

18th Century Twist to Contemporary Workspace Scheme

align has designed a striking, elegant and highly-contemporary workspace scheme for a financial services company client, with a unique 18th century visual twist. The client is based in a central London building with a Grade I-listed façade and a new-build structure directly behind and the new project specifically relates to the redesign of one entire floor. The scheme had to be delivered in three phases, with staff moving round the space to allow working to continue throughout.

*'The client's business had grown substantially when the need arose for this redesigned work floor', **align** Director and Co-founder Nigel Tresise explained, 'with the existing layout proving not only overcrowded, but spatially disjointed.'*

A flowing and open floorplan was a key tenet of the brief. The remit was to incorporate three closed meeting spaces; a small number of private offices; a series of open collaboration spaces and a kitchenette/tea-point area, incorporating additional seating and meeting space. The 18th century twist came in links between the building and a great eighteenth-century portrait and landscape painter. The brief given to the award-winning workspace design team was to introduce some connection to the painter in the scheme, but without fighting against the essentially modern structure of the building, nor creating anything pastiche.

In order to create this painterly connection, **align** suggested a graphic route, using some of the painter's works in the form of floor-to-ceiling matt translucent film, applied to the glass walls of the three meeting rooms and one office, as well as informing the meeting room naming strategy. After identifying options from the painter's landscape work for this, the design team proceeded to apply for copyright from a number of leading galleries to use the chosen images, including *Tate Britain and the National Gallery*, ending up with the right to use four paintings. These then informed the names of two of the meeting rooms.

Further aspects of the brief given to the designers were to incorporate plenty of fresh, green planting and to reference the company's branding colourway by injecting bold splashes of colour throughout. The brief also asked for British suppliers and products to be used, wherever possible. This latter request led to some unusual discoveries.

'We had to find an alternative to the solid surface worktops in the kitchen, for example' **Nigel Trese** explained, *and ended up specifying recycled glass worktops from Stoneville, which worked really well.'*

In the end, there was only one element of the scheme which couldn't be specified from the UK, with the laminate on some of the wall storage coming from Belgium. The furniture on the scheme, however, chosen together with *Broadbase*, all came from British manufacturers and includes desking from *Tangent*, tables by *Naughtone* and soft seating from *Naughtone*, *Boss* and *Orangebox*.

When it came to greenery, the scheme features a wide range of integrated planting, arranged in small and large containers at floor level and above, featuring tropical and succulent plants sourced by specialist supplier *Lease a Leaf* and including *Aspidistra*, *Zeylanica*, *Zamioculcas* and *Chamaedorea Palms*.

The new space plan devised by **align** for the scheme takes the form of a single and continuous arrangement, with clear through-views from one end of the space to the other, creating linear connectivity for all staff. This was reinforced by a new lighting scheme, which forms part of the brand-new ceiling structure, featuring continuous lines of recessed, flush-mounted LED lights by *Future Designs*. The lights are arranged in a grid, running between white metal ceiling tiles (a bespoke resizing of an existing product by *SAS*), with accessible plasterboard tiling between the grid lines to allow access for services. White, trapezoidal, fabric-wrapped acoustic panels by *Fabritrak* were also set into the plasterboard to ensure effective acoustic management in such an open and flowing space. The enclosed meeting rooms also feature further acoustic panels in sets of four. These resemble textured artworks and are the *Botanic*, *Bella* and *Scrunch* designs by *Offecct*.

'Not only did we underline the linear connectivity of the space via the lighting scheme', Nigel Tresise added, 'but we also made sure that major design features in the space, such as the oak slatted wall between the first two collaboration spaces, the bespoke black metal and timber-box storage frame and the two-tone hanging wall of felted acoustic panels at the rear of the space all had integrated gaps or cut-outs in them, so that there are no blocks to the flow of space or to the sightlines from one end of the office to the other.'

Two of the three semi-open collaboration spaces, a 4-person and a 6-person area, are located near the entrance to the floor, on either side of a solid oak slatted screen. The screen fans out in a curved shape on its inwards side and has been designed to sit on a mirrored plinth so that the carpet below seems to float.

'The oak we specified for the screen is particularly beautiful', commented Nigel Tresise, 'in that you see exactly where the branches were still. It was great to have the option to use such high-quality timber for this scheme.'

A striking feature lighting above the second space is the *Buzzigrid* felt light from *Buzzispace* in *anthracite*. A second *Buzzigrid* fitting is used over the seating at the end of the kitchen area, this time in a *curry* colourway. Both feature *Mutu* bulbs.

