



WORLDS APART

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING DIFFERENT AND WHY STAFF SHOULD GET THE BETTER VIEW. ANN CLIFFORD VISITS AMP HENDERSON GLOBAL INVESTORS' NEW 1800M² WELLINGTON PREMISES. PHOTOGRAPHY: PAUL MCCREDIE

As part of its move across Featherston Street to the HP building, AMP Henderson Global Investors wanted to turn a few preconceptions about investment companies on their head. Innovative solutions in investment design, IT and financial reporting have been exported from the Wellington office around the company's international network. But when it comes to innovative working environments, investment companies aren't what generally comes to mind.

Undaunted, AMP Henderson Global Investors managing director Catherine Savage determined that the fitout would say something new about the company, something that would distinguish it within the financial market. "The financial marketplace is a very crowded one and it [is] important for us to be different."

In the old building the company (New Zealand's largest fund manager and the local arm of an international investment company) was spread over three dark floors. The new locale comprises two floors only, and reflects both Savage's desire to make the company stand out in the traditionally conservative investment market and to create a good environment for staff.

Coming out of the lift at reception (Level 14), you immediately focus on the view towards Oriental Bay. Fitout designers Creative Spaces resisted the temptation to place the reception desk across the view shaft in front of a floor-height window. Instead reception is offset, at first out of sight, inside what the designer refers to as a "one-off sculptural space".

In 2001 designer Andrew Cox from Creative Spaces took a year out to study fine art at Massey: something 100% creative and a complete change of scene. Now back in the workforce, the year focused on sculpture and painting has influenced his design philosophy.

With newly widened horizons, Cox says he has moved from a traditional approach to finding his own voice.

He's keen to create decorative elements in an interior, to give a more visually interesting result than that achieved with the prevailing minimalist approach. He's aiming, says Cox, for more depth.

Cox and Savage were clearly of the same mindset: minimalism is "cool and clean but boring aesthetically".

The gallery-like reception area is a clean white, with intense colour provided by the bright orange / red desk and chairs. The desk's oval form (with black lacquered MDF skeleton) was inspired by American / Japanese sculptor Noguchi, who is known for the biomorphic imagery in his contemporary sculpture.

Cox in fact generated the whole layout, including the desk, off a curved wall designed to provide sculptural shape. The wall sweeps around the reception area and the view out to the harbour is edged on each side with meeting rooms, a kitchen, boardroom and the security-locked private capital area.

The oval form is echoed again in cutouts in the ceiling over the reception desk and client interface area that leave the air conditioning ducts and wiring exposed. These, say Cox, come from his study of the work of American artist Jessica Stockholder, whose often temporary site-specific works are about (amongst other things) forms in space that are explored using found objects.

Cox enjoys the contrast between the dusty raw wood and the highly polished bluestone floor and white white walls. "I wanted it to be left as it was. I wanted to create more depth."

There's more sculpture at play in the aluminium pipes – looking rather like balanced pick-up sticks – that form visual screens behind

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the reception desk and in the client zone. While they provide a demarcation of areas (and a “wall” on which to hang the large plasma television screen), these screens refrain from blocking off space or the view.

Although it’s the reception area that dominates, Catherine Savage is insistent that the fitout was for the 73-odd staff and not visitors. “In too many companies the money goes into the front of house, leaving a bare minimum for staff,” she says.

All the staff (apart from the private capital and computer support teams) are housed above, on Level 15, where, in line with the brief, they’re brought together in an environment where the workspace is an extension of home living.

The goal was an open plan office that would allow support staff to interact with executive staff – something that didn’t happen in the old building, where, even at Friday night drinks, they’d congregate in separate teams. The hierarchy is articulated as a flat structure, with staff spread around the outside perimeter of the floor in workstation clusters. Strategically positioned TV screens mean everyone can keep an eye on the

markets, and storage – hard against the central core – is no more than three metres away from anyone.

The adjustable workstations are a Formway prototype (AMP Henderson is an investor in the company) that was tweaked by staff before the move. Further brand loyalty is demonstrated by the Life chairs, the first bulk purchase of this new Formway product in New Zealand.

With virtually everyone accommodated in this open plan area, there were some ground rules laid down before the move: no eating except in the staff area and a clear desk policy every night. There was, not surprisingly, some resistance – and during the first week Savage even went as far as threatening to collect items left on desks at night and put them in her office for collection next morning. “The whole idea was to set standards and make the most of the floor space,” she says, and it must have worked, as her threat wasn’t carried out...

The key to all this though is not the work area, which merely provides a fairly muted backdrop to

the real business of the company. Rather it is the central breakout zone that has changed the way staff relate and had a big impact on morale.

Savage reportedly made a pact with staff that nothing would change during the first three months and then they could discuss it. Anecdotaly, staff have already adjusted: it’s reported to be much quieter than anticipated, and there’s a noticeable difference in morale. We hear also that the breakout space is a big hit and there’s a lot more interaction.

Office life now focuses on the kitchen / breakout zone that is positioned to take advantage of fantastic views. This area also incorporates four meeting rooms at its edges, each a different deep colour (chartreuse green, deep purple, ruby and aubergine), ideal for informal intra-office meetings.

Cox was keen to create an eclectic feel and has used a mix of furniture to provide contrast. There are double sided chairs in blue boucle for relaxing, stools at a bar overlooking the harbour, or a long table backed by a white vinyl banquette. The





kitchen, where AMP Henderson's early rising bond and equity dealers often breakfast, is in a slick but homey Bestwood Melamine, with white baked enamel glass splashbacks and hard-wearing lino on the floor.

Staff have apparently given Cox 99.9% positive feedback about the impact of the area and can be reluctant to return to their desks. "AMP Henderson wanted to get teams working together in a big open plan space, but was open to us doing something different," Cox says.

The shapes, colours and artwork in this scheme (large black and white Anne Noble photographs in reception, dark landscapes by Margaret Eliot that contrast the dramatic views from the meeting rooms, abstracts by Simon Morris in the boardroom) set this AMP Henderson company

SELECTED CREDITS

- CLIENT AMP HENDERSON GLOBAL INVESTORS
- DESIGNER CREATIVE SPACES
- MAIN CONTRACTOR FLETCHER INTERIORS
- PROJECT MANAGER CREATIVE SPACES
- ALUMINIUM PIPES ULLRICH ALUMINIUM
- FURNITURE KADA COMMERCIAL FURNITURE, THONET & CO, TOOMEY
- INTERIORS, WILKHAN ASIA PACIFIC
- HARD FLOORING TRETHERWEY GRANITE & MARBLE
- JOINERY FORMWAY BRENDON
- LIGHTING AESTHETICS LIGHTING, MODUS LIGHTING
- LINOLEUM HALSTEAD FLOORING
- OPERABLE WALLS HUFCOR
- PAINT RESENE PAINTS
- SOFT FLOORING FELTEX
- WORKSTATIONS & SEATING FORMWAY



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