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HIGH-END COMMAND

LUXURY DEVELOPERS AND THEIR SUPER-PRIME HEADQUARTERS

London's luxury developers are increasingly applying their interior design expertise closer to home and creating headquarters that would make the Google folk jealous. PrimeResi investigates a growing trend for some very finely tuned engine rooms...

Everyone knows about the tech giants and their utopian "big kid" bases, but the luxury property sector has also started embracing the statement office as a way of both motivating employees and knocking clients' socks off.

We're not talking a blown-up map of the local area and a new Nespresso machine; these new spaces are designed to encourage creative thinking, promote core brand values and even integrate world-class art collections.

Key to this new wave of uber-HQs is MoreySmith, the architectural design practice called in to transform the nerve centres of Red Bull, Coca Cola, ASOS and Moët Hennessy, and recently those of top property firms including Argent LLP, British Land and Helical Bar.

We asked Principal Director *Linda Morey-Burrows* why developers are opting to make this (often major) investment, and how on earth you go about designing the perfect space for super-prime pros...

Your client roster includes a wide range businesses and sectors, from top property developers to media companies and major blue-chip organisations; how do you go about understanding their individual requirements?

I like to understand an organisation and its people, the positives and negatives about how it operates. The external image of a company is often misleading and there can be deep rooted issues within teams working in silos and not in harmony.

We like to understand the people, what they do, their needs and aspirations and match this with the business aspirations. This ensures the end result not only meets and fulfils their requirements but exceeds expectations in how it impacts on the staff and business results in the long term. In the case of British Land's old office, the previous office environment was not representative of their business and developments. We observed them, listened and challenged them which then enabled us to design a concept and strategy which showcases their business to best represent all three sectors – Residential, Commercial and Retail.

Images opposite: British Land's HQ at York House, 45 Seymour Street, London W1H 7LX



What are the key elements that make a successful workspace?

People – Happy people!

Even when we may have challenged organisations (and in some cases dragged them kicking and screaming) to a new culture, they are all very pleased with the outcome and can be found proudly showing people around afterwards – then you know it's a great success!

British Land previously occupied three floors with no connectivity, enclosed meeting rooms with no visual corridors and an air of secrecy. Our radical intervention was to open up the three floors with a new staircase, providing a centrepiece for staff meetings, collaboration and the transparency the company desperately needed.

While open plan is important this then needs to be balanced with interesting and varied spaces to empower employees to work away from their desks. This enhances creative thinking and teamwork, as employees are encouraged to leave their desk and walk around the office, interacting with colleagues on a more frequent basis. The working culture of the company is already shifting as a result of this change in design and space configuration – it encourages employees not to work in silence.

Images opposite: Argent's HQ at
4 Stable Street, King's Cross. London N1C 4AB

Technology is changing the way firms work, and moving faster than ever; how do you future-proof your schemes?

Yes we have to allow for constant changes and improvements in technology, this has been the case for the last 15-20 years, by providing an environment that can keep up with the needs of the business. It's also important not to overcomplicate as the key thing for most of our clients is ease of use and simplicity, they don't want anything which can slow them down or hinder productivity. We tend to avoid fad equipment which is overly complicated to use. All areas requiring audio and / or computers have a large allocation of space and plenty of options for new wiring and moveable electronic devices whether that's computer or TV screens, all can easily be taken out and replaced with upgraded versions.

Technology for me means freedom, freedom to work wherever and however people like and this is the most important thing.

Do you prefer working with older buildings or are new-builds generally easier to sculpt?

Personally I prefer old stock & heritage buildings as they are more challenging and give us more scope to be creative. Many new buildings today lack personality or spatial volume and variety, although this makes it easy to create interesting interiors from a "blank sheet," but we usually have to strip out many of the corporate ceilings and lighting and get it back to a raw state before we can create the spaces people love to work in.

That said, a large proportion of our work to date has been conversions of an existing space and we really enjoy this as there is a real sense of "transformation" which comes with this, for example Argent's offices at King's Cross and Primark's offices in Dublin.

The new British Land HQ houses much of the firm's extensive art collection, and you often commission bespoke artworks for your schemes; what difference can artwork make to a workspace and how do you go about selecting the right pieces?

We usually work with our sister company ArtSource to commission and research new art and sculpture. We like to consider art early in our designs and not "dress" walls with art, we like the pieces to be an integral part of the overall design and we enjoy working with the artists.

Curating and selecting from British Land's collection was easy as they had so many good works to choose from, but ensuring the right size, colours and texture is a skill too and one we are adept at.

It was a pleasure to work with an organisation who places such an interest in art and design. They have one of the most incredible collections I have had the experience of working with and we were able to select and work with the pieces we felt best complemented the office design. We are strong believers in art really pulling together a project and like to include this wherever we can. This really varies from project to project, and is complementary to the overall design. At Argent's offices for example the artwork hinted at King's Cross's industrial past.



What are the key trends you've observed in workspace design over the last 20 years?

Even 20 years ago we were designing cool buildings for the likes of Capital Radio and Sony Music, however the biggest change we've seen is of course technology. This has changed the way people can work; it's blurred the lines of home, work, hotel, retail, and cafe. People work harder and longer and want to enjoy life; be comfortable, sociable and be as successful as possible in their environment.

And do you have any predictions for how workspaces will change over the next 20?

Flexibility, variety and offering different places and atmospheres for people to work in, as the ever expanding serviced office market shows. We are currently working on the global concept in Paris for new boutique serviced office group Deskopolitan on two buildings... So watch this space!

What's the most difficult brief you've ever been given?

Most of our projects are challenging in some aspects, clients usually come to MoreySmith when they can't find the solution or have a difficult building with constraints. I think I'd be in trouble if I named one particular client at present, as we enjoy loyalty and repeat business from most of our clients!

What kind of positive effects can the right environment have on a business and its staff?

The culture of British Land has changed as a result of opening up the space. Staff are getting up from their desks and walking around. They are conversing more and getting to know people from different parts of the business.

There was some hostility to change at the outset but there is not a single person who hasn't said how much they love the new space. They feel proud to come to work and when people interview they come away thinking wow yes I can see myself working here, and it helps seal the deal when it comes to attracting fresh talent.

Do you have any tips for creating an office that makes the right statement to visiting clients?

Think of the people who are working and passing through the spaces, put this at the heart of any project and success will come! Be brave, be bold and think big! ☺

Images opposite: Helical Bar's HQ at
5 Hanover Square, London W1S 1HQ



*Super-prime developer Finchatton now operates out of a handsome, cutting-edge space in Chelsea that leaves visitors in no doubt about the team's top-end credentials. Here's Finchatton's Project Director **Adam Hunter** on the importance of an exceptional HQ, and some of the luxury trends they've incorporated down at Jubilee Place...*

Luxury brands the world over understand the importance of well-designed offices, fitted out to a standard which epitomises their brands but translates into a working environment. Take Savile Row tailors Gieves & Hawkes or Kilgour, both of which have created exceptional spaces for clients emphasising the craftsmanship which is integral to their businesses. In the same way, it's important for Finchatton to meet clients in a setting which is elegant and "on brand," hence we've incorporated joinery, technology, comfort cooling, artwork and accessories into our meeting spaces and ensured staff office space (the "engine room") is functional but still lives to the brand's core values.

COLLABORATIVE WORKSPACES

- We created spaces within the office (design library table, Egerton Room, shared table space) based on open plan design concepts. Innovation is at its best when staff collaborate to develop new ideas and move concepts forward.
- We decided to encourage staff interaction by moving away from traditional cubicles to allow for more spontaneous conversations and brainstorming. Here, the interior design team sits together, alongside our architects and project managers, so that any questions can be raised easily with everyone involved on a project
- White boards – the staff kitchen/dining space has a huge whiteboard allowing staff to add spur of the moment ideas.

MULTI PURPOSE SPACES

- We've put a large table in the kitchen which is used for less formal meetings as well as for staff to eat and mingle. We stock the kitchen space with healthy snacks to encourage this further.





Adam Hunter in Finchatton's Eaton Room at Jubilee House, 2 Jubilee Place, London SW3 3TQ

NATURAL LIGHTING

- We chose to move our office to a space that we feel really encompasses this. Natural lighting radiates throughout the first floor space through floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the King's Road. We opted for an industrial design for the main working space that incorporates the already existing rawness of the space's open ceilings. The meeting rooms, in contrast to this, are fitted out with dropped ceilings, carpeting, joinery and are more formal in presentation.

WELLBEING

- In addition to healthy fruit and snack provision, the new office includes shower facilities to accommodate staff who run to work or who exercise at lunch. The building also offers cycle spaces for those using two wheels to commute.
- And we make available the best coffee and tea facilities – every flavour of herbal tea you can think of – and a coffee machine with weekly capsule deliveries.

TECHNOLOGY

- Technology is essential to the modern office, there's no doubt about that, and we have taken the same approach to integrating AV into the office as we do in our homes. Our Eaton meeting room for instance has a professional grade AV unit and amplifier system hidden away behind dark timber joinery, along with flush ceiling mounted speakers that you only realise are there when they are in use. All the meeting rooms are connected to the internal Finchatton network, so wherever you are, you can pull up the latest drawings and presentations and work on them together on the big screen. 🐾

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