Ave South, New York

Spacestor

Palisades Grid

A customizable and modular zone divider that gives flexibility to today's hybrid workplace. With design roots in mid-century modernism, Palisades Grid allows for the simple and attractive division of space into zones and neighbourhoods.

Gusto, Dogpatch, San Francisco

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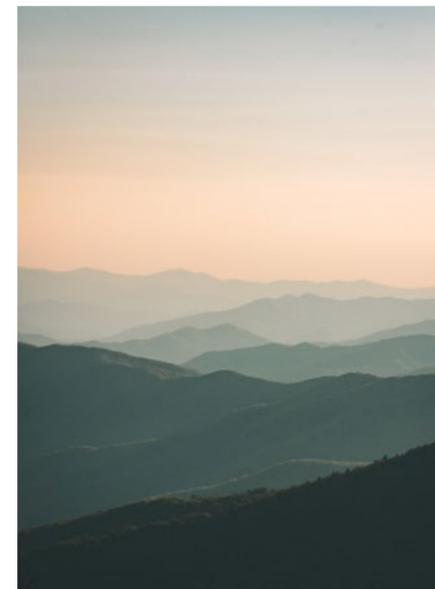
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Editor's Letter

Welcome to Moments, Spacestor's magazine and celebration of great work design.

First off, why is it *Moments* and not *Spaces* this time? Well, simply it puts our own experiences first. Reflecting on past experiences, and designing for moments yet to arrive.

We all work in - and many of us work on - spaces but that's only in view of better human experiences – moments. And we continue to research, imagine, design and think about the very best work settings where those moments happen.

There are a few stand-out features we touch on in this issue, features we see as key to redesigning our workspaces, work weeks and experiences.

More than ever before, respect for individual needs is to the fore: designing and considering for every one as an individual, not as lost in a corporate mass. This means new levels of thinking around features we make available in our buildings, spaces and settings.

In particular, inclusivity is at long last gaining its true place – and we mean genuine inclusivity that brings and keeps everyone together, rather than spotlighting special and different provisions.

Digital equity is one of these individual considerations. Both in wholly distributed work but even more critically, in any hybrid models that may be adopted. Simply, the opportunity to show up on screen and be heard with equal presence and voice – the same equity in the meeting – as everyone else. The force of this of course, is that employers can only give and guarantee an experience where they control the location - that is within the workspace.

Sustainability and wellness is rightly recognised; our whole responsibility in both care for our environment and resources, and human wellness, which drives utilizing, and where necessary, locating healthy alternatives to suboptimal materials.

Another theme is providing a variety of settings for everyone's own needs – that isn't just for the work type but for our own personal programming and preferences. And those can vary at different times too. Whether quiet focused work, a more sociable café-style buzz, or collaborative spaces that facilitate quick, even ad-hoc meetings and check-ins. Allied to the provision of settings, we see less hard edges and corporate palettes, and more warm colours and finishes taking their place for a visual cue to welcome and reassure.

But the biggest single need we hear is flexibility. Flexibility has shades of meaning, whether it's user edits of a space during the day, or whole floorplates intentionally planned so they can be adapted to the unknowns that the future still holds for us. So in this edition we visit ways in which flexibility, and layers of flexibility, can be designed in.

A special thank you to all our contributors, and our panelists on our Insights Live panels, for sharing their methods, issues and solutions to all these and many more questions. We are grateful to be able to share these and warmly welcome thought leadership contributions on all aspects of the workspace experience.

Grab a coffee, or whatever suits you right now, and enjoy the Moments!

Nic Baxter
VP Global Research & Insights, Spacestor

2020 was a year like no other, and COVID-19 has changed how we'll look at work and the workplace going forward. However, it hasn't so much prompted new trends as **accelerated existing ones.** The pandemic has highlighted just how important it is to have a modern and agile workplace in today's fast-changing world.

The future of work is flexible, and so is the future of the workplace.

In this edition of Moments, we explore three leading trends shaping the future of workplace design.
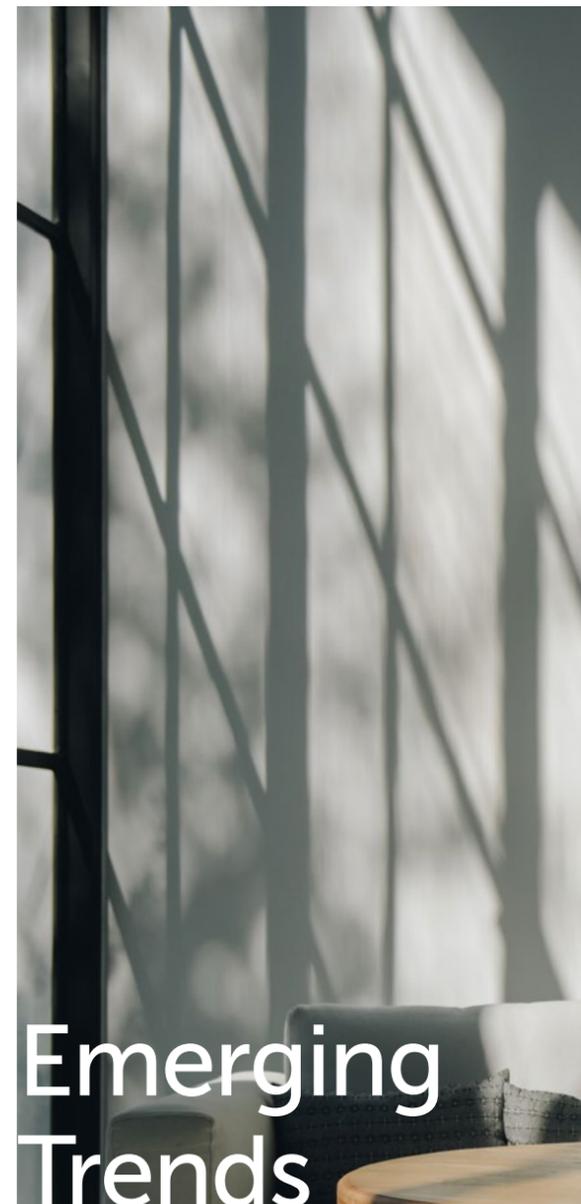
Emerging Trends

Flexibility

The future of the office is definitely changing. The move towards greater flexibility provides a platform for experimentation. At the moment, nobody has all the answers for what the next era of the workplace might look like, so having a flexible base will accommodate **an imminent period of experimentation and discovery**, in which the future of the workspace will evolve as a reflection of changing human need. We should think of the workplace as not just a building, but a dynamic piece of architecture; a diverse, inclusive, flowing, imaginative space able to reform and mold itself to the brand's identity - its people.

Inclusivity

True inclusivity is a matter of effective leadership and an organization having a true culture of inclusivity and diversity. **It is about caring for everyone;** being open to change and accommodating a wider range of workforce, offering them a choice of technological solutions and platforms, and also flexible working conditions. A brand with inclusive policies woven into its identity needs to reflect this through inclusive design. Design that can help everyone personalize their workplaces, feel a greater sense of belonging, and experience optimum comfort, thereby reducing everyday frustration and effort, and hence increasing mental well-being and productivity.
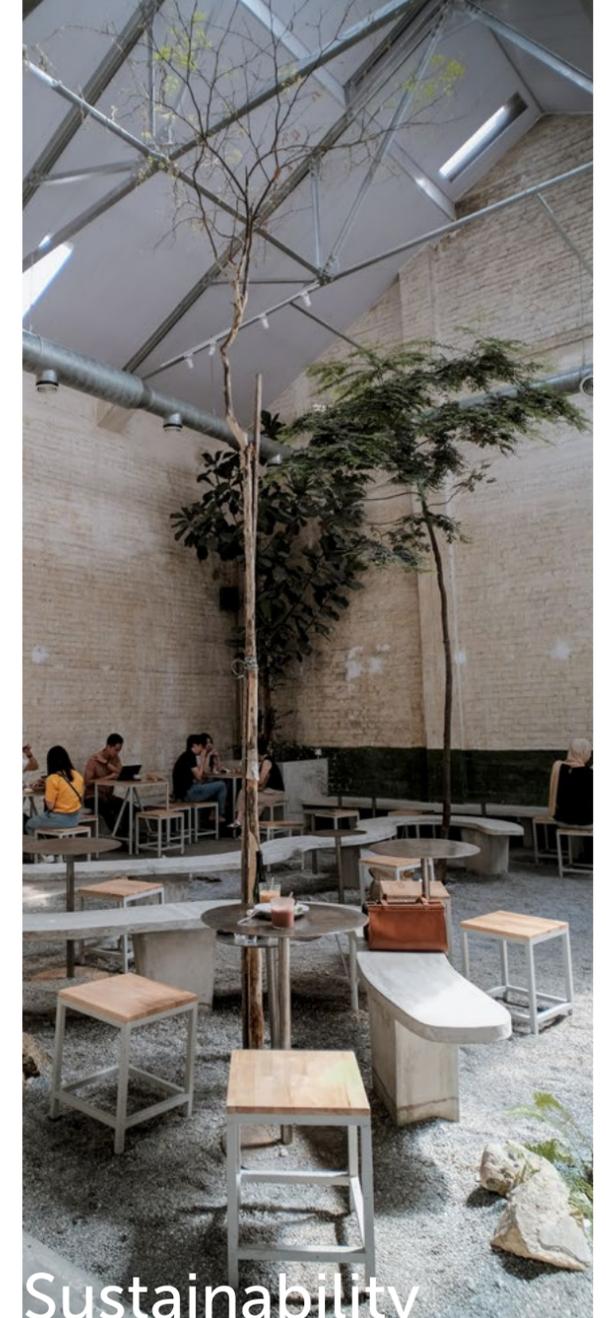
Sustainability

At a time where public concern over climate change is at an all-time high, sustainable workspace design has never been so important. These "workplaces of the future" are being designed and built today at costs comparable to typical office space, with increasingly positive results to an organization's bottom line. Done effectively, it promises a whole host of benefits to the environment and the community, enhancing wellbeing and providing a collective sense of purpose. The secret to building a truly sustainable workplace is to choose well-made furniture and **modular components** that will last, use **healthy materials** in their composition and are **flexible enough to adapt to any eventuality.**

Re-Inhabit

The more we're apart, the more being together matters. The past year, or more, of remote work has taught us that virtual communication is no true replica of face-to-face human connection. It has also emphasised the importance of the workplace as being the heart of the brand community.

As companies across the world begin to reinhabit the spaces they left in 2020, we have a unique opportunity to **redefine the true meaning and purpose of the workplace**, based on our learnings from the past year. The nature of work is changing. We have become more versatile and more collaborative, as we've had to adapt to the changing scene and depend on one another's support to get through challenging times. Most of all, there has been **a greater recognition of individuality**. Everyone of us has had a different home working experience; some have had greater levels of distraction or simply not the right space, whilst others have had more of a successful experience. Either way, this has opened our eyes to each and every one's differences and this will certainly inform the future of workspace design. Just as much as we need to be designing for the community, we need to be designing for the individual.

Research has shown that the wide majority of the workforce community want a hybrid work model where they have the choice of a mix of environments; the home, the workplace and perhaps a third space, like a café or nearby coworking space. The past year of home working has given everyone a greater insight into the space characteristics best suited to their working style. So, companies will need to work on a mobility strategy that gives their people the autonomy to match work to the right setting.

Returning to the workplace will be a renewed experience for everyone, after so long. And there will be elements of the home environment that people may perhaps miss, so **the office needs to learn from the home.** The transition from home to the workplace should be an elevating experience, and there will be certain elements of the home that will need to form part of that transition. People will have become accustomed to greater levels of privacy in the home and will likely expect a reflection of this in the workplace. Compared to an open-plan office, the acoustics of a home are more conducive to productivity, with softer furnishings like sofas and curtains and also much fewer people around. So, there's a design cue - **the comfort levels of the home meet the ergonomics of the office**.

The home as an environment is one that we have full control over - it's fully personalized. Over the past year of remote working, people would have been using the flexibility of their personal space to their advantage: to edit and refine their optimum workspace. And herein lies another lesson for the office - flexibility. John Harrison, design director of Gensler Houston, predicts that

"the biggest shift in the post-pandemic workplace will be a radical change in flexibility. People's behavioural habits are going to be different, and the physical office must accommodate that in a forward thinking, creative way."

It's the biggest need we're hearing - a wider range of innovative, futuristic solutions that provide greater levels of flexibility and choice, reflecting the large variety of personalities and experiences amongst the community.

New layers of flexibility will, in turn, support the initial stages of experimentation and hackability we're likely to see in the post-pandemic workplace. Nobody has all the answers to what the next-generation workplace will look like, so a flexible platform will be needed as companies seek to discover future solutions.

In the interest of sustainability, a design principle of flexibility is well attuned to the concept of circular design. As the component parts of different work settings are designed to be multipurpose, with wide-ranging applications in mind, this avoids wasteful changes. And there will likely be a lot of change as companies reinhabit their workplaces and redefine the optimum arrangement, based on the collective experiences of the past year. So, a flexible environment that can adapt and flex to suit changing needs, as users experiment with space, will be highly valuable.
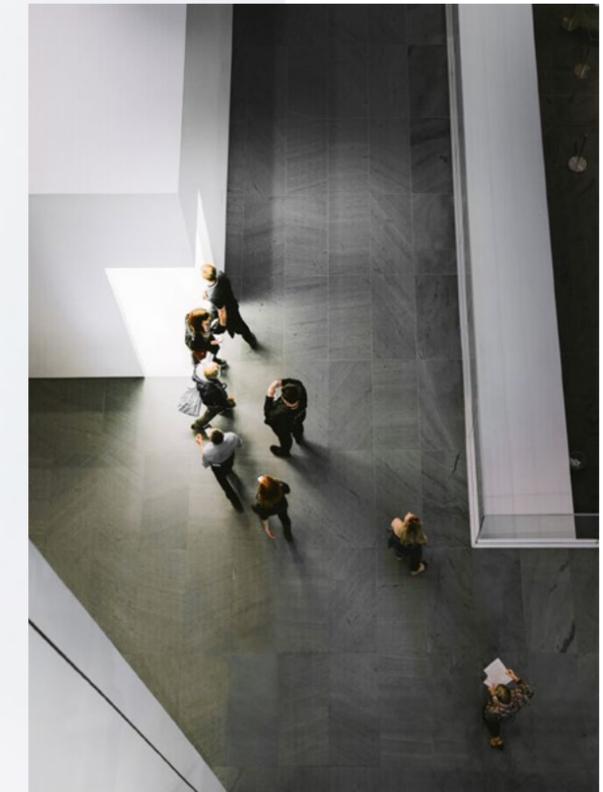
Ultimately, we're designing for each human being and their individual personality.

We're envisioning a renewed, connected user experience in which people will feel cared for and respected as individuals, equipped with the tools they need to thrive, and empowered to collaborate, innovate and break boundaries. The workplace needs to become a destination for community and brand engagement where people return to rebuild that lost human connection, through the support of an equitable and inclusive environment. And this human-centric space is not only for the human beings of today's workplace, but for the generations of tomorrow.

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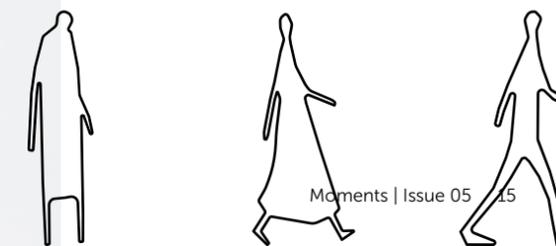
> ❝ The future ain't
> what it used to be

Yogi Berra
New York
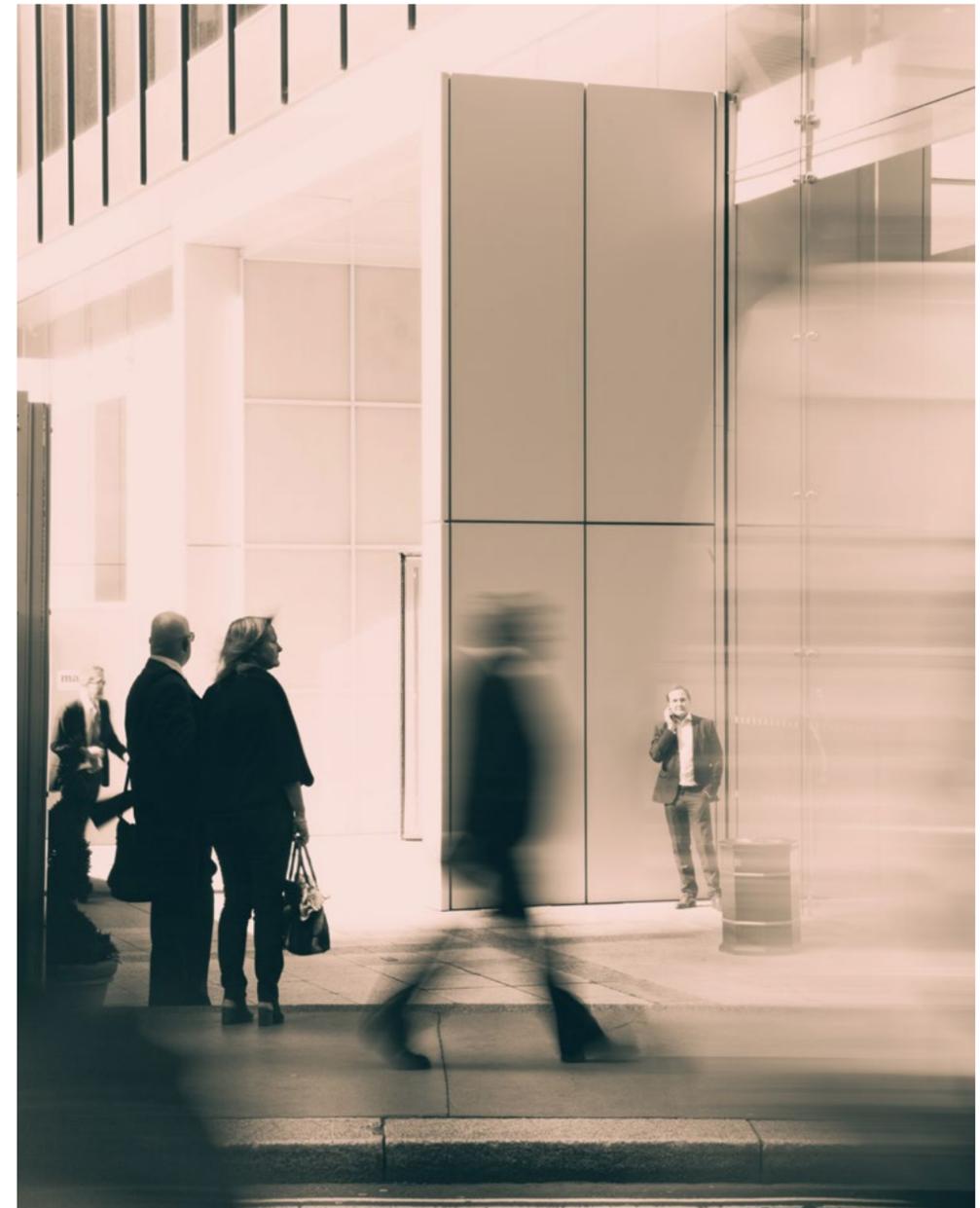
A New Vision

Design Principles for Empathetic Workplace Interiors.

