

SPACES

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A
new
era
for
emap

Emap relocation
Architect: Spacelab
Client: Emap Communications
Cost: £4m
Start date: February 2007
Completion: February 2008
Floor space: 9,300sq m

Spacelab has brought together the disparate offices of Emap into Camden's Greater London House, and the focus is on flow, connection and bold graphics ➤





This picture Spacelab created zones throughout the building, each with their own graphic identity



Above Glass-fronted meeting rooms open onto the reception area

Below A first-floor break-out area



Left Red lights keep the cafe aglow

Right A colour-changing wall forms the backdrop to the reception



Right The staircase creates a central flow between the floors

Converting factory spaces into workspaces took off on the 1960s and 70s in New York, when well-known artists began to occupy the redundant industrial district of SoHo, and it's a habit that has stuck.

London-based practice Spacelab has completed the final phase of the refurb of two floors of a converted cigarette factory in London for Emap Communications. The vast space has been used to bring together the B2B media group's 25 business units under one roof. After analysing the existing property portfolio – five buildings accommodating almost 14,000sq m – Spacelab put Greater London House on Hampstead Road forward for the relocation. The 9,300sq m office fit out was completed last February, with businesses moving in during three phases.

"The directors felt that there were relationships between the individual businesses that were not being exploited," explains project architect Andy Budgen. "The reception is designed to be a place of calm, but the central staircase that runs through it is to connect the floors and create a central flow, up to the desk areas."

This route passes through the cafe, also the "central hub" of the building. "Although people can take the lift they tend to use the stairs more, passing

through this area to grab a coffee, and then walk to their desk," says Budgen. "The fear with a building this size is that people come to work in pockets of the building. Connecting people was a core part of the project."

What it lacks in salubrious surroundings – Emap Construct and Emap Architecture previously occupied trendy corners of Clerkenwell, Rosebery Avenue and Exmouth Market – Greater London House certainly makes up for in character.

The Art Deco building, tucked behind Mornington Crescent tube station, was formerly the Carreras Cigarette Factory, originally built in 1928. Before being converted to office space, it was recently restored to its former grandeur, including the colourful ornamental front of the building, and, notably, the two large black cats flanking the entrance.

Previously inhabited by travel agent Thomas Cook, who left a legacy of "yellowy partitions", the two floors taken by Emap were soon cleared as Spacelab cut back the ceilings to regain the original height for the reception area. Lowered bulkheads, containing lighting and air-conditioning, were made into a feature of the fit out, playing a key part in the linear design.

A range of different sized meeting rooms around the ground floor facilitate an ad hoc way of ➔

"People can meet at the 'red cherry zone' of the floor or the 'green stripe zone'. This encourages people to move around and use the space as their own"



Above Graphics help with way-finding

Below The central cafe area



working, where rooms can be used “as and when” for formal or informal get togethers; another use of space designed to draw people away from their desks.

But it was the sheer vastness of the first-floor space that proved the biggest challenge.

“We didn’t want to brand the different areas by publication or product, because this is too susceptible to change,” Budgen explains. “But we did want to create zones, each with their own identity.”

On a tight budget per square metre, Budgen decided not to try to cover or decorate the vast expanse of wall space, but to concentrate efforts on the areas at the edge of each open-plan space (there are 12 distinct areas in all).

“We wanted to use wall graphics, more as a form of way-finding than product branding,” says Budgen. “People can meet at the ‘red cherry zone’ of the floor or the ‘green stripe zone’. This encourages people to move around and use the space as their own.”

Graphics and colours were decided on after much “flicking through magazines, cutting out shapes, ideas and patterns that appealed to us,” says Budgen, “holding them up against different walls and deciding what would work. There were no set themes as such.”

The idea works, turning white wall space from something quite clinical into clean space between decorated areas of the building. The graphics range from arts-and-crafts patterning to Japanese imagery and bold black-and-white Art Deco design.

“It is a FTSE 100 listed company, but also a strong media brand. The challenge was to create something cool, but not too cool”

Office desks are laid out in large open-plan areas, with photocopying points positioned in the natural breaks in the floor space. Work benches along the edge are set aside for layout and graphic design. Red tiled kitchens or tea points occur at regular points on the walk around.

“We created five lines of sight that connect the whole floor,” says Budgen. “It takes away the rabbit warren feel and creates a large but connected work area. After passing and talking to people en route it takes one of the directors half an hour to get to his desk; luckily he sees this as a good thing.”

The fit out strikes a clever balance between a media and corporate feel. “It is a FTSE 100 listed company, but also a strong media brand. The challenge was to create something cool, but not too cool,” says Budgen.

As the rest of the building is let out to other companies, including two advertising agencies and cosmetics giant Revlon, Budgen had to avoid Emap branding in the entrance area. However, as you reach reception, there is no mistaking the nature of the business. Back-lit walls that change colour as you walk past, tasteful stripes and brightly coloured modern furniture make it undeniably a media fit out.

The buzz around the place is also a giveaway, and means the building has worked; a purely corporate outfit would have a quieter cafe area, and people would be wearing much less leopard print... ■