Furniture in the first two collaboration spaces includes the white *Fold* table by *Naughtone* and *Viv* stools, also by *Naughtone*, in two different shades of green, with white metal frames. A bold pink and purple feature carpet area here, which continues through to both sides of the screen, not only alludes to the shape of the company logo but, via its colourway of cerise, bilberry and prune, also picks up on colours from the branding guidelines. It was supplied by *Forbo Westbond*.

Other major stand-out features include the series of floor-to-ceiling hanging felt acoustic sliding panels with a striking fret-cut motif, located at the rear of the space and supplied in alternating *aqua* and *teal* panels by Edinburgh-based *Friends of Wilson*. A large blackened steel storage framework is by *Walker* at *Abstracta*, with internal boxes facing inwards and outwards laminated with the exterior in *egger* laminate and the interior in *blue night* laminate, both supplied by *Polyray*. The piece was bespoke-made for the scheme by *Neil Marton* of *Select Shopfitters Ltd*,

responsible for all the joinery on the project. Additional storage is in the form of a 10m-long, white-lacquered storage wall to the rear left-hand wall, by *James Price*.

Further flooring used in the scheme includes the *Nordic Stories Tectonic* carpet for the open-plan areas from *Milliken*, whilst the carpet in the meeting rooms and offices is *Milliken's Artic Survey* in 'below zero'. The video-conferencing room has the same carpet in 'black ice' and the final carpet choice, used both in the lobby and teapoint areas, is the *Flex Stone* carpet from *Forbo* in a 'natural concrete' colourway.

For the lighting in one room a small stone pendant light was used, sourced from *Not on the High Street*. Furniture here includes a *Pars* table and *Calder* meeting chairs, all by *Orangebox*. The four-person meeting room has a *Dalby* meeting table from *Naughtone* and green *Albany* armchairs from *Lyndon Design*, with *Metaline 10012 wallpaper* on the walls by *Tektura*. The three-person meeting room features striking, two-tone *Albany* purple armchairs (upholstered in *Bute Melrose* fabrics which almost exactly match the feature carpet areas in colour) and an *Agent* table from *Lyndon Design*.

There are also three phone booths in the scheme for calls. These had to be fully enclosed and so were located to one side of the office, so as not to impede the central clear view. They have a dark and calm feel, with bottle green *Forbo Linoleum* used for the desktop and upstands and *Forbo Westbond* for the flooring, though in a different colour for each booth (*midnight*, *capri blue* and *jade*). Grey fabric acoustic panels above the upstands keep the noise in, along with double-glazing. Each booth also features copper anglepoise lights (the *Type 75 Metallic wall light*), whilst seating is the *Do* chair from *Orangebox*.

The kitchen/tea-point area to the left of the scheme features cabinets at high and low levels. The higher-level cabinets are in *egger* laminate and the lower in *blue night* laminate, with both laminates supplied by *Polyray*. These choices were exactly replicated for the boxes within the black metal storage feature piece and were similarly bespoke-made for the scheme by *Neil Marton* of *Select Shopfitters Ltd*. Purple seating at the informal meeting area at the end of the kitchen, where the surface wraps around, is by *Naughtone*, whilst the wall tiling is the *Matt*

Polygon White from the *Tones* range by *Johnson Tiles* and the striking plinth tile detail is the *Ted Baker Geotile Deco*.

Throughout the open-plan office, height-adjustable desking is by *Tangent*, from the *Cosine* range, with monitor arms from *Humanscale* and storage by *Bisley*. Walls are painted in a Dulux diamond matt, with feature paint by *Farrow & Ball*.

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Notes to Editors:

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About align:

align, co-founded by Nigel Tresise and Gurvinder Khurana, is a London-based interior architecture and design agency, specialising in workplace design, but also active across a variety of sectors, including hospitality and residential interiors. In 2015, the company was named 'Best Small Studio' at the London Design Awards and also won Gold at the same awards for its BrandOpus office project. The BrandOpus project went on to scoop the Annual Space Office Award at the Modern Decoration International Media Awards in China. In 2016, align was also a corporate winner at the 2016 Corporate LiveWire Architecture Awards. The company most recently completed the 'Omeara' live music venue, events and bar space for client Ben Lovett of Mumford & Sons, winning the coveted 'Hospitality Venue of the Year' award at Mixology 2017.

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