The majority of our time is spent at work, and our environment substantially affects our mood, productivity and well-being. Interior designers have a tremendous impact on an environment by choosing which materials and products will be used and how people may interact with their surrounding spaces. Organizations are now seeking to incorporate principles of empathy and wellbeing in their interiors.

Here we explore design principles that address these topics and how these can be incorporated in workplace design.

Inclusivity

An inclusive workplace values individual differences in the workforce and makes everyone feel both accepted and cared for. However, the culture must translate within the workplace design, not just in the workforce itself.

It is near impossible to design something that is a perfect fit for the entire population, but inclusive design researches the target market and provides an appropriate response to address diversity. Roland White, Global Director of D&I at Microsoft says, "Inclusive design doesn't mean you're designing one thing for all people. You're designing a diversity of things so everyone finds a way to participate."

Video conferencing has been expedited by the pandemic and is improving team connectivity around the globe. A continued reliance on video calls will aid the transition to a hybrid and flexible environment, and this will need to be done in an inclusive way, catering for everyone. For example, the design of the Residence Connect video conferencing pod from Spacestor affords an equitable experience for all users, regardless of their abilities. Every aspect of the user experience has been considered to ensure ultimate comfort and control.

A survey by the Harvard Business Review found employees at companies that focused on diversity were more likely to out-innovate and out-perform others, and that employees in a 'speak up' culture were 3.5 times more likely to contribute their full innovative potential.

Trust and Community

('the glue that binds societies')

Over the last year, we have missed everyone being able to come together. A sense of community is now central to the office and attracting talent back to the workplace.

Importantly, offices need to be human, to recognize and be built around the human activities that take place within them. There needs to be a renewed focus on designing offices around the individuals and their personalities, experience and choices in the way they work. Environmental and wellbeing principles are often a strong foothold in the workplace and give the workforce a greater sense of purpose, keeping them engaged and retained.

When looking at sustainability principles, it's very important to pick materials and products with the lowest environmental impact. There are labels, standards and certifications that encourage an extra layer of honesty, giving credible information about the products' origin and identifying eco-friendly products, for example, the cradle to cradle certification examines the health effects of construction materials, recyclability of materials and the consumption of resources.

The world of design is becoming increasingly aware of the need for sustainable thinking, throughout a product's entire life cycle, from production to how they are discarded after use, and not just replacing products as soon as they go out of style. Modular and flexible office solutions, like movable space dividers, are great as they can evolve with a changing office, being repurposed and adapted in creative ways to give them new life.

Individuality

Businesses that thrive have a sense of identity and purpose. Recognizing that the office supports not only the community, but the individual, is important to give everyone an environment that enables additional learning and the successes of individuals.

We see this design principle reflected in furniture trends - acoustic meeting pods are currently some of the most popular pieces of office furniture. Quiet booths, private pods, and wrap-around chairs manufactured from sound-absorbing materials give employees opportunities to collaborate without causing distractions, concentrate on focus work, or have confidential meetings.

Relaxation zones will gradually become commonplace as employees are given opportunities to move away from their desks for restoration breaks; this is more likely to be in demand in the post-covid workplace after many have become used to the comfort of the home. But homely office designs expand beyond plush sofas and ergonomic office chairs - we expect to see more flexible and innovative furniture. Empowering employees to make decisions about their direct environment, through designing for an extra level of autonomy, can increase productivity and efficiency.
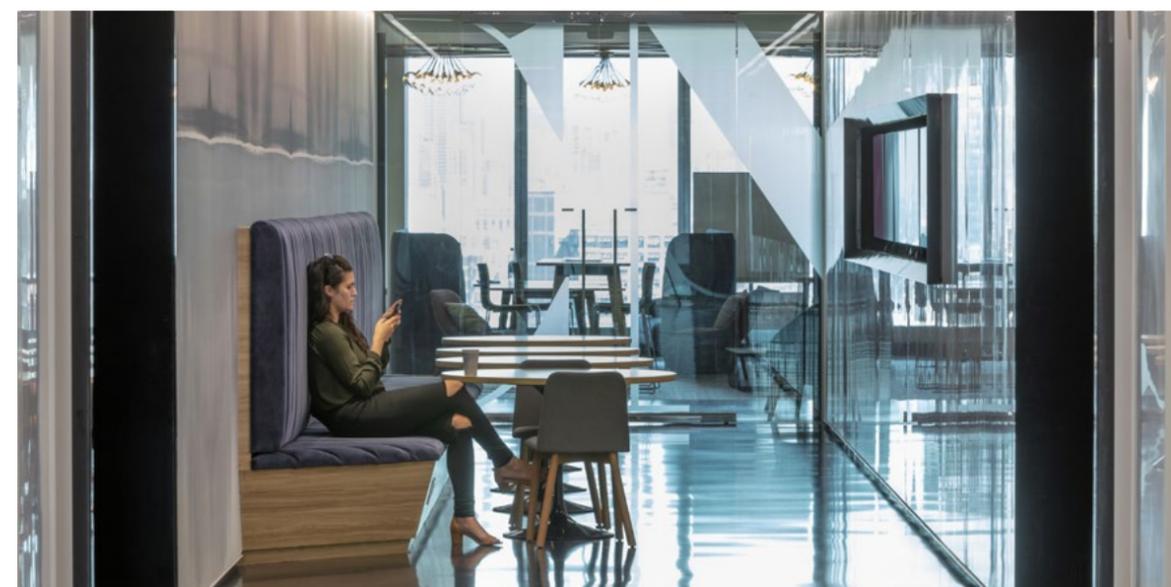
Wellbeing

Due to the amount of time people spend indoors, environment health is a high priority for interior designers. There are several factors to consider when designing healthy spaces, such as air quality, heating, ventilation, lighting and acoustics.

One of the leading design solutions is with biophilia - elevating human connectivity with nature. Workspaces that bring people closer to nature throughout the office in a multisensory way (with use of plants, natural timber, water features, and even nature-inspired playlists) have positive influences on physical and emotional health.

Biophilic design requires more than dotting a few potted plants around. Enhancing the connection with nature involves a holistic look at the environment, examining ways in which space can be reconfigured to maximise daylight levels and incorporate a materials palette taking textural cues from nature in the form of wood, bamboo, and natural textiles. Planting and green walls then add a final aesthetic touch.

Exposure to natural light and good air quality reaps great health benefits. Workplaces that have access to outdoor areas can capitalize on space by creating a garden or outdoor work extension. Rooftop gardens and balconies are being used for relaxation or quiet areas decorated with shrubbery and other natural elements.

The focus around wellbeing has already become a natural addition to any forward-thinking office design, and technology can play its part with productivity apps, progress boards, and social connectivity software, stimulating collaboration and creativity to support workers.

Multisensory

Ultimately, the goal of an interior environment is to move forward the intention of a space and engage the user in meaningful ways. One way to do this is by designing spaces to activate the five known senses: sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste. Our senses receive information that is used to shape our reality, creating meaning and memory.

Our sense of touch informs us in much the same way and we hear differences in materials when we enter a room. Spaces with various textures are quieter than open spaces with clean, shiny surfaces.

Sight is probably the sense we rely on most. It is widely regarded that colour impacts mood, to a certain extent, and this is an obvious method of manipulating sight. In a recent panel discussion with Spacestor, Laura Guido-Clark looked at the impact of colour in the workplace. Using different shades and tones throughout the office can help encourage focus and creativity.

Contrasting colours not only serve as a visual spectacle, but also as a practical use - different colours can be used as part of a wayfinding strategy or a method to signpost different neighborhoods and zones.

Although we tend to consider our senses individually, they actually work in tandem. People experience sound by feeling vibrations and seeing movements as well as hearing by ear. The more senses we engage, the more strongly we are tied to a moment, an object, or a space. As a result, design is evolving to incorporate sensorial experiences into the places in which we live and work.

The design of a workplace should reflect the nature of the business, the company culture and the needs of employees. Today's interior office designs are essentially human-centred but with the ultimate goal of helping companies meet business objectives such as increased productivity, job satisfaction, employee loyalty and retention.

Gensler, Houston

Gensler is a world-renowned, award-winning integrated architecture, design, planning and consulting firm. With over 50 locations and 6,000+ employees, the architecture firm has recently signed a lease for 50,000 sq feet over two floors in downtown Houston, Texas. In recent years, its Houston office has implemented more of the design principles it studies and carries out for its clients, which include some of this region's top law practices, financial institutions and energy firms.

The design of the office is a real representation of Gensler's history and strength in Houston - showcasing the full spectrum of project types, practice areas, and clients. And this new space will bring even more forward-thinking design. **About 70% of the Houston office focuses on agile working,** where employees can choose from a variety of workplace settings, whether it's outside on a patio, in a huddle room or at a stand-up desk.

The transformation represents a shift from a traditional workplace-focused office into a far more multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary practice. The result is **an environment that supports and harnesses Gensler Houston's dynamic, boundary-pushing energy.** The office embraces the full range of work styles required by the creative process, enhancing collaboration and innovation.

This shift, from traditional workplace focus, to an interdisciplinary practice, is bolstered by Gensler's repositioning of 2 Houston Center itself, linking the office with public space in the building, which supports a more collaborative, mobile, and progressive workflow.

"As you have more open areas, sometimes some people just need to get away," Flickinger said. "Not focus rooms or huddle rooms, but rooms for you to separate yourself from the working environment to get refreshed."

An expanded Design Library cleverly creates various meeting spaces while enhanced technology is available in lounge-furnished "cabanas" for informal group meetings and other gathering areas dispersed throughout the office. Direct access to a landscaped outdoor terrace, equipped with Wi-Fi and speakers, presents alternative work and meeting spaces. This prized amenity is one aspect of the design that emphasizes employee health and wellness; other elements that focus on sustainability help to achieve LEED credentials. And supporting these wellbeing amenities is the large underground space for bike storage.

This new office is a statement, and not only that but **a true design lab.** The Library, Maker Space, and VR Room are all on full display by the reception to make visible Gensler Houston's identity as innovators and change-makers. "We like to see our office as a testing ground," Flickinger said.

> " AS YOU HAVE MORE OPEN AREAS SOMETIMES SOME PEOPLE JUST NEED TO GET AWAY ... ROOMS FOR YOU TO SEPARATE YOURSELF FROM THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT TO GET REFRESHED
>
> *Flickinger, Gensler*

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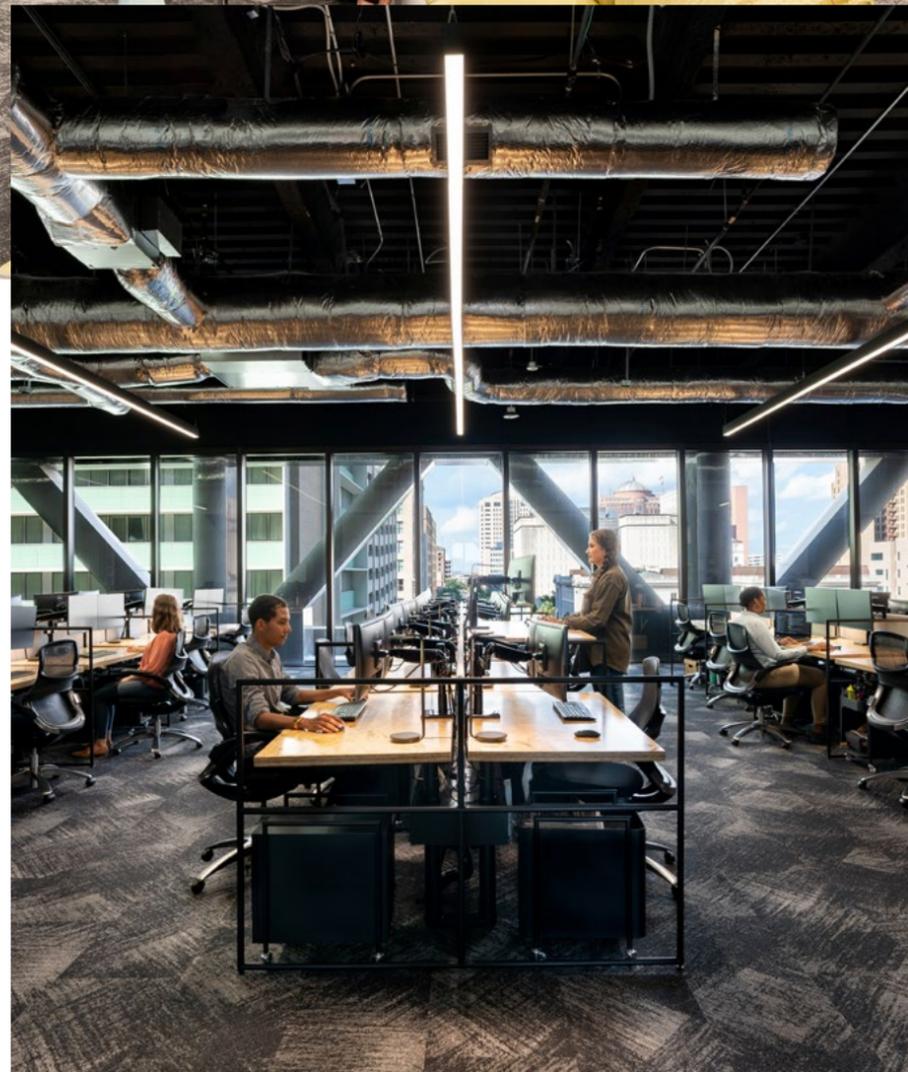
WE LIKE TO SEE OUR
OFFICE AS A TESTING
GROUND

Flickinger, Gensler

Gensler, Houston

The Pandemials

Rarely does a crisis affect every human being across the world in just about every aspect of life, however the shock of the global pandemic has reverberated through every generation. So much so that many believe it's formed a new generation; meet the 'pandemials'.

Who Are Pandemials?

'Pandemial' is a neologism born out of COVID-19, related to the terms Gen Z and Zoomer. Generally speaking, a pandemial is old enough to be conscious of the full impact of COVID-19 on their lives, but not old enough to remember life before 9/11. Young adults (those born after 1997, who are 24 and under) are living through their second major global crisis: first came the financial crisis of 2008, and now we're in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has seriously affected the quality of their education, their economic prospects, and their mental health and wellbeing.

Many students now are leaving school with no exam results, or enduring an unsatisfactory remote learning experience at university, and to make matters worse they're graduating into a time of high unemployment and economic downturn. Understandably, they have many career worries. These young people are often called Generation Z, but might be more appropriately called "pandemials", and they're joining the workforce right now.

So, what are their skills, what do they want from the post-COVID workplace, and how can thoughtful office design help them?

For all their socioeconomic disadvantages, pandemials also have many advantages to bring to the workplace. For one, they are very familiar with "connected" concepts, and intuitively understand how to navigate a 'hybrid workplace' that blends the best elements of working in an office and working from home. Because they're so well accustomed to using the latest software and technology, and moving between real and virtual spaces, flexible working arrangements come naturally to pandemials. They are often described as "communaholic"—meaning they make no distinction between online friends and real-world friends, and form communities around shared goals and interests. They like to be connected with others around the world, and are able to work from anywhere, even when on the move.
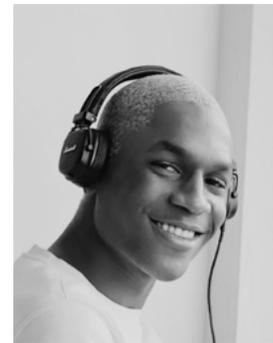
What Do Pandemials Expect From a Workplace?

As this generation emerges from education and starts to find its feet in the workplace, HR leaders will be seeking to attract these young, dynamic minds, offering attractive career-growth paths, in view of injecting new blood into their businesses.

Here's a look at what these career-hungry individuals will be looking for in the workplace and how they envisage its future:

Technology

Pandemials are a connected generation. Because they are so used to using many different apps simultaneously, they're well suited to multitasking, and well placed to teach older colleagues how to make the most of the latest digital tools.

In order to flourish, they need easy access to documents and servers, and the latest software and technology. They want to be able to access their work on the go, on portable devices that are always by their side. Furthermore, as they consume so much online video, it's a great idea to use video as a digital training medium.

As the future generation of workplace leaders does so much business over Zoom and Teams video calls, video conferencing booths are an effective provision, those specifically designed to provide a great virtual meeting experience. Replacing large meeting rooms with video conferencing booths has many other benefits too:

- It takes up much less space and improves the capacity for collaboration by increasing room availability in the office.

- By removing calls from shared desk areas, it allows everyone else to focus on their own tasks.

- These booths have a modular design that is very flexible; they can easily be moved around and positioned in optimal places in the office.

- They're quicker and cheaper to install than meeting rooms, so organizations can save money on space, and on the cost of meeting rooms.

Health and Sanitation

Pandemials want to feel reassured that their office is a safe and hygienic environment. They'll appreciate

changes like increased airflow, hand sanitizer stations, touchless doors and interfaces, contact tracing protocols, and flexible desk layouts redesigned with social distancing in mind. As part of these social distance measures, personal storage spaces will be a high priority, agile storage solutions might be provided so that employees have a place to store their work and belongings while moving around the office.

Mindfulness and Wellbeing

It's also just as vital to look after employees' wellbeing. The pandemic has been a traumatic experience for this young generation and studying through it from home has led to widespread burnout. Companies can help alleviate these effects by offering wellness and meditation programs, subscriptions to mindfulness apps, and opportunities for social engagement, which fosters a greater sense of wellbeing all-round. Most pandemials consider the provision of communal spaces and neighborhoods particularly important and enjoy social hubs and relaxed seating areas. The addition of biophilic elements can serve to create an enhanced aura of wellbeing and facilities like acoustic pods and booths providing quiet, private space can expand the variety of work settings, creating space for focused work and private meetings.

Flexibility

As noted above, pandemial employees thrive when granted flexible working arrangements, which they much prefer to traditional office spaces. They like to be offered a choice of working environments, including a variety of different spots to suit different tasks. For instance, they'll look for appropriate spaces for one-on-one chats, and prefer smaller meeting pods, to the built meeting rooms of old.

It is difficult to predict what the long-term effects will be on this generation, a retrospective view will be very interesting; how will this generation look back on these times? In 25 years' time, will they still be zealously washing their hands, avoiding surfaces, and instinctively reaching for their masks before going into public spaces? One thing is for certain, a future-focused workplace design that is flexible, resilient, and able to quickly respond to changing circumstances and evolving working habits will, in turn, attract pandemial top talent and help them thrive.

Digital Equity

'Work from home' has taught us a lot. It's not until you are physically separated from your colleagues and your daily working environment that you realize how much you value what may seem like 'everyday' things. Our subconscious appreciation for such things started to regain consciousness as we were physically separated from them. In the early stages of the work from home experience, our immediate reaction was that it was a great success, however as Lindsay Wilson, president of Corgan, described in a panel discussion with Spacestor, we were "lulled" into believing this. The truth is that although we have all been experiencing the same thing in principle, every one of us has been having a very different experience underneath.

Being stripped of human interaction and physical connectivity has meant we have had to rely on technology to replicate this human connection. Many would agree that this has emphasised **the importance of culture and community** in the workplace. Virtual collaboration has proven to be an imperfect substitute to the enriching experience of face-to-face interaction. Becoming accustomed to the virtual version of one another has had an effect on relationship building. Lack of physical presence removes the opportunities for casual collisions and the impromptu social interactions that take place as a result, and although these may seem a lower priority, they are the highly valuable moments that form a unique company culture, building stronger relationships on a personal level. There's a certain lack of transparency about virtual connections; simply seeing someone's face in a small square on your screen does not replicate the human nuances we would sense in a face-to-face interaction.

Every individual is going through different experiences and every individual has different needs to be able to participate to the best of their ability (virtually). This is a point that all organizations are gradually coming to realize; as is often said, the "one size fits all" approach will not work. Leadership within each organization needs to ensure that every person has these differing needs met so their virtual participation experience is fully optimized and each team can arrive at a state of digital equity in which everyone will have equal opportunities to participate. Fully understanding each individual's needs will not only teach leaders how to maximize the productivity of team collaboration but will also help to redefine teamwork strategies as the workplace is reinhabited.

As we continue to work towards a future state of work, we need to be **constantly striving for digital equity and virtual inclusion.** In a hybrid reality, there will be a greater range of personal work experiences with people at home, at work or perhaps at third spaces, such as cafés or coworking spaces. As we settle for this state of a blend of environments, careful change management and communication will be essential for ensuring equality and inclusivity in team collaboration. Being virtually present in a team meeting should not restrict or narrow the opportunities for participation and it should be a key priority for all organizations to ensure **every employee's voice can be heard virtually, as well as it can be physically.**

Wholly distributed work has proven the value of virtual technology - we simply couldn't have got through without it in the past year. It quickly became the only means of communication and as we move into the new era of the hybrid work model, we will continue to prove its value. And this is where d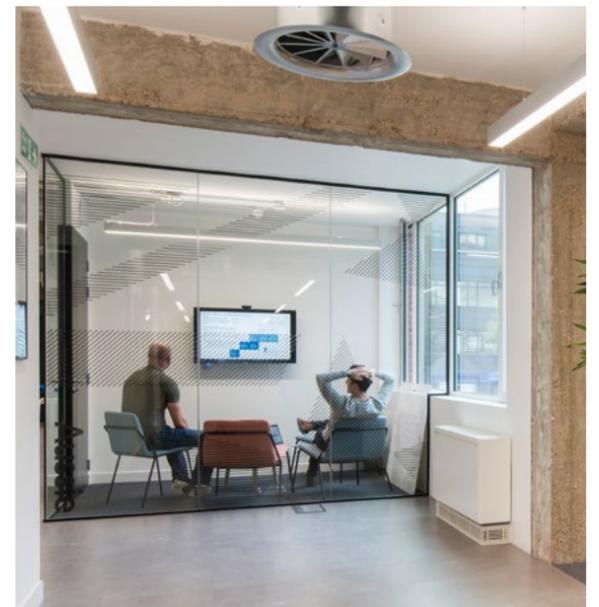igital equity will come into play. More and more, we will have the situation where multiple team members are joining a meeting from the office, whilst others are joining separately from remote locations. Regardless of where they are, each member within that meeting must have **the opportunity to be heard with equal presence and voice** - the same equity in the meeting - as everyone else.

Panel Review

The Office Won't Die
– It Just Keeps Evolving

The 20th panel debate of Spacestor's Insights Live series brought together Mirko Wanders of Gensler, LA, Laura Walsh of Avid Technology, Boston, and David Heyburn of Edison Spaces, to discuss how the office won't die, but will just keep evolving. Here we review the discussion and evaluate some of the key points.

Mirko Wanders
Design Director,
Gensler

Laura Walsh
Senior Director of Global Real Estate and Workplace,
Avid Technology

David Heyburn
Managing Director,
Edison Spaces

History shows us many examples of consequential changes resulting in new or more relevant inventions. Rarely have these come about by momentous shifts, but a series of small iterative adjustments. The office has come a similar journey, from Taylorism and the rise of the open-plan to cubicle farms and experienced-based working. As humans we have an innate ability to improve our circumstances, making enhancements that keep our surroundings relevant in an ever-changing world.

Recent events have seen the speed of this evolution increase considerably, calling for a new agility. **Laura Walsh, Senior Director of Global Real Estate and Workplace at Avid Technology** explains how her company is exploring what the next chapter of workplace looks like across their 30 global locations. For her, it's all about flexibility and choice - and figuring out how to deliver this to employees in a safe and effective way. "People have different feelings about where they want to work, but it may be a mix of both - being able to work part time from home but also getting back to the office to get back to those meaningful, personal interactions we're missing the most right now."

> " GETTING BACK TO THE OFFICE TO GET BACK THOSE MEANINGFUL, PERSONAL INTERACTIONS WE'RE MISSING THE MOST RIGHT NOW
>
> *Laura Walsh, Avid Technology*

Of course, for Avid, like most companies, this is neither the place for binary decisions nor cookie-cutter solutions. Every sector, company and indeed individual has their own needs and consequently a work-type that will suit them best. Leaders should take a deep dive into looking at the different types of workspaces needed for their teams based on work style as well as the behaviors and outcomes they're trying to encourage.

For creative industries like design, the office is where the magic happens. **Mirko Wanders, Design Director at Gensler SF**, described how the awkward stop-start zoom interruptions are far from ideal, even though they've made it work: "certain groups are really longing to get back to the office. It's hard to collaborate virtually, even though it's working. I look someone in the eye and request feedback – VC is not helping to be creative in my opinion." And then there's the emotions and body language you just can't feel over a video call. Mirko recalls key moments "when you have to be in a room and look each other in the eye over a decision you made – we smell it, we feel the climate."

But it's not just collaboration, it's collaboration with that revered spontaneity. Over the last year, everything in our lives has been scheduled, and if it wasn't booked in, it didn't happen. As **David Heyburn, Managing Director of Edison Spaces** put it: "there's a certain level of serendipity that's needed for real creativity and collaboration to happen - when it's scheduled at 2pm on a Thursday, it lacks flow and energy." Hence the role of having a physical space to come to, even if in more distributed fashion, such as the much-talked about hub-and-spoke approach.

> " THERE IS A CERTAIN LEVEL OF SERENDIPITY THAT'S NEEDED FOR REAL CREATIVITY AND COLLABORATION TO HAPPEN - WHEN IT'S SCHEDULED FOR 2PM ON THURSDAY, IT LACKS FLOW AND ENERGY
>
> *David Heyburn, Edison Spaces*

Many workers have found homeworking offers them highly prized privacy and concentration space, previously conferred only on those with corner offices. But this isn't so for everyone. In Mirko's experience, the office is also a safe haven away from home. "Let's face it - kids running around, dogs crawling under the bed... it can be distracting sometimes! The workplace can be the place where you go for a couple of hours to intensely concentrate maybe."

Emerging from the conversation are two very different use cases for the future workplace; providing a place to get together and collaborate, but also a high-focus sanctuary to those for whom home is peppered with distractions. Possibly the work in between those two ends of the spectrum is what's best completed at home or other locations.

A new potential role for the office as cited by David, is the boundary-setter. For many remote workers, a merging of work and home life, caused by indistinct boundaries has resulted in an 'always on' expectation with colleagues. A survey from FlexJobs and Mental Health America (MHA) found that 37% of people report working longer hours when working at home, but 56% said their workplace could offer support and mitigation of burnout through flexibility in their workday.

> " WE ACTUALLY DO WORK MORE BECAUSE WE ARE REACHABLE AT ANY GIVEN MOMENT. IT'S IMPORTANT THAT WE GIVE OURSELVES WAYS TO RECOUP ENERGY
>
> *Mirko Wanders, Gensler*

"We actually do work more because we are reachable at any given moment. It's important that we give ourselves ways to recoup energy. With 10 hours on zoom calls, when do you do your work?' says Mirko, suggesting leaders are strict but flexible with teams – strict on boundaries and flexible on working hours to enable a healthier existence.

So, a hybrid solution seems to be a pragmatic approach and one adopted by many companies in recent weeks. But it certainly isn't devoid of its own challenges. One such being, how do we provide an equitable meeting experience for both those in-office and at home? Zoom screens levelled the playing field giving everyone equal visibility, but with hybrid meetings, many report in-office attendees holding the floor, leaving little or no air-time for remote members.

Another important consideration will be ensuring a 'critical mass' is present in the office on any given day to allow coworkers the enriching experience of meeting colleagues face-to-face and feeling that buzz so missed at home.

But these things are going to take time to work out. The moving parts, the multiple needs, the shifting goalposts - could experimentation be part of the

answer, lowering the expectation of the perfect solution? Whilst some global companies have gone all out with announcements of how they intend to work in the future, a lot are still in wait-and-see mode. David verified this desire to experiment commenting "Companies aren't sure what the future will hold so want to do some experimentation at least in the short term without taking on a lot of capital, especially if you're a 5–10-person team." As a flexible office space provider, David sees this as a great solution for small businesses that don't have the same resources as large corporates to take on the risk of experimenting with real estate strategy at scale.

But what of the element of human nature amidst all this change? Using the corner office as an example, David illustrated how people have attached a lot of meaning to things in the physical environment: "the hierarchy that somebody has achieved in an office is marked by moving up a desk or into an office, so this experiment of democratizing might be easy to digest for some folks but for others could be really difficult. I've seen you on zoom calls for a year and now you're back in your office – how does that work?"

But our appetite for trying new things has certainly increased and this is borne out by large companies in traditional industries scrapping their private offices and having CEOs sitting out on the main floor. Old precedents are no longer relevant when charting new territory - **no one has the answer, meaning there's a strong case for experimentation** in the evolving workplace, and so again, the need for flexibility.

Not only because it gives us options, but it leads us closer to a sustainable existence. In considering how we can provide for the future after the curved balls of the pandemic, companies are changing their mindsets about how long products can last, thinking about furniture that can be repurposed and so contributing to the circular economy.

But it goes further than furniture, Mirko points out "we have to be really smart where to place walls. How sustainable are we making the future? We were able to react to one pandemic but maybe there's more, maybe we have to redo our offices on a yearly basis – what way are we reacting from a construction standpoint to that? How can we make our floorplate flexible in a way that can be chopped up? How can you expand and contract very quickly? This is a great opportunity for not only architects and interior designers but also product design." Conscious of the amount of trash we're producing since working from home, he feels we have to attack it in any way possible. "What furniture solutions can be used that are flexible and recyclable after we're back in the office, without compromising on design but at a reasonable cost?"

> ❝
> HOW SUSTAINABLE ARE WE MAKING THE FUTURE? WE WERE ABLE TO REACT TO ONE PANDEMIC BUT MAYBE THERE'S MORE ... HOW CAN YOU EXPAND AND CONTRACT VERY QUICKLY?
>
> *Mirko Wanders, Gensler*

As a tech company, Avid invest in fixed, heavy infrastructure. Laura shared some thoughts on keeping sustainability in mind in these scenarios: "a smart thing to think about is what if we grow or need more space – what does that look like and how would this design expand? Usually, people don't want to think contracting or needing to save money, giving up half our space for a sub-tenant. Think about both scenarios when designing."

But it's when the less tangible and often-overlooked elements are considered that the physical workplace really comes into its own. Take alignment with the missions of the organization; **the human desire not only to be connected to each other, but with a common purpose too.** David posed that the concept of camaraderie is a critical factor in what draws us to what we do every day - the office has a role in cultivating the shared goal that remote working has splintered.

A further aspect for consideration is the larger talent pool remote working has given us access to – no longer do companies have to hire in expensive markets but can look further afield for staff. Similarly though, if an employee never ventures into your space, how can you make them feel part of your company? An opportunity for designers and furniture providers to provide curated home office setups and creative ways

to pull remote workers into the office experience, Laura suggested. Supporting culture remotely and practically expressing the organization's brand and values with a distributed workforce certainly remains a challenge to be risen to by most.

And then there's the value of an experience. To illustrate this, Mirko drew a comparison between the office and a restaurant. "Most of the time you eat at home but there's an experience going to the restaurant – guaranteed the food will taste better in the restaurant than if you'd had a take-out from the same place." So, it's about more than just the space itself – humans are hard-wired to not only want but *need* company and hence they get together - the very reason the pandemic has been so difficult to control!

Enforced working from home has taught us that whilst many of us *can* work effectively remotely, there's parts of the workplace experience we just can't recreate virtually. We've learnt what we do and don't like about remote working and now we want choice, resulting in many different types of hybrid, the re-evaluation of the office's purpose and therefore yet another evolution. A hugely challenging period for our industry has opened up many new opportunities for a more positive future, so aptly summarised by Mirko in the phrase **"if 2020 was a battleground, 2021 is a playground."**

Long live the office!

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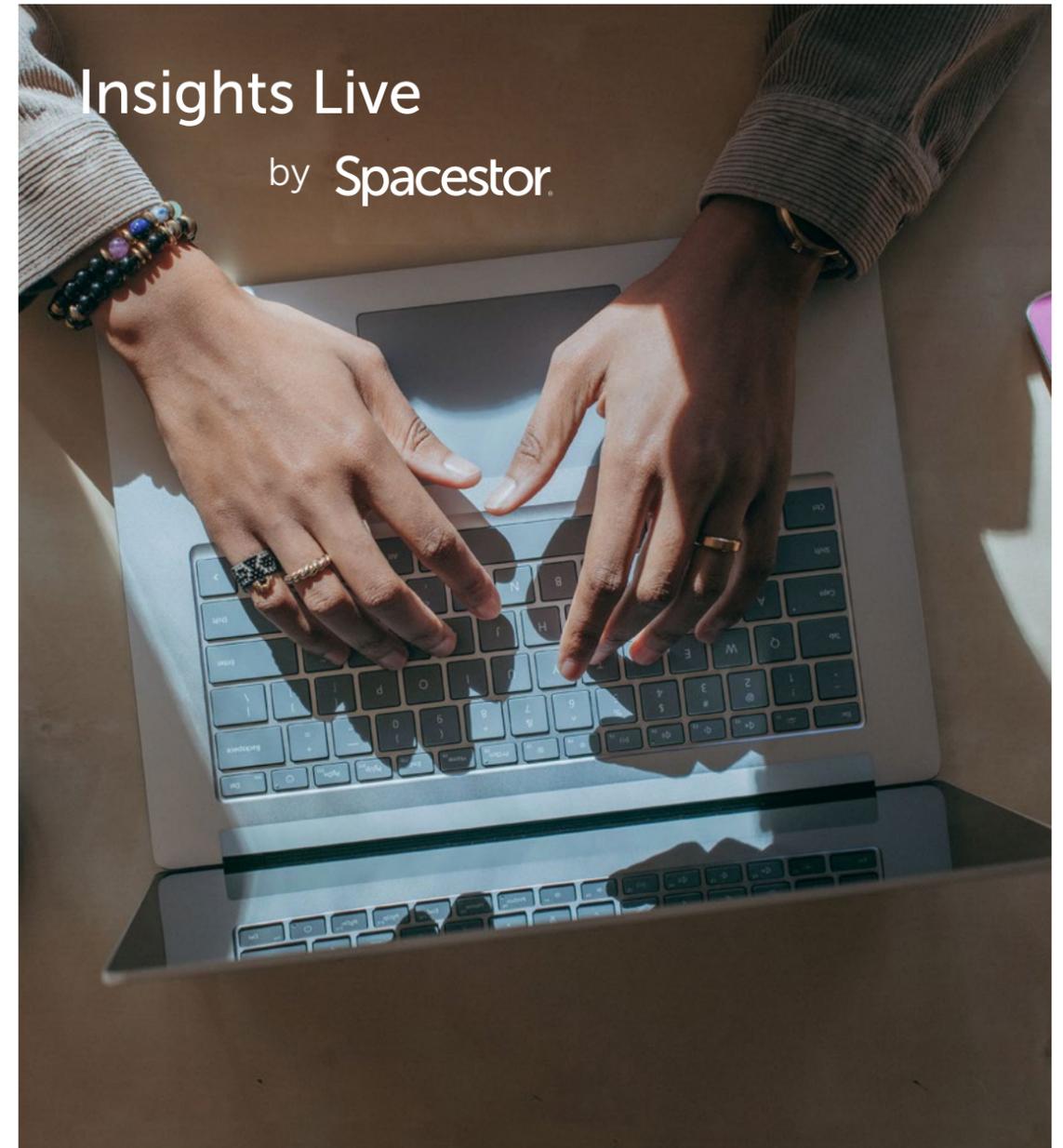
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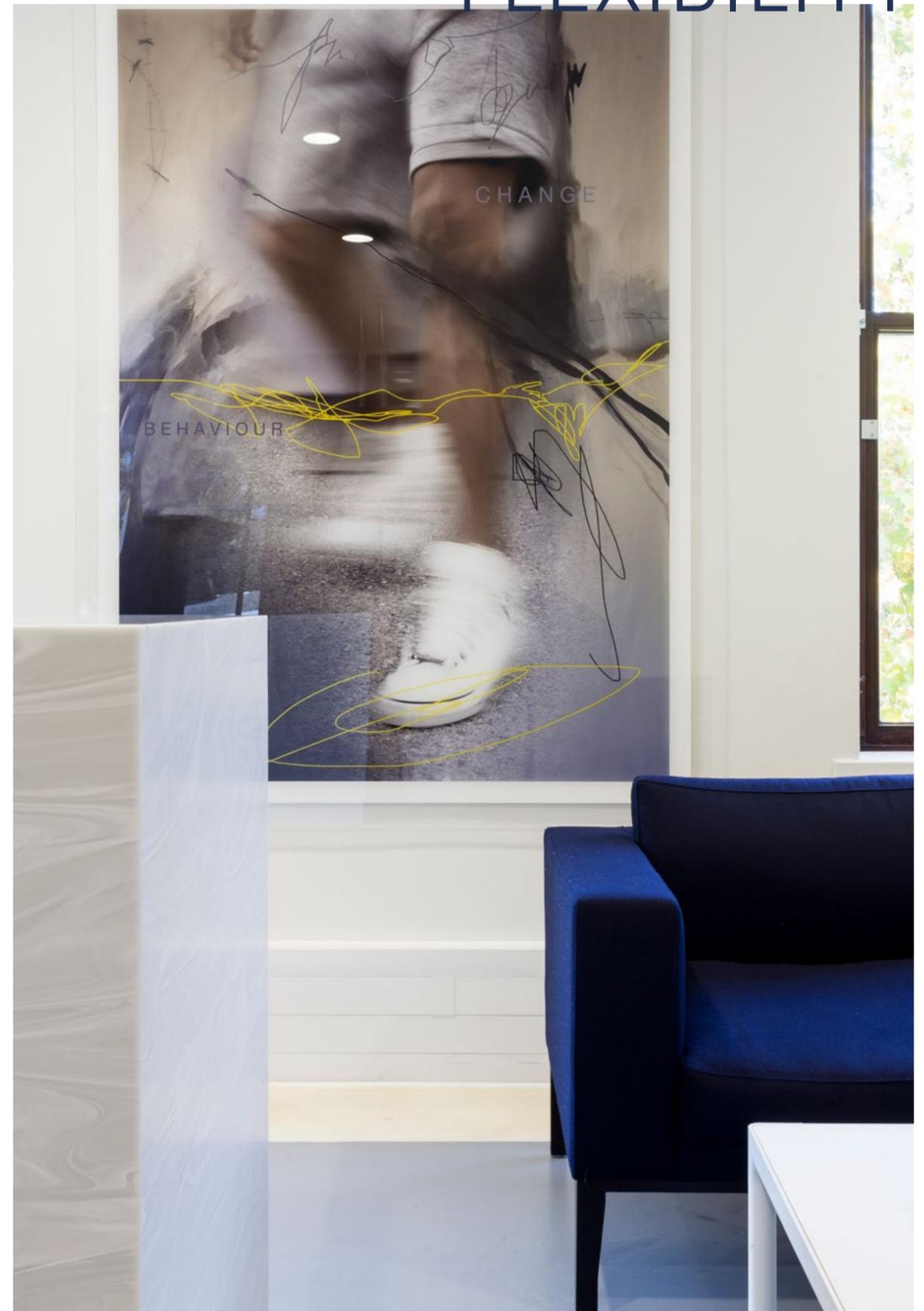
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> "
> If 2020 was a
> battleground,
>
> *2021* is a
> playground

Mirko Wanders
Design Director, Gensler

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us that companies need to be ready for anything. So much changes so quickly, and businesses have to adapt in order to survive, and to thrive. Office leases are now shorter than they used to be. The locations in which we work are changing. Most of us are working from home. However many of us have also grown weary of working from home, perhaps choosing to work in more flexible coworking spaces, close to our homes. Many of us are looking forward to returning to our old workplaces this year: the best of these will be reimagined as more flexible spaces in which employees can choose where and how to work. The home working experience has been a disruption unique to every individual and the learnings from which should be an influence on workspace design for the post-pandemic future.

What is a Flexible Office?

Many workplaces were designed according to a one-size-fits-all template. The flexible office, however, is designed to adapt and evolve. It's a dynamically agile environment suited to a wide variety of uses; one that can easily change, switch, turn and pivot, quickly reflecting the needs of the employees and their organization. Rather than having dedicated spaces for each employee, it's a more open environment with collaborative areas for teams. It's made up of modular components, which can easily be reconfigured for any space. It's office design that adapts to the needs of staff, rather than forcing them to conform to it. Companies are recognising this design approach as a way of moving from short-term thinking on maintaining efficiency to long-term thinking about how to become more effective. According to John Williams, of Instant Offices, the next 12 months will likely see a 21% increase in the supply of more flexible office space.

Why is Workplace Flexibility So Important?

The world can change overnight, so must workplaces too. Building a workplace model that is inherently flexible is critical, especially now, as the workforce community gradually returns to the workplace following a year at home. The home has become the office, for many of us, and as employees return to the office, the office needs to learn from the home. Companies cannot afford to breed a sense of loss or frustration at certain benefits of the home working experience being absent in the workplace. So, workplaces should be entering a discovery phase as they become reinhabited, seeking to imitate the same level of variety and choice as the home.

Returning to the office will be essential for rebinding the communal spirit of the company. The workspace needs to be supportive of each individual that makes up that community; recognizing diverse personalities and identities and giving everyone the environment that enables them to thrive. As we know, when people are performing at their best, businesses thrive, and when businesses thrive, communities thrive.

A flexible office that offers a variety of environments, giving people the agency to create what they want to create, raises levels of comfort, productivity and creativity. The use of modular and flexible components is a sustainable, cost-effective way of working with existing infrastructure to create future-proof spaces. When a change is needed, components can simply be reconfigured and reused, rather than thrown away, which empowers businesses to quickly adapt to fast-changing situations. Despite these benefits, it does also create some challenges. Employees' needs have to be balanced with their facilities team's needs: the space shouldn't change so much that it becomes difficult to manage. In other words, it shouldn't be *too* flexible.

Creating a Flexible Workplace

The events of the past year have given us a rare opportunity to think about workplaces differently, and how they might be improved. The traditional approach to office design (receiving a brief, coming up with a plan, designing it, and building it out) doesn't lead to the most innovative spaces. A better approach is one of ongoing experimentation, hackability and evolution. With that in mind, here are three elements to consider when creating a more flexible workplace:

Modular Workplace Architecture

Modular furniture and components can be endlessly reconfigured and moved around. For example, by choosing modular meeting pods over built meeting rooms, designers can add smaller spaces suitable for many different task types, with the ability to relocate in the event of a move or to accommodate dynamic floor plates. An important consideration here is whether such furniture will stand up to being reconfigured many times over; quality modular furniture is built to last and will be a cost-effective, long-term solution. A modular 'kit of parts' is a sustainable approach to a flexible workspace as the many variations that can be configured out of one collection of components provides a huge choice of work settings.

Multilayering of space is a trend on the rise. This is where flexibility meets individuality, extending to the users themselves. For example, an event space or larger collaboration area has its place in the office, however may not be in use for every moment of the day. With the addition of drapes, users could zone off this space for yoga or meditation early in the morning, or turn it into a temporary training area. A space that can be multi purpose is capitalizing on the investment.

The future of the office is definitely changing. The move towards greater flexibility provides a platform for experimentation. At the moment, nobody has all the answers for what the next era of the workplace might look like, so having a flexible base will accommodate an imminent period of experimentation and discovery, in which the future of the workspace will evolve as a reflection of changing human need. We should think of the workplace as not just a building, but a dynamic piece of architecture; a diverse, inclusive, flowing, imaginative space able to reform and mould itself to the brand's identity - its people.

Open Workspace Design

Open-plan layouts encourage open-minded approaches. Modular and movable zone-dividing systems allow for the simple and attractive division of space. Room dividers and flexible furniture systems become 'architecture within architecture' as they enable the creation of zones and neighborhoods, providing homes for different business units, without building walls. Solutions for bulk storage or individual lockers can be integrated to take care of personal needs while still looking aesthetically pleasing.

Homely Workplace Design

Whilst working from home has perhaps become tiring and monotonous, it brings comforts and benefits that had never been a part of the working experience in the pre-Covid era. The comfort and 'coziness' of the home setting is an element that workspace designers should consider reflecting in the office, moving away from the 'corporate' in corporate interiors. More soft, low seating, more breakout areas that feel like living rooms, are perfect places to start. The way we work now is more flexible than ever. Not only does the home bring elevated comfort, we can hack space and experiment with it to give ourselves that optimum working environment - workplace design must be flexible in this way too.

FLEXIBILITY
AT HOME

The need for flexibility is equally as necessary in the home setting where space is limited. Compact solutions like the KIT Desk enable users to shift working location easily, encouraging movement and agility.

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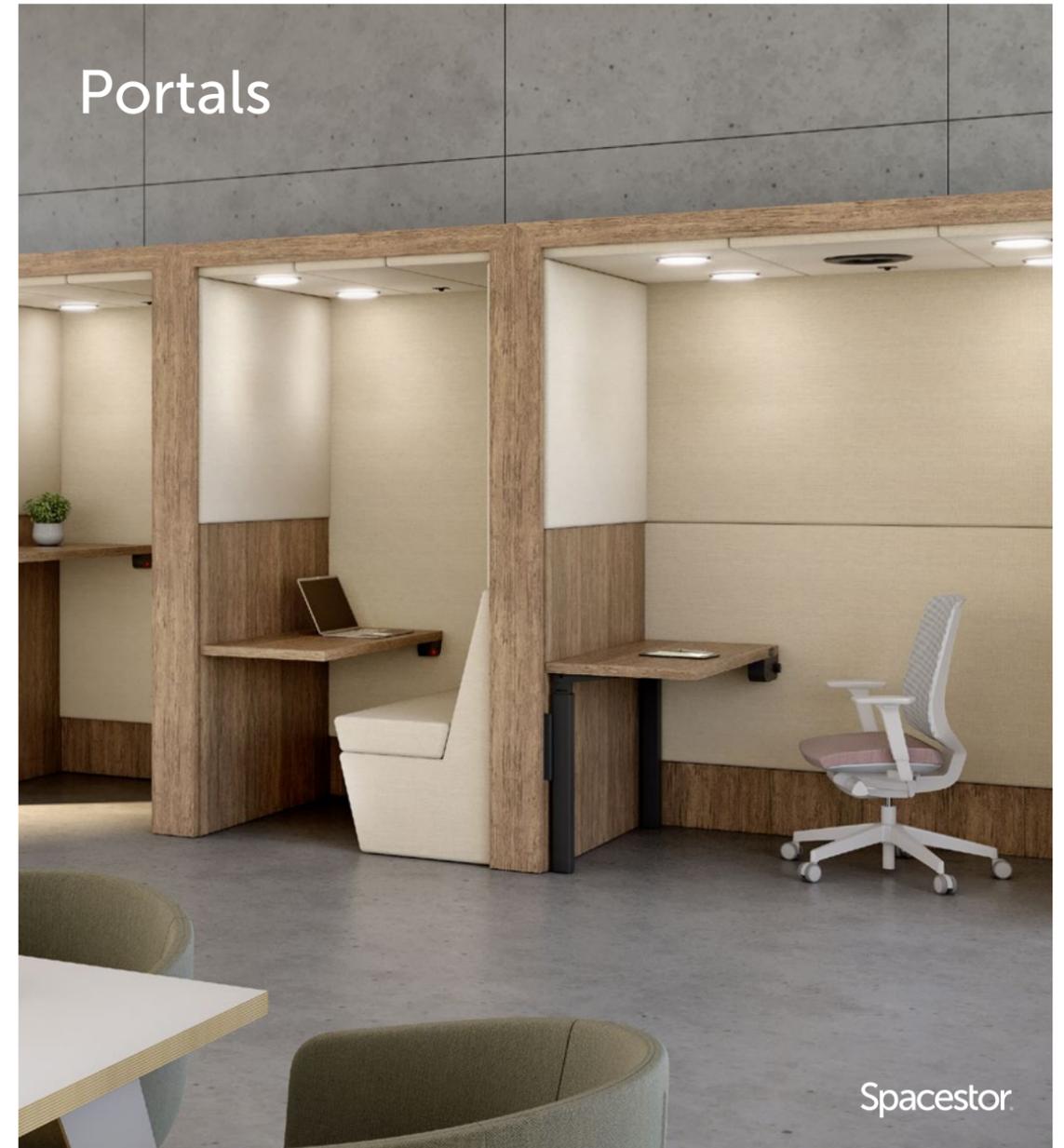

KIT Desk

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> **"** When you enter an office, you want it to remind you of why you belong to this organization and what you're doing there. You need to feel welcomed … you need to drink in the values of the organization

Steve Collins
Associate Director, TP Bennett

Portals

Spacestor.

Explore the
Portals range

Layers of Flexibility

With just a little thoughtful design and a holistic view, owners and occupiers can build-in low cost future flexibility to workspaces.

That sounds simple, sure. But how often has it been practise pre-pandemic? We now know that reimagined workspaces will need to change in future – maybe multiple times – after all, known unknowns are now more of a thing than ever they were recently, in the world of design. We are making assumptions and guesses in layers, and expecting conditions, risks and fears to evolve. The global work-from-home experiment has shown a few things – it can be done, we can get through. But secondly, it does not suit everyone. And third, it suits comparatively few of us all the time. We are social beings, we need interaction – as one of Spacestor's panelists pointed out in 2020, that is exactly why the virus was so hard to control – we want to be with others!

This concept can significantly reduce cost as well as the time and upheaval in planning and implementation of change, because a kit of parts – albeit that may be a very diverse one full of choices - is to be reused.

The Three Rs

So how to leverage this foresight, and tee up those churns and changes we know will come but don't know in what shape? We propose Three Layers of Flexibility. For the sake of simplicity, let's call them **Refine, Reconfigure, Reshape**.

Refine

Small tweaks that get the space just right for today – **user edits**, if you will. Like, shift some seating around; roll along some screens for a scrum meeting. Refine the use of products that are either mobile in design or light and easily moved on the run.

Reconfigure

Also thought of as a **two-day move** – think a Facilities mini-project, maybe over a weekend. Pods and booths, if they are plug-and-play in nature, can be shifted and repositioned, simultaneously and subtly rezoning the office landscape, if that's wanted. Zone dividers and low storage can be rearranged, and possibly desking dependent on the level of wired-in infrastructure.

Reshape

This is more of an upheaval – say **two or three weeks** notice but only three or four days work, still using the same kit of parts. Some contractors might need to be brought in, but typically just furniture fitters and electrical/AV trades – working together for a quick result! Having assessed opportunities to improve the whole neighborhood or even the floorplate, whole modular rooms could be grown, shrunk or shifted rooms – clearly not possible with traditional or 'stick built' architecture.

Photography Credits © Ryan Ancill, Tom Bird

Photography Credits © Irving & Nichols, Spacestor

LAYERS
of Flexibility

Refine

Reconfigure

Reshape

Verandas

Leading Financial Services Provider

A true example of flexibility

Leading design firm, Jacobs, were commissioned with the design of a lakeside campus for one of their long-time clients in the financial services sector in Westlake, Texas. The Jacobs team, based in Dallas, developed a range of solutions for a dynamic and flexible work environment, influencing project strategy, in order to create a superior design and ultimately, an unbeatable user experience.

The beautifully open-plan space is divided into multiple neighborhoods and different space typologies, to provide a variety of work settings. Moving through the space, it is noticeable how much of the furniture is not fixed, creating a highly flexible space for experimentation and easy adaptation to future needs. A flexible seating configuration by Spacestor, named 'Bleachers', perfectly complements this design choice, bridging the gap between a meeting room and an auditorium-style space. Users can instantly create the desired environment for any interaction, making

a personal, informal space that will foster a flow of inspiration and new ideas.

Whilst collaboration plays a key theme for the Westlake location, employees still need touchdown spaces where they can be fully focused and alone. Being upholstered on three sides, Spacestor's 'Portals' booths give the much needed acoustic privacy, without being totally enclosed behind a door, and disconnected from the more distracting buzz of the office. Health and wellness has been considered at every step of the design – to allow for longer periods of comfortable use, the desks have sit-stand functionality, and space to wheel in an ergonomic task chair.

In several different iterations through the workplace, the 'Snugglestor', also by Spacestor, provides an upholstered alcove for breakout discussions, colleague catch-ups or team touchdowns. Highly customized to the look and feel of each space, they provide a perfect working zone with integrated power and lighting.

Touchdown Zones featuring Snugglestor by Spacestor

Informal Collaboration Space
featuring Bleachers by Spacestor

Westlake, Texas

Photography Credits © Jeffrey Totaro

Collaborative Hub featuring Palisades
& Railway Carriage by Spacestor

OTHER LOCATIONS

Westlake, Texas
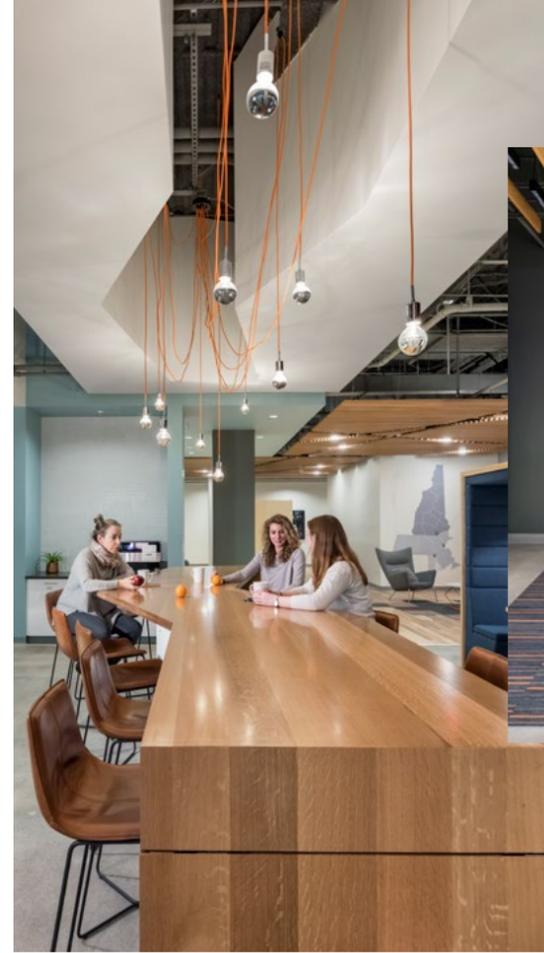

Boston, Massachusetts

Snugglestor

Palisades Grid

**The Collaborative
& Communal Core**

Merrimack, New Hampshire

A true example of flexibility

Boden, North Acton, West London

Lockers

Spacestor

Explore the
HotLocker range

> **Inclusive design doesn't mean you're designing one thing for all people. You're designing a diversity of things so everyone finds a way to participate**

Roland White
Global Director of D&I, Microsoft

Designing for

INCLUSIVITY

Many have recognized the opportunity for growth and change as a positive outcome of the global pandemic, which has gradually become described as a 'catalyst' for resetting and recharging workplace strategy. With everybody forced to work from home, the opportunity to rethink the physical workplace was a rare one. And as companies grasp this opportunity, many are questioning the purpose of the office and how well it was really designed.

In the imminent post-pandemic future, everyone is looking forward to a workplace with a renewed experience as being the physical core of the brand and one that is much better suited to the human activities that take place there. There are a number of themes of change that seem to be guiding this 'redesign' of the workplace; one of which is inclusivity. It's becoming unacceptable not to design a space that's accessible for everyone. Not only does this relate to physical accessibility, but **recognizing neurodiversity and designing for different personalities.** Also referred to as 'universal design', it's a new standard that elevates space and benefits all users.

Inclusivity and diversity are moral and legal responsibilities and leaders are working hard to give diverse voices a platform. But the culture of diversity and inclusivity also needs to be represented in the workplace design, not just in the workforce itself.

A question all companies should be asking themselves at present is **"are we really matching our inclusive policies with inclusive design?"** For the ultimate user experience, workspace design should be a true reflection of the values of the company. As Sonya Simmonds, Head of Workplace, Design and Build at Spotify, said in a recent panel discussion with Spacestor, "inclusive policy matching an inclusive design is super super important now, and it gives a very strong message to whoever is coming into the office ... that this space is going to be easy to use and we're doing everything we can to enable you to have maximum enjoyment and maximum comfort."

Inclusive design is the accessibility and usability of a product by a broad range of people, irrespective of any differences, without the need to specially adapt them. It is near impossible to design something that is a perfect fit for the entire population, but inclusive design researches the target market and provides an appropriate response to address the diversity in this target population; it is all about putting the users at the heart of the design process.

The design has to be efficient, subtle, and effective in creating a welcoming and inclusive environment without putting any undue focus on anyone, thereby creating a calmer and happier workplace.

More and more companies are going well beyond American Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements, and proactively creating offices that enable people of all abilities to be as productive as possible. We call it "inclusive design", because the goal is to include all workers in the organizational workplace. Roland White, Global Director of D&I at Microsoft says, "Inclusive design doesn't mean you're designing one thing for all people. You're designing a diversity of things so everyone finds a way to participate."

A greater level of choice should be there for everyone, regardless of ability. **By designing a workplace that authentically encompasses the principles of inclusivity and equality, the standard of the space is truly elevated.** Sonya Simmonds believes "we have a responsibility as architects and designers to allow people to feel involved and belong ... to be something for everyone." In a human-centric space, each individual deserves an equal opportunity to have that sense of belonging; to feel cared for and valued as a member of the brand community.

The work from home experiment has proved the power of virtual connectivity and with the increasing popularity of a hybrid work setting, video conferencing is here to stay. However the question that emerges is, how do you cater for an inclusive workplace whilst also providing a hybrid and flexible workplace?

> " WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY, AS ARCHITECTS AND DESIGNERS, TO ALLOW PEOPLE TO FEEL INVOLVED AND BELONG ... TO BE SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE
>
> *Sonya Simmonds, Spotify*

Designing for Inclusion

With so many top firms looking to go beyond the baseline requirements, Spacestor was approached by one of the world's leading tech companies with the challenge of designing and engineering a pod that took video conversations out of the open workspace and into an efficiently-sized acoustic pod. Every feature of this space needed to be optimized for the best user experience, with inclusivity in mind. After two years of development, Spacestor launched the Residence Connect Video Conferencing Booth.

Following the principle of inclusivity, the design of Residence Connect affords an equitable experience for all users, regardless of their abilities. Every aspect of the user experience has been considered to ensure ultimate user comfort and control. Some of the key features of the ADA model were designed with inclusivity in mind for easy approach, entry and exit, with an automatic door opener and readily accessible charging cables. The control dashboard had also had inclusivity considered where these controls have been designed for easy differentiation and all levels of dexterity.

One of the unique aspects of this design is that the upholstery fabrics and the light source are dependent upon one another to optimize the visual representation of all users on camera. To ensure a fully inclusive design, specified textile offerings are in support of VC equity guidelines as well as being UL approved. Upholstery fabrics are highly reflective, non-directional and have the ability to complement a wide range of skin tones. Extensive testing ensured the optimal specification of upholstery fabric was arrived at. To ensure an equitable visual user representation, the light reflectance value (LRV) falls in a specific range depending on the location of each upholstery panel. Panels surrounding the screen and work surface needed to have an LRV of 50+% and upholstery panels surrounding the user needed to have a LRV of 15-25%.

For optimal user comfort, bias lighting was chosen, which is proven to support the best viewing experience, reducing eye strain and enhancing image quality. The light source is positioned behind the monitor and illuminates the upholstered panels behind the screen. The upholstered panels behind the monitor reflect the light source, which evenly accentuates and brightens the skin and facial features, giving a clear, flattering quality to all skin tones, supporting the equitable visual representation of all people.
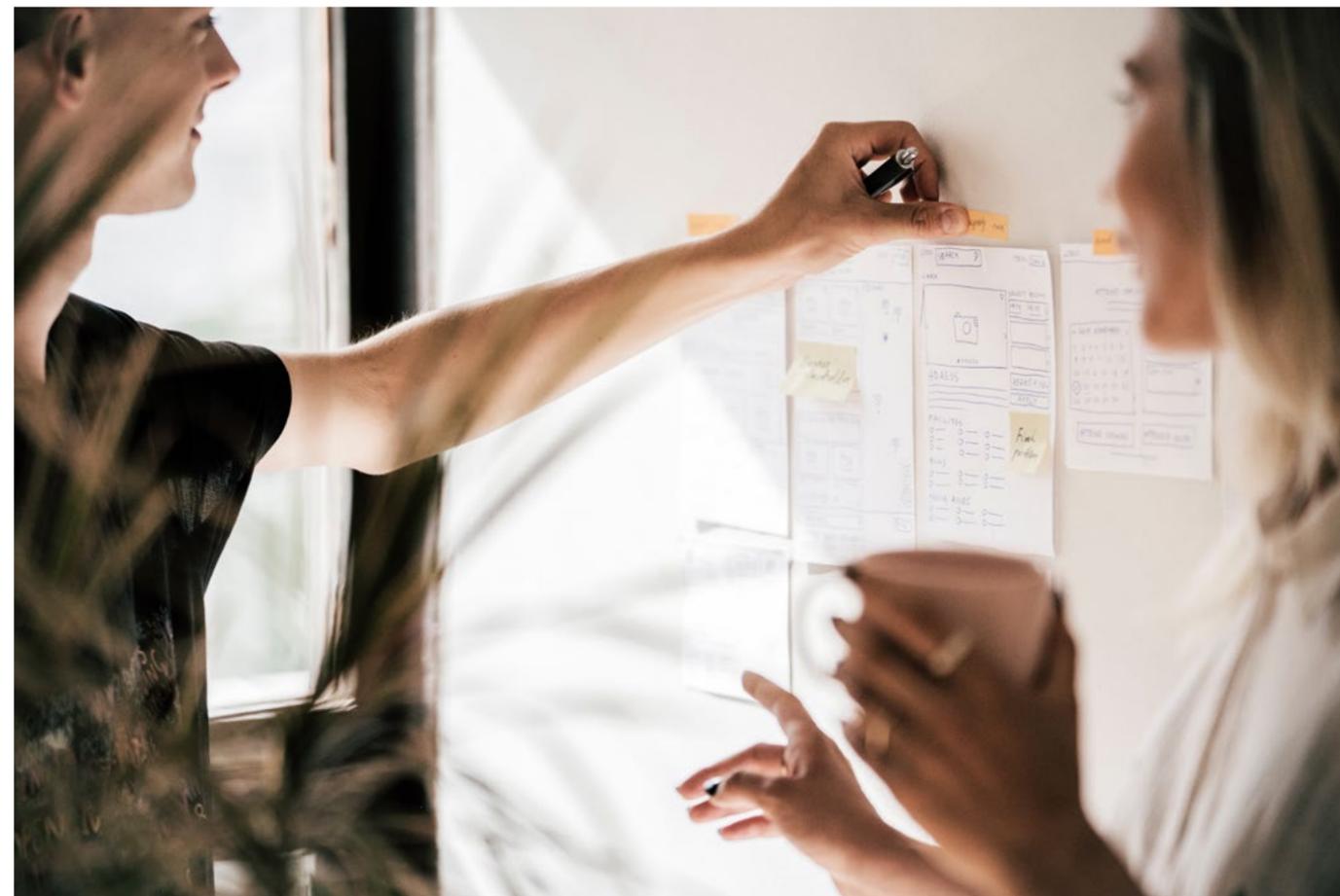
Residence Connect

Photography Credits © Spacestor

Spacestor.

Explore
Residence Connect

A survey by the Harvard Business Review found employees at companies that focused on inherent and acquired diversity were more likely to out-innovate and out-perform others. The report also revealed employees in a 'speak up' culture were 3.5 times more likely to contribute their full innovative potential. By including employees from across the board – different genders, ages, countries, backgrounds – businesses can increase their access to a wide variety of perspectives and expertize. A diverse workforce can help companies open up new opportunities and explore new solutions.

The first step towards designing an inclusive workplace is acknowledgment and acceptance of neurodiversity. **It is about offering choices to people.** There are things that can be done very easily without much additional cost or effort, such as:

- Providing more accessibility in the workplace; including ramps as well as stairs, and providing ease of movement with accessible doorways and barrier-free access points as well as taking space considerations as per anthropomorphic parameters.

- Providing suitable door handles and openings for people with limited manual dexterity, such as levers instead of knobs. Follow the "closed-fist rule", in which storage units and other equipment has U-shaped handles, push latches, side-hinged doors, and other elements that can be operated with a closed fist

- Ergonomic keyboards and a thorough assessment of workstations and seating, as well as providing smart technologies and apps that can help people adjust their environment to their own preferences like lighting, heating and glare.

- Assessing all wayfinding graphics to ensure caps lock text is avoided which dyslexic users find challenging to read.

Many little design nuances need to be mastered, layered on top of fulfilling the basic needs, in view of designing a space that is completely accessible in every aspect. However, designing for inclusion from the start helps sidestep the need for retroactive accommodation later, and it also creates a much more inviting workplace that benefits all of us.

As we find our feet **in a hybrid workplace, digital inclusion will be a design strategy** to consider. During the home working era, on the whole, teams have managed to interact successfully and productively via Zoom or whatever digital platform has been in use. However, as people return to the workplace, multiple participants in a meeting will be able to join from the same room, meaning remote users could become disengaged. The technology will have to be supportive of this, enabling full equality for every user in the same meeting, regardless of location.

The workplace, as an environment, has been slow to arrive at the accepted standards for inclusive design, however as Sonya Simmonds also said "opening up the workplace, it has to happen … it's not acceptable any more, not to design like this." And in a hybrid future, the office will be the only environment we can control to become that equitable space, for everyone.

Above all, true inclusivity is a matter of effective leadership and the organization has to have a true culture of inclusivity and diversity. It is about caring for everyone; being open to change and accommodating a wider range of workforce, offering them a choice of technological solutions and platforms, and also flexible working conditions. **A brand with inclusive policies woven into its identity needs to reflect this through inclusive design.** Design that can help people personalize their workplaces, feel a greater sense of belonging, and experience optimum comfort, thereby reducing everyday frustration and effort, and hence increasing mental well-being and productivity.

Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust

The Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust was set up following an unprovoked racist attack in 1993, which led to the tragic death of 18 year-old Stephen Lawrence. Lawrence had dreams of becoming an architect that sadly went unrealized. However, the Your Space (Stephen Lawrence Centre) has been designed to honor his memory and provide a space in which young people, aged 13 to 30, from disadvantaged backgrounds, can be helped to succeed in their own dream careers. Gensler donated their time and design expertize to this project, and Spacestor were privileged to be able to enrich the space by donating Palisades Grid and the locker system. The lockers provide storage for everybody, with grids installed along the wall fitted with plywood alcoves for bookshelves and planters. Your Space's bright, open coworking area will encourage and inspire everybody that works there. It's all part of the dream of creating a fairer society.
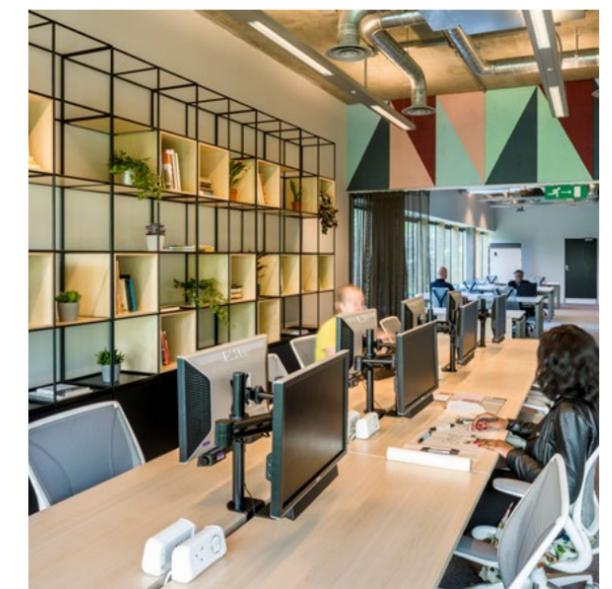
Sustainability is about ensuring what we use and how we use it today doesn't negatively impact the quality of life for current and future generations.

It's about meeting human needs in a way that is environmentally beneficial, socially ethical and economically viable.

Designing for

SUSTAINABILITY

39%

"

THE BUILDING SECTOR ACCOUNTS FOR OVER A THIRD OF GLOBAL GHG EMISSIONS

Global Alliance for Building and Construction

A Sustainable Future for the Workplace

When using phrases like "workplace of the future" most people imagine a high-tech, utopian model of business efficiency. However recent years have seen climate change and the importance of eco-friendly practices placed front and centre of their priorities. Not surprisingly, when we discuss the workplace of the future, a circular design approach is quickly identified as a sustainable solution to implement a healthier, enhanced human experience by lowering our environmental impact on the world.

Much of the world started working from home during 2020 which led to a huge reduction in travel and triggered reports from around the world of significant environmental gain. A surprising outcome of the pandemic, perhaps, but we **all witnessed how quickly nature can heal itself and this has had a catalytic effect on the sustainability agenda.** Many companies are concerned with continuing the good work that's been done and are committed to finding a way of more eco-friendly working. Sustainable workplace design is the key to success in this area, applying innovative methods to save energy, and in turn reduce carbon emissions, cut waste and boost the quality of life for all those involved.

Many organizations have recognized COVID-19 as **an opportunity to 'reset' and 'rethink'**, particularly in relation to their environmental impact and how sustainably they are designing spaces. In the last decade, sustainability has moved to become central to the architecture industry. As a result, this paradigm shift is disrupting the commercial interiors industry and changing the way we design space. Essentially, sustainability is about ensuring what we use and how we use it today doesn't negatively impact the quality of life for current and future generations. It's about meeting human needs in a way that is environmentally beneficial, socially ethical and economically viable. It's a strategic challenge for architects and designers, but it needs to be considered from the beginning and act as a prevailing design principle throughout any project.

Globally, the built environment is the largest contributor to our carbon footprint. According to the Global Alliance for Building and Construction, constructing and operating buildings accounts for over a third of all carbon emissions in the world, more than any other sector. In the UK alone, over 830 megatons of CO2 was produced last year. We need to reduce our carbon footprint, and we need to act fast. In response to this escalating crisis, governments have made pledges in the last few years, for instance, in the UK, the government requires all greenhouse gas emissions to be net-zero by 2050 and all new buildings to operate at net-zero carbon by 2030. Consequently, more and more multinational organizations, including the likes of Microsoft, are making the commitment to become carbon-neutral, or even carbon-negative.

A large new building project can have a timescale of up to ten years before construction is complete, so these targets are applicable to the work that's happening now. It requires a whole new mindset. Rather than considering the building or interior as the end product, as may be the traditional approach, we have to think beyond that and evaluate the full life cycle of any project. A holistic design strategy with people at its heart, prioritising wellbeing and inclusivity, combined with a boundary-breaking drive to create positive impacts on climate and the economy, will achieve sustainable and resilient design. The **buildings of tomorrow demand a multi-dimensional design approach that adopts the attitude of delivering an ever-growing, adaptable resource for the future.**

As a global community, we can no longer afford the waste of a building that is past its prime. Adaptability and resilience need to become inherent characteristics of buildings and their interiors so that spaces have greater longevity and the products within them are relevant for multiple genres of use. Buildings then have the future ability to react and adapt to the changing needs of the market and remain a reliable resource which can be reconfigured and repurposed time and time again.
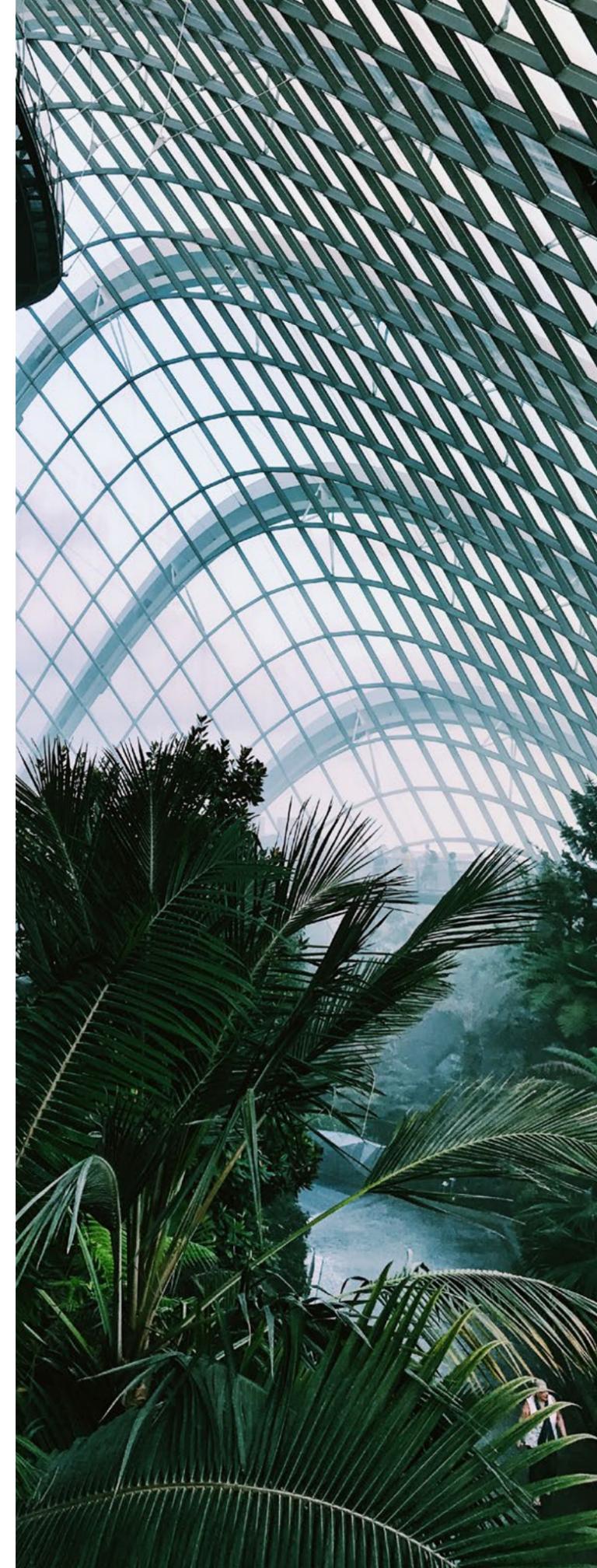
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The power of space to influence our energy, interaction, health, and drive is tremendous. Creating a unique, unforgettable workspace experience, and inspiring wellbeing, supports and strengthens the global community. There are a number of different design methodologies and approaches that play into achieving these wellness and sustainability goals, and by consistently integrating these core concepts into each step of the design process, from concept to occupancy, we can create more resilient, sustainable workplaces.

Circular Design & Adaptability

Within the last decade or so, we have been beginning to experience the negative impacts of a 'linear economy'. Well known to commercialism, a linear economy follows the "take-make-dispose" process where raw materials are extracted from nature,

transformed into usable products which are then sold, used and soon discarded as waste. No second life, in any form, is breathed into these materials, they flow in a straight line from resource extraction to landfill. Non-renewable energy resources are rapidly depleting and the ecosystem is suffering due to excessive carbon emissions generated by the waste produced in a linear economy. This emphasizes the urgent need for a new design process in view of preserving our ecosystem.

In contrast, a circular economy is an economy that is both restorative and regenerative by design. As described by Stop Reset Go, a 'global collective for rapid whole system change', "a circular economy aims to overcome these nested problems [of a linear economy] through intelligent design inspired by nature's genius, which reuses and redevelops resources already operating within the production cycle via renewable means." The end of life of any

product, or project, is considered at the very beginning of the design process and the entire life cycle is designed to offer fresh opportunities and avoid waste.

One of the key things the pandemic has taught organizations is how adaptable they need to be. So much change has happened and is happening still, and buildings need to be ready to react and adapt in response. Adaptability has become one of the biggest drivers of circular design, and circular design is adaptable to the core. Flexible and adaptable spaces then gradually lessen their ecological impact as less carbon is required to make changes to them.

> " A CIRCULAR ECONOMY AIMS TO OVERCOME THE NESTED PROBLEMS [OF A LINEAR ECONOMY] THROUGH INTELLIGENT DESIGN INSPIRED BY NATURE'S GENIUS, WHICH REUSES AND REDEVELOPS RESOURCES ALREADY OPERATING WITHIN THE PRODUCTION CYCLE VIA RENEWABLE MEANS
>
> *Stop Reset Go*
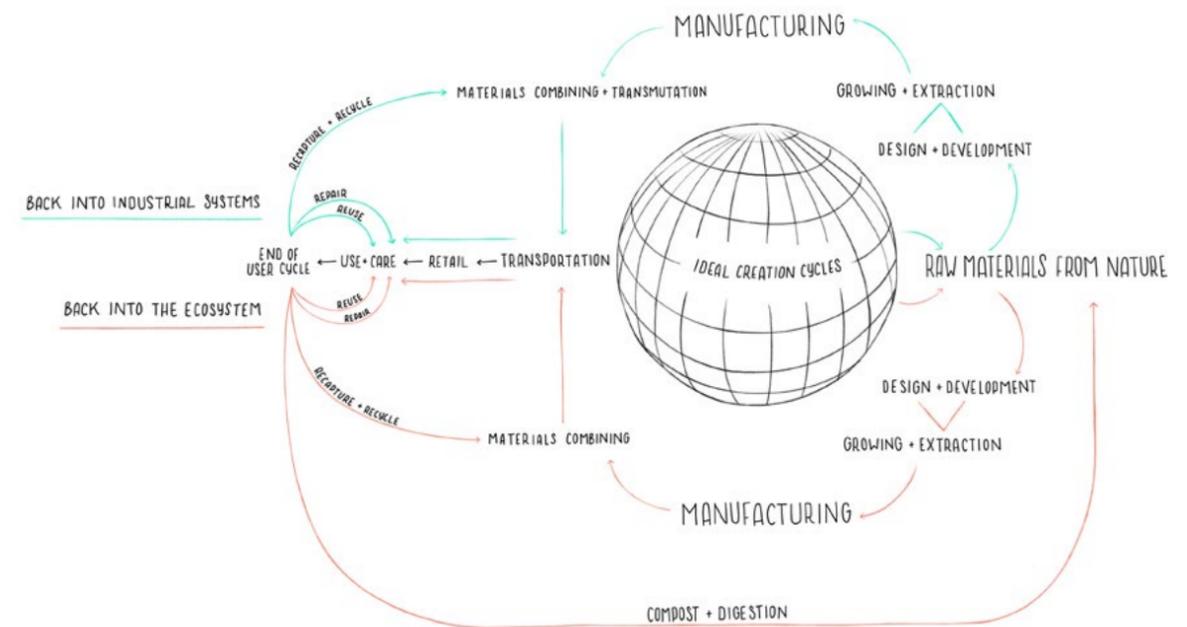
Designing for Disassembly

For a space to be adaptable, its components need to be designed for disassembly to support the reuse and repurposing of space. During a recent talk with Dezeen, Adam Strudwick, principal at Perkins & Will, made the point that "for hundreds of years, architects have drawn thousands of drawings on projects for how that building goes together but now we also need to have a set of drawings to show how that building comes apart." According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, deconstruction rather than demolition of a building can save 90% of a building's materials. So, it's a sustainable concept and one that enables fluidity of space. The design process needs to engineer a space in a way that gives it many lives beyond the first use.

Designing for modularity, disassembly and reassembly in an honest way is key. As Adam Strudwick also said, this could lead to "a more authentic aesthetic ... the visibility of connections is a big part of designing for reversibility."

> " A MORE AUTHENTIC AESTHETIC ... THE VISIBILITY OF CONNECTIONS IS A BIG PART OF DESIGNING FOR REVERSIBILITY
>
> *Adam Strudwick, Perkins & Will*

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Energy Efficiency & the Environment

With the built environment being the world's largest contributor to our carbon footprint, we need to holistically apply the guiding principles in sustainability in order to design efficient, low-carbon spaces. Identifying opportunities early on and committing to them throughout the design process effectively mitigates carbon emissions, contributing to the ultimate goal of becoming carbon-neutral. The challenge ahead is to simultaneously make smart decisions from a climate perspective while still creating functional and aesthetically-pleasing workplaces.

As more and more parts become reusable, the environment is being preserved in two ways; reducing the amount of waste going into landfill and decreasing the amount of carbon associated with creating new parts. So, extending the life of existing components saves waste, and money. Optimizing energy use is also essential in reducing the impact of operational carbon on the environment. According to author and sustainability expert, Paul Hawken, "we can reduce our energy use by 80% with no reduction in our quality of life."

Increasing human connectivity with the natural environment is not only an energy-saving strategy but it also has a direct impact on our health, wellbeing, and cognitive function. Studies have shown that "green" workspaces with higher outdoor ventilation rates can improve cognition and productivity. According to a recent report published by Gensler titled 'Climate Action through Design', "when you design for natural ventilation, you can use fresh air to offset costs of heating and cooling for four to six months out of the year, depending on local climates." Designing for daylight with strategic window placement and using solar energy can greatly decrease our reliance on artificial light, thereby saving electricity. Adopting a human-centred approach to design elevates the standard in every aspect; an improved quality of work life for the people and an improved impact on the environment.

Materiality

Sustainable design starts with the right materials. According to Gensler's recent report, "the harvesting, manufacture and transportation of raw materials used in building construction is responsible for 11% of global emissions", accounting for roughly a quarter of emissions produced by the building sector. When making choices for materials and interior finishes, it is critical to consider the carbon impact of their production, transportation and end-of-life disposal or recycling. A product's global warming potential (GWP) is a measure of greenhouse gas emissions associated with that product. The higher the GWP intensity, the greater its carbon impact, and the more important to pursue low-carbon alternatives.

The longer materials are used in buildings, the better, so the durability and longevity of materials and products are also critical factors in building a circular economy. Opting for timeless palettes of materials and color can

> **"** WE CAN REDUCE OUR ENERGY USE BY 80% WITH NO REDUCTION IN OUR QUALITY OF LIFE
>
> *Paul Hawken, Author*
> *& Sustainability Expert*

eliminate the desire for frequent replacement when trends go out of style. As Adam Strudwick of Perkins & Will said "when we're truly trying to deliver net-zero carbon interiors, the palette of resources and materials that are available becomes less," however, "it's about being creative with the materials that we have and the techniques that we know are thorough and authentic when it comes to sustainable design."

Timber is a sustainable and renewable material source with wide-reaching applications from structural elements to smaller furniture pieces. Its universally-appealing characteristics of texture and warmth imbues an aura of nature, contributing to that stronger human connectivity. Not only is timber a sustainable, evergrowing resource, it also absorbs carbon from the atmosphere during its growth cycle. Wood has low embodied energy so its production process is much more environmentally-friendly when compared with a material like steel which requires five times as much embodied energy. In interiors, timber is beginning to replace traditionally used manmade materials like aluminium and plasterboard.

Materials produced with minimal emissions further reduce the overall carbon footprint of an office. The sustainable workplace incorporates eco-friendly materials, with recycled furniture, non-toxic paints and recyclable equipment at the top of the list.

The Sharing Economy

For sustainable design to be effective, the working community needs to believe in the eco-friendly practices it promotes. This begins with the organizational culture of the company, with many promoting recycling programs, car-sharing and cycle-to-work schemes as a way to engage employees with the cause. The sharing economy promotes sustainable and durable design, avoiding long-term waste. Put simply, if everyone shared one (lasting) thing, rather than each having individual resources, there would be a lot less stuff in the world. As Adam Strudwick of Perkins & Will said on a recent panel discussion with Spacestor, "that sharing economy puts more onus on people to deliver products in a more circular fashion and to take responsibility for assets. We're going to need that to move towards a net-zero economy; people to take more responsibility for their assets and deliver services in a circular way."

Designing for planned obsolescence is unethical, however has become an insidious problem in commercialism and the linear economy. The circular design movement demands lasting and sustainable design that accommodates the sharing of resources, as much as future reusability.

At a time where public concern over climate change is at an all-time high, sustainable commercial interior design has never been so important. These "workplaces of the future" are being designed and built today at costs comparable to typical office space, with increasingly positive results to an organization's bottom line. Done effectively, it promises a whole host of benefits to the environment and the community, enhancing wellbeing and providing a collective sense of purpose. Organizations that take their ecological footprint seriously are also more likely to be viewed favourably by customers and clients. The secret to building a truly sustainable workplace is to choose well-made furniture and modular components that will last, use healthy materials in their composition and are flexible enough to adapt to any eventuality.

EisnerAmpner

A welcoming, wellness-infused biophilic design ... EisnerAmper's New York City workspace provides a unique and efficient sense of space for employees of the accounting firm giant.
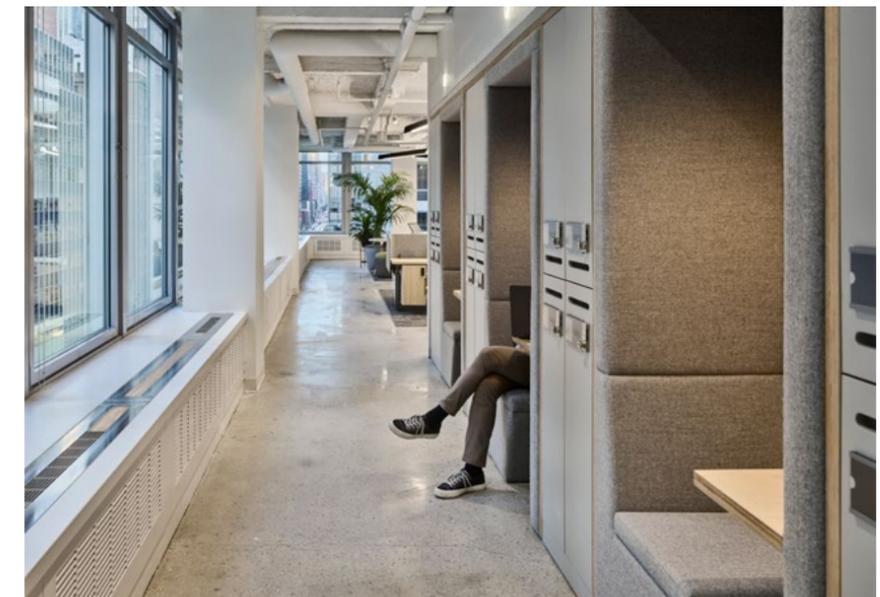
Driven by rapid growth, EisnerAmper, one of the US' largest accounting firms, recently moved into a new office in the heart of New York City.

Working with leading architects, FCA, they pushed the boundaries of workplace design and developed a 125,000 square ft collaborative and agile design scheme that aligns with EisnerAmper's vision for growth, whilst also showing a deep understanding of the workplace trends of today.

Right from the outset of this workplace design project, the strength of the EisnerAmper brand shines through. The seamless entry welcomes clients to the reception lobby where EisnerAmper's digital brand messaging and environmental graphics create an immediate sense of connection to the company. The seventh-floor space was designed with the intention of building a sense of vertical community and communication between all the employees of the business. Moving from the lobby into the central zone, the space opens up into the large central hub based around a three-story atrium connecting all floors via the grand staircase.

Focused on providing a healthy space with emphasis on employee wellbeing, each floor provides staff with as much access to natural daylight as possible. Along one side of the space, large windows along the side of the building flood the focus booths with light. Spacestor's Phonebooths create secluded areas for focused, individual working. Having an open side provides the benefit of a connection to the energy whilst the three upholstered walls create a sound absorbing cocoon around the user.

Lockers have been a fixture in top offices for years, however they are becoming increasingly recognized as a great solution, not only to enhance the employee experience, but to create a flexible storage solution that can aesthetically divide spaces and enable a clear desk policy for better cleaning. Seamlessly set in a run together, Phonebooths and lockers give a bespoke look and feel, whilst still being a modular and relocatable construction.

Further supporting the welfare and happiness of the EisnerAmper team, FCA ensured the design included a selection of biophilic elements, from plants throughout the space, to natural colours, finishes and textures. Providing a range of spaces, for collaboration, breakout, and focused work all impact on employee happiness, allowing them to complete their work in the type of space that suits the activity. The outdoor terrace on the seventh floor allows employees to step beyond the boundaries of the indoors and relax or work in the open-air.

Photography Credits © Frank Oudeman/OTTO (designed by Francis Cauffman Architects/FCA)

New, Innovative Materials

The increase in AI and technology during this recent period, along with priorities of sustainability and wellness, has highlighted the importance to merge the aims in seeking the development of innovative processes, applications and products with ecologically beneficial goals.
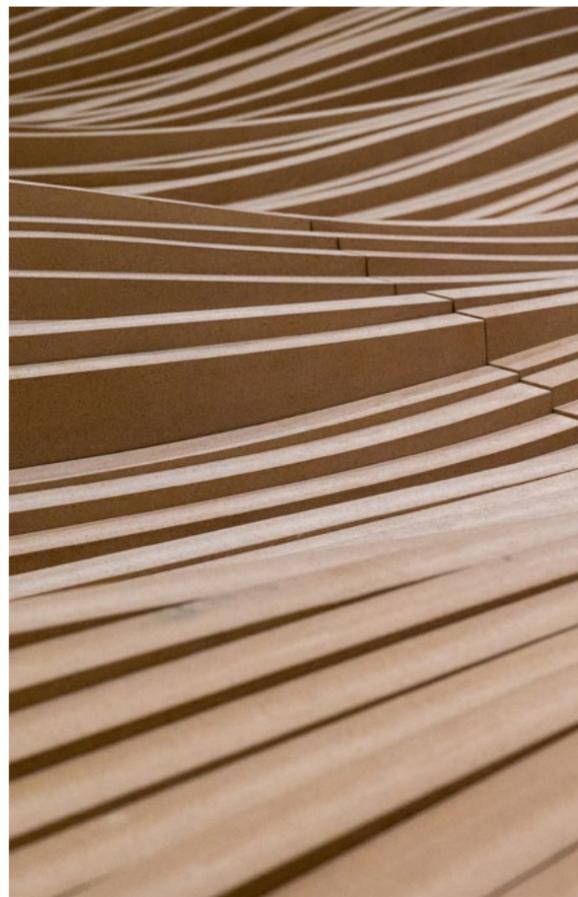
S ociety is becoming increasingly aware of the importance of environmentally responsible building and interior design. The post-Covid period marks the mass return to the workplace and in workplace design, we are presented with the opportunity to assess recent developments in architectural materials; and center our priorities on maintaining wellness and continuing the advances made in the environment and sustainability which were seen as transport and travel paused for a year all around the globe.

As well as the return of the workforce, there is an entire generation of 'Zoomers' or 'Pandemials' that are heading into work, most of which have just left education, and according to some research, are already expected to make up around a quarter of the workforce now. This generation are looking for the ability to connect to anyone in the world in seconds, but are also very aware of the importance of health and wellbeing, having lived through one of the biggest pandemics in recent history.

Moving Towards A More Sustainable Future

Employers must not ignore what makes a desirable company to Gen Z or they risk losing opportunities from a large proportion of the future work-pool. Cone's 2017 Gen Z CSR Study: 'How to Speak Z' found that 94% of this generation believe that companies should address urgent social and environmental issues and will consider the social purpose of a company when deciding where to work. However, environmental and wellness priorities are not exclusive to this generation, some great examples of wellness and environmental practices can be seen in projects like Headspace and their Californian HQ, and Jacobs where they opened a new European flagship office in London.

More often than not, environmental sustainability can improve wellbeing at work. Cycle-to-work schemes, switch-off campaigns and car-sharing programmes are all opportunities that companies can provide to their people to give them a social purpose on a scale that has a large impact.

There is much that we can do to improve the sustainability of a workplace by looking at the materials that are used within the production stages. We have to move away from our current 'take-make-waste' model when it comes to products and materials. The sustainable material palette is growing and offers great alternatives to materials like single-use plastics and non-recyclable materials.

Single-use plastic is one of the world's worst contributors to waste. Here are six materials which are on-trend right now, and have wide-reaching, innovative applications in workplace design...

Cork
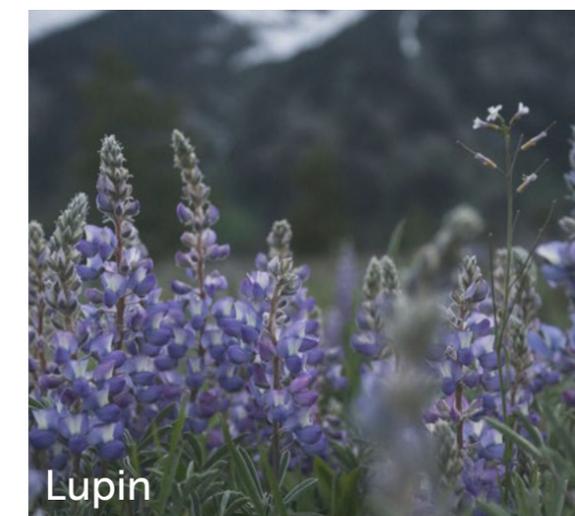
Lupin

Cork has been favored by many designers and architects for its compostable and recyclable properties. Its popularity has been on the rise and uses are now stretching far beyond cladding in architecture. Portuguese studio, Digitalab, used an innovative cork thread to create a collection of lighting and accessories, and Jasper Morrison made a series of furniture items from cork block left over from wine-bottle cork-stopper production.

This is a material that is carbon efficient as well as sound absorbent, fireproof, and water resistant, making it a great choice for production.

Students from the Iceland Academy of the Arts in Reykjavík have been developing a sustainable substitute to fibreboard that is self-binding, chemical-free and biodegradable.

This is a material made from a plant source which is completely self-binding, making it a great alternative solution in product design to materials like MDF that uses synthetic glues to bind the wood fibres together.

Photography Credits © Thom Milkovic, Tod S
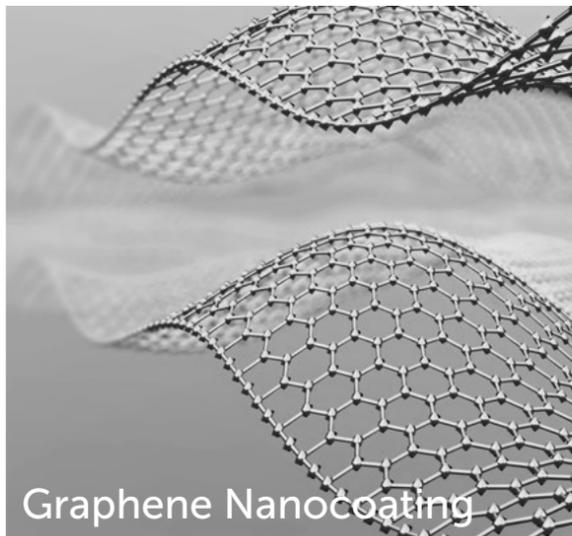
Photography Credits © Ryan Pearson

Paptic

Paptic is a new material that blurs the line between paper and plastic. Made of sustainable wood fibre, it feels and looks like paper, but is as strong and tear-proof as plastic. This makes it suitable for uses where plastic films have previously been the only alternative, it is easy to print on, easy to recycle, and perfect for packaging. This is an emerging material that is likely to be seen a lot more in the near future.

Wood

If interior magazines and Instagram are anything to go by, natural timber is the top trend in design right now. It is also known to be one of the most naturally renewable energy sources, which means it will have less of an impact on the environment compared with other materials. Additionally to this, research has shown that reducing the amount of man-made materials and introducing natural alternatives in your surroundings lowers stress and anxiety levels. Biophilic design is ever-popular in the workplace as it is a key contributor to a healthier environment. Natural timber finishes resonate wonderfully with this trend as its warm, yet subtle, texture provides a connection to nature.


Organoid

Organoid is a brand focused on 100% sustainability, authenticity, closeness to nature and untreated natural materials. These form the ingredients of their natural surfaces. They center around the principles: See. Feel. Smell. Experience. Natural surfaces from Organoid are made of natural raw materials (hand-cut alpine-hay, rose petals, lavender stalks and more) and are applied on various backings. They retain most of their natural properties, such as fragrance, texture, optics, and create a multi sensorial experience.

Graphene Nanocoating

One hundred times stronger than steel, amazingly light, nearly transparent, and capable of efficient heat and electrical conductivity, graphene has many applications in solar power, electronics, biomedicine, and more. It's a relatively difficult material to work with and mass-manufacture in its purest forms, however using graphene nanocoating allows other materials to be coated with the material, giving them most of graphene's best qualities cheaply and efficiently. One emerging industrial design use is in helping to make thinner, lighter, stronger smartphones with better battery life.
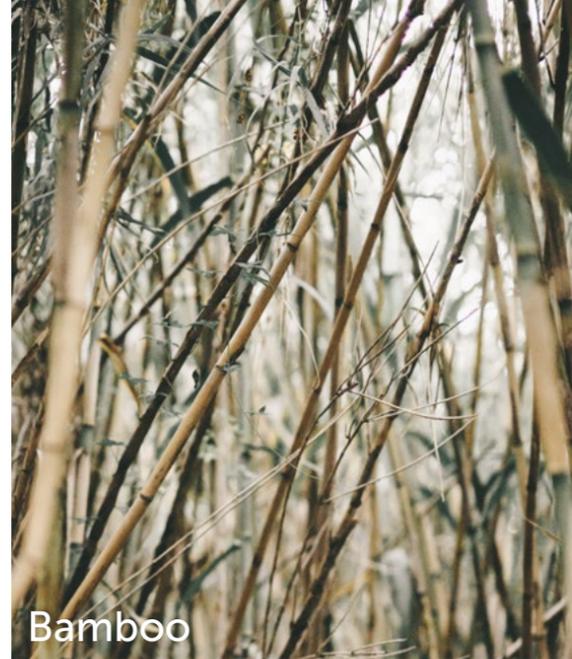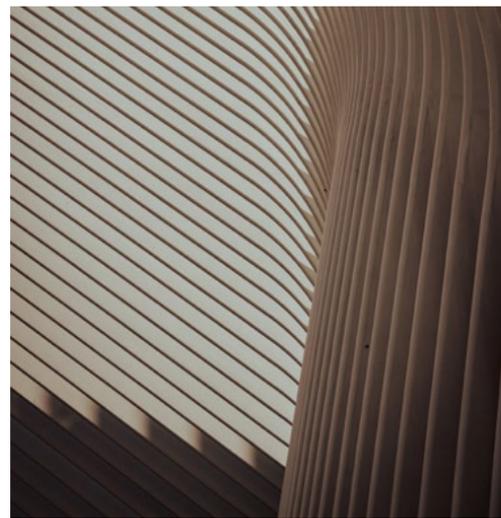

Bamboo

Bamboo is the fastest growing plant on earth, able to grow 3 feet in 24 hours in the right conditions – it is a super sustainable alternative due to its naturally renewing properties, often nick-named as the new 'green steel' for its versatility and strength in construction. In Asia, it's often used in place of steel for the construction of buildings and roads, or to reinforce concrete. As it's technically a grass, not a tree, there are no weak points along its length. This makes it stronger and more durable than even the toughest hardwoods. Bamboo fibres are naturally anti-bacterial without needing any toxic chemical treatments, this means nasty pesticides and chemicals aren't required when harvesting. It has been used for many years, however we are more and more seeing the use of this material in top designs and are likely to see its continued use as a top trending material for years to come.

The Power of
COLOR
& TEXTURE

COLOR AND TEXTURE ARE
POWERFUL, EMOTIVE TOOLS THAT
GREATLY IMPACT THE SENSORIAL
EXPERIENCE OF SPACE

2021 is looking on to a new chapter of the workplace as the community gradually re-inhabits spaces that have been empty for over a year now. For many companies, this will not be a return to how it always was, it will in fact be a 'reset' of the workplace. The global pandemic has allowed companies to stop, consider and reevaluate the purpose of the workplace and indeed, why and how we use the space to capitalize on real estate investment.

The physical workplace will always have a role to play as the 'anchor'; a tangible nucleus of a company's identity and the foundational platform upon which a communal experience is built that's unique to the brand. The workplace is really a physical manifestation of that brand and an embodiment of the company's culture. This imminent new chapter of the workplace is **an opportunity to reestablish a positive and memorable brand impression.**

Brand stories and impressions are formed by the experience of place. As humans, our senses form our experiences as they stimulate and engage the brain. So, a multisensory approach is key to redesigning unforgettable workplace moments that seek to revive the communal spirit, rebuild emotional connections, and reassert the brand vision.

Color and texture in interior design are powerful, emotive tools that greatly impact the sensorial experience. Predominantly, sight and touch are the senses directly engaged by these two design aspects, however science has shown that once we isolate and elevate one sense, this makes the others more powerful.

Color, But Not Brand Colors

Typically, there has been a tendency for companies to interpret 'branded spaces' as spaces which boldly utilize the brand colors. Whilst this is an expression of the brand's identity, it's an obvious one and it should really be deeper than this. Color should be used emotively, to shape certain moods of spaces, if the aim is to create a truly multisensory experience. As Laura Guido-Clark, CEO of Love Good Colour, said "brand colors are way better served when used strategically, and in the right place." An interior color scheme should be a carefully selected palette of shades and tones chosen for the atmosphere they create. It would be erroneous to say that a certain color consistently evokes a particular feeling in everyone, however past experience tells us that **color is most definitely a contributor in influencing mood, emotion and perception within a space.**

Color is perceived differently by every individual – it's personal and subjective. We have each experienced color differently throughout our lives and the connections we make with colors are informed by associations made with objects, places or events over the years. An individual's emotional response to any color is impacted by culture, preference and past experiences. Ultimately, we want to curate color palettes that instil a sense of wellbeing, reflecting brand values of care and trust.

Color choices need to be mindful of the environment in which they will be present. Natural light has a strong effect on color and the color value determines whether that light will be absorbed or reflected. The temperature and vibrancy of color can influence mood, for instance, warmer colors are generally associated with more lively emotions, whilst cooler colors generally evoke feelings of peace and calm or sometimes, indifference.

Another interesting concept is manipulating color to create the desired spatial experience. Different color values create the illusion of different dimensions – lighter, cooler colors make spaces appear larger whereas darker colors make spaces appear more enclosed. For example, if you have a space for deep focus work, the experience needs to be enveloping and immersive, so by opting for strong, rich shades on every wall surface, the space feels more compact and gives a greater sense of enclosure.

Textural Depths

Often considered secondary to the more instantaneous impact of color, texture adds an extra dimension to color. The two are interconnected - texture adds a certain quality to color, determining the tactile qualities of a material, adding a layer of depth and interest. Texture is visualized through light play; how light falls on the surface of a material, and the differences in reflected light and shadow, creates a variety of textural experiences.

Material variety means texture takes on many forms. More natural, rough textures like timber and woven fabrics absorb and reflect light irregularly creating a subtle surface. In contrast, shiny materials like glass, ceramics and laminates are highly reflective and the surface appears brighter.

This additional, subtle dimension can also evoke different feelings in a space. Rough textures have a similar impact on space as cooler, muted colors, creating a relaxed and serene atmosphere, whereas shinier textures, that strongly reflect light, create a brighter, uplifting ambience. Textural contrast builds interest. And when considered alongside the color scheme of a space, it can have a transformative effect, adding an extra depth to the experience of space.

Texture captivates both the sight and touch senses – the latter, in particular. Striking the right textural balance within an interior defines the levels of comfort. Interiors created for this 'new chapter' of the workplace will need to be inviting spaces and in no way a poorer experience than the home. The past year has seen homes morphing into offices and we have all grown accustomed to a new level of comfort. Texture plays a key part in this, with the softness and warmth of sofas, curtains and other soft furnishings, and this element will need to be translated into the workplace experience.

Huckletree

Huckletree is a coworking provider focusing on building hubs across the UK and Ireland for businesses of all sizes to come together by sector, scale, be brave, and lead industry change. They build physical workspaces for teams, educational and accelerator programs for them to scale and connect them to valuable investor and talent networks.

For their first Mancunian location, award-winning Manchester-based designers, OBI, led the refurbishment of the original home of the Daily Express. At the heart of the design is a zone that is referred to as the 'Imaginarium'. Using Palisades II by Spacestor, OBI have created a beautiful 'architecture within architecture' - a space for meditation, creative thinking and relaxing. Using an abundance of planters, LED neon lighting and soft furnishings, they have given the space zen-like qualities and it is a true reflection of Huckletree's brand promise to be futurists, game changers, innovators and risk takers.

PALISADES II
endless possibilities

Spacestor

Serene Sanctuary
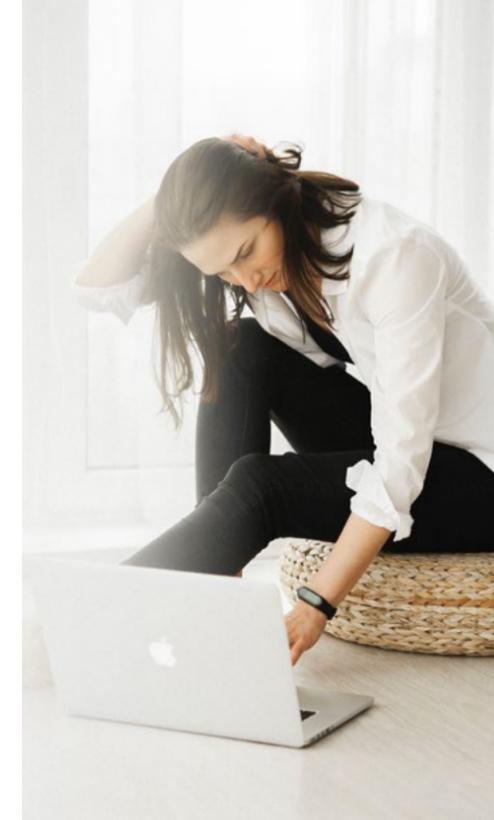
Workspace design has been becoming increasingly soft and organic. As the workplace becomes more and more valued as the heart of a brand, empowering individuals to be their best and nurturing the communal spirit, its purpose is being questioned. The regular corporate office, which focused on high levels of efficiency, is no longer as relevant. And, at long last! To be an inviting core of the company where you go to truly engage with the brand and its people, the space needs to be warm and welcoming. Entering it needs to be a transformative experience that translates you from the outside world into the brand as a living, breathing organism.

As we recover from the life-changing impacts of the pandemic, **a warmer, more welcoming space, bringing an enriched experience of culture, community and connection,** is especially important. Everyone has had an overload of virtual technology, and we see the workspace becoming a retreat from the digital space; a serene sanctuary. Returning will become a treasured moment where we can experience the luxury of physical human connection and re-ground ourselves in the vision of the company, as united by a common purpose.

The focus is on a natural aesthetic and simplicity,

rather than unnecessary complexity. It's about coming to work and stepping into a relaxing, distraction-free environment. Taking design cues from natural shapes and organic forms, nature-inspired spaces introduce soft, warm tones and rich, authentic textural layers. The best environments borrow from the natural environment: maximising sunlight, using finishes like raw timber and bamboo, and lots of greenery. By **strengthening the connectivity with nature in all its forms,** we are further building on principles of health and wellbeing, providing a serene surrounding as a perfect cleanser from the outside world, allowing us to be present in the moment.

The workplace-as-sanctuary is the natural development of a number of trends that have been influencing workspace design in recent years: the popularity of biophilia and the growing emphasis on sustainability and wellbeing. Combined with the aftermath of a pandemic and a new life being breathed into the workplace as a result, the concept of a serene haven will be widely embraced. As people come back together, a key focus should be giving people time to rebond former emotional connections, relax and recover from pandemic-induced loss - community.

An aura of pastoral, calming serenity will help recharge and form a seamless transition into the new-generation workplace.

Human Connection

This is a trend Spacestor forecasted in early 2020, before the pandemic struck. Interestingly, this is now more relevant than ever.

The Value of Human Connection

The events of the past year have left an increasingly large number of people isolated and anxious. Statistics show that the coronavirus has taken its toll on mental health and exacerbated the loneliness epidemic. We are social creatures, by nature, and the lack of human interaction as a result of lockdown, has been overwhelming.

The Fatigue of the Digital Space

To maintain needed levels of collaboration within teams, we have had to resort to virtual connectivity. The demands of always being online have contributed to heightened levels of anxiety, distraction, emotional detachment and interpersonal difficulties. So much of our time is spent online, and opportunities to make real connections with others, and to spend time together face-to-face, have grown very rare. The increase in remote and distributed working risks us becoming socially atomized.

We Need to Interact More

To save more of the community from loneliness and anxiety, and to recognize that, as human beings, we thrive on in-person collaboration and socialization, we need to interact more. And not only do we thrive on these things, it also fosters greater levels of creativity and innovation.

As lockdown eases, companies are gradually reinhabiting the spaces they left in 2020. We need to ensure that this is a culturally-rich experience, providing unique and plentiful opportunities for building social capital. These are not just any interactions, but heartfelt, meaningful interactions.

Simply occupying the same space is not enough. We need to build authentic human connections within those spaces. That's where the renewed human-centric design of the post-pandemic workplace comes into play.

Meaningful human connection has become a valued luxury, and the workplace is more important than ever for making and maintaining such connections. Today's generation of workers want the sort of workplace that allows them to make friends and meet likeminded folks. It should be thought of as a communal centre for fostering connections and collaborations between people, and designed accordingly.

The Office Has Become a Communal Space

The modern workplace, as we've noted elsewhere, has become more like a shared home, including a larger proportion of communal spaces such as kitchens, café areas, soft seating areas, event spaces and so on. Informal social spaces like these help to define a company's culture and mood, and provide invaluable spaces for employees from different business units and teams to meet and chat.

Likewise, by creating neighborhoods within workplaces, businesses can help communities to grow organically, which encourages team bonding. Offices should be spaces where we get to know one another and explore the many things we have in common.
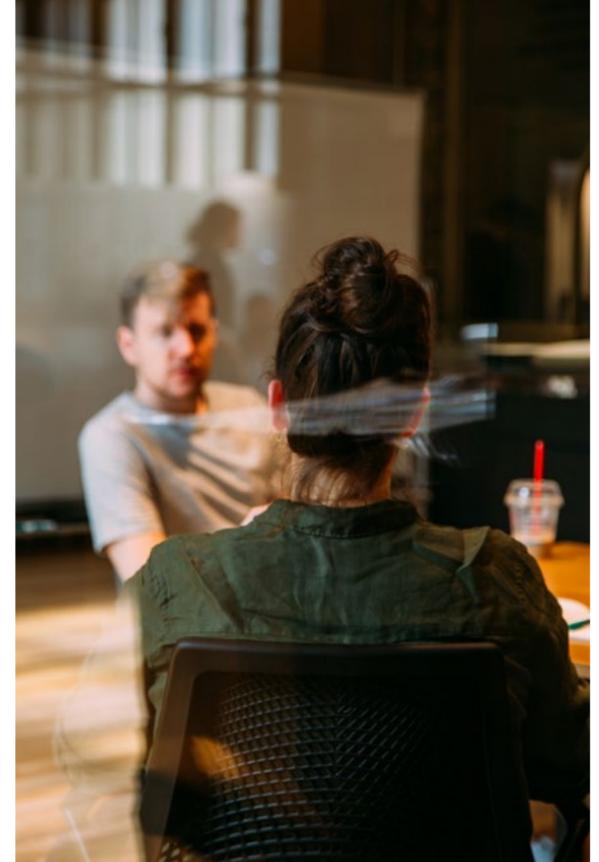
This concept of "office as communal space" is one that can grow and grow, and foster a greater sense of wellbeing all around: some companies have even taken to sharing their premises with local small businesses, so that they're more engaged with the surrounding community.

Meaningful Human Connection

Wellbeing is increasingly valued, just as much as salary, and so it's more important than ever to provide a healthy work-life balance. Building human connections plays a massive role here.

Employees perform best when they understand one another, when they're engaged with their colleagues, and when they have opportunities to connect with one another on the human level. This has many benefits for them: including lower levels of stress, loneliness and anxiety, and a happier, more optimistic outlook. Likewise, meaningful human connection brings many benefits for employers as well: such as higher levels of engagement, creativity, productivity and company loyalty. It helps everybody to better understand each other, and have a greater empathy.

Designers can be healers: they can help to build a better society and to create a revived sense of social responsibility.

Gusto

The original Union Iron Works machine shop at Pier 70, San Francisco

San Francisco-based startup, Gusto, worked alongside world-leading architects Gensler, to create a gigantic office in the former Union Iron Works machine shop at Pier 70, which is designed to feel like home with its shoeless policy.

As a San Francisco-based startup that helps small businesses manage their payrolls, benefits and human resources, Gusto is always up to date with the latest trends in work, technology and design. Their gigantic office in the former Union Iron Works machine shop at Pier 70, in the up-and-coming neighborhood of Dogpatch, has been designed by architects and interior designers, Gensler.

In the words of Gensler's design manager Marcus Hopper, "this is basically a new building inside an old building." Countless ships have been repaired in this 55,000 square-foot machine shop, going back to the days of the Spanish-American War of 1898, and Gensler decided to leave the old gantry cranes, lifts, pipes, beams and roofing as a visual focal point and also a homage to the past. In keeping with the building's history, they designed the conference rooms to look

like shipping containers; however, in keeping with the building's bright future, these rooms have been named after some of Gusto's 60,000 small business clients: the Bait and Tackle Shop, the Bakery, the Florist, the Gelateria, the Ramen Shop, and so on.

Gensler is committed to designing human-centric spaces, and as such, they involved Gusto staff in every stage of the process: team members helped come up with ideas like the heated floors and no-shoes policy, explored early designs in virtual reality, and even painted a 40-foot mural celebrating their customers. "We want our office to feel like a home," Gusto's CEO and co-founder, Josh Reeves, explained, "to be comfortable and authentic."

Spacestor's Palisades Grid system acts as a series of stylish zone dividers in the open-plan atrium space at the heart of the building, subtly breaking up the space into neighborhoods. Given that Palisades Grid was inspired by the work of Californian furniture designer Muriel Coleman, it's truly telling its design story in the Golden State.
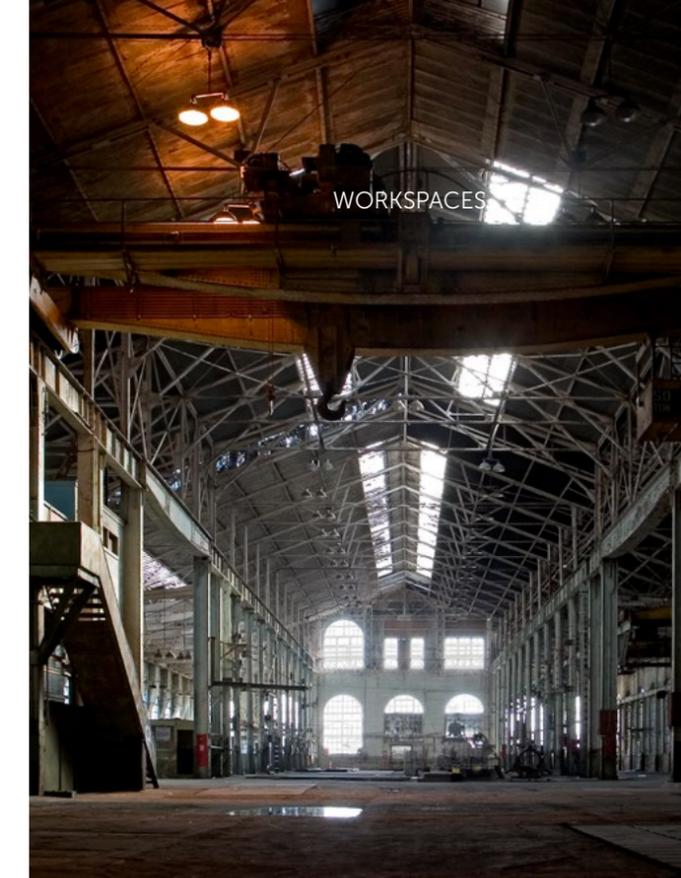
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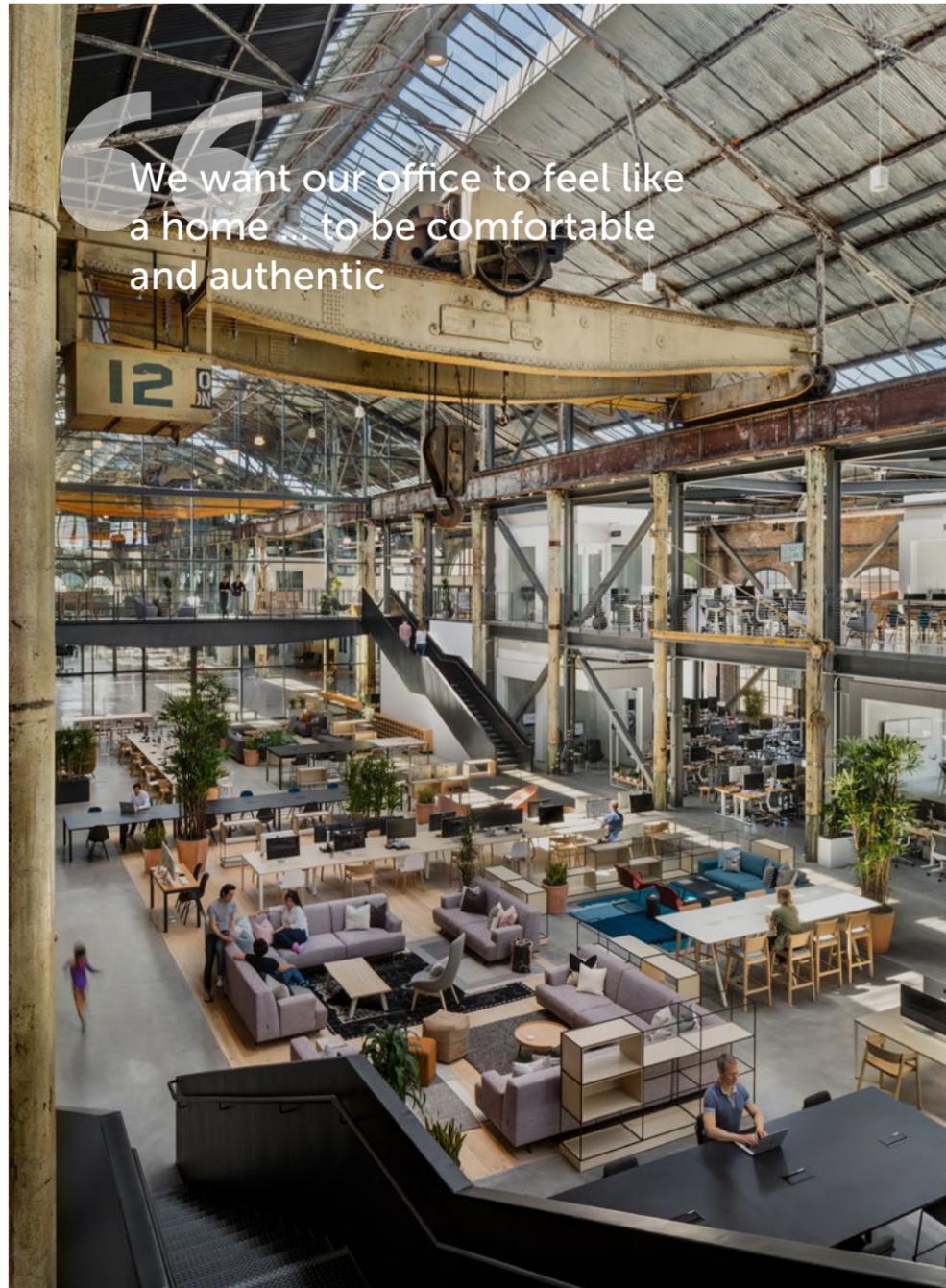
> "We want our office to feel like a home ... to be comfortable and authentic"

Josh Reeves
CEO and Co-founder of Gusto

Gusto, Dogpatch, San Francisco
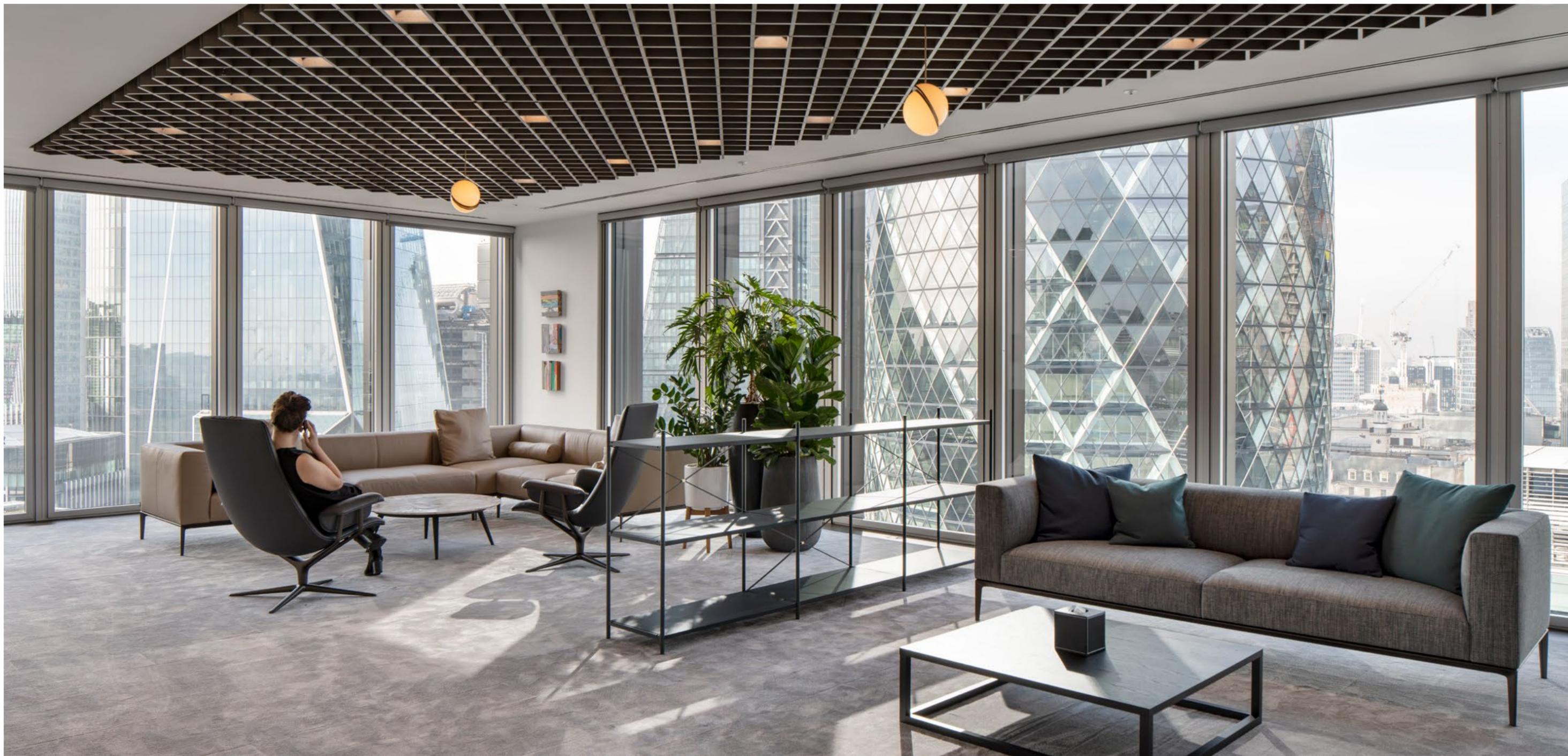
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