

# hinge

ARCHITECTURE  
INTERIOR DESIGN

## OVERTIME... DESIGN GOES TO WORK

**COLLECTING WORDS**  
Aric Chen of M+ Tells All

**BEAUJOLAIS NOUVEL**  
A New Winery Building

**CAFFEINATING BERLIN**  
Three Cafes by JOI Design

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**NEW  
OFFICE  
DESIGN**

Work. The very thought of it evokes sweat, routine, labour. As ever greater portions of the world's population move into urban centres, the number of people who perform physical labour in exchange for monetary reward drops. Most of us work in comfortable, climate-controlled environments; in fact, more and more of us can work virtually anywhere, as long as we have a decent hand-held device and good WiFi. Yet the notion that work is something unpleasant, something to be endured, still lingers. That workaholics are people to be pitied. And that if the workplace was such a cool space to hang out in, well, no one would need to be paid to do their job – they would just volunteer their time.

Therein lies the rub. While naturally there are many office environments that really do seem like work if any length of time were spent within them, successful companies that value highly skilled employees understand that recruiting and retaining them is paramount to continued success. These companies invest in facilities that people want to work in. They hire specialists to delve into workplace strategies and how to best foster an environment that reflects their corporate culture – and corporate aspirations. They hire interior designers to not only plan spaces efficiently but also to carve out volumes and bring them to life with colour, materials, lighting and art, inspiring and instilling pride in the people who work there.

Work spaces may not be as sexy as hotels or restaurants – although some may argue that they are catching up fast – but for a group of people from diverse backgrounds to spend the greater part of their waking hours together, being productive towards a common goal, sexy isn't really a top priority. Despite the significant changes in office interiors, what hasn't changed over the years is the fact that well-designed offices still reflect the company's personality. The lavish corner offices with built-in bars seen in *Mad Men* allude to the heady days in the 60s when advertising first impacted spending habits. Compare them with the tasteful yet much more restrained offices of Lockhart Gardner in *The Good Wife*, where the law firm's insolvency, which entailed the occupants' giving up one of their two levels, became the driving force for the characters' shenanigans for a whole viewing season. All of the bugbears that managers and staff have always worried about still exist: privacy, confidentiality, conferencing, adjacencies, image, branding, front of house, back of house, technology and storage. Today, though, there is more of an emphasis on accountability and transparency – and that is reflected in offices that are, quite literally, free of walls or demarcation.

The open office environment suits millennials just fine. This group of 20-somethings, freshly graduated and embarking upon their first jobs, don't know a way of working that didn't involve keying or typing. The cream of their crop is whom blue-chip info tech or R&D companies try to recruit and, along with a hefty signing bonus, they are promised a

hip, urban environment where they can lounge, shoot pool or confer over cold-pressed juice. Millennials like to know what's going on; they don't mind doing everything themselves, and everything at the same time, and there are no boundaries between working and playing, as they are always online and in touch. Their increasing numbers in the workplace mean industries where they dominate are being designed to resemble sophisticated frat houses. Dedicated desks and workstations are getting smaller and smaller, while common areas such as lounges, pantries, cafes and perks such as pool tables, gyms and napping nooks are getting more real estate. With server and cloud capacities exponentially increased, files are more likely to be stored only digitally in some industries, reducing the need for hard-copy storage. While server rooms remain more or less the same size, the equipment within them is faster and more robust.

Reception and waiting areas used to be where all the money was poured, as these zones embody the image that the business wishes to project to its visitors and clients. While that is still the case in some industries – and there are plenty of reception areas with enough bling to rival Versailles – it is no longer the norm to even have a reception in others. Some firms such as publishers or e-commerce companies have done away with not only with the space previously dedicated to a reception area, but also the very position of receptionist. Other companies prefer a more informal waiting area, and have combined it with staff lounges, pantries and casual meeting tables and chairs. As employees typically don't enjoy privacy at their desks, the 'front of house' is often where privacy nooks in the form of booths for concentrated work or for confidential phone calls are found. In the contemporary office, even the front of house/back of house boundaries are blurred, as companies with flatter organisational charts allow staff to indulge in real estate with views from every inch of the space. Indeed, workspaces are becoming more like an extension of the residence; it is also not surprising that the home-office as the primary place for business is becoming more common globally. And with the games, toys and gadgets installed in some corporate spaces, no wonder employees are signing up to do overtime.

In the following pages, we explore offices from near and far, places large and small, grand and modest, across many different types of industries. They are all reflections of the businesses they house; some are in remarkable, even heritage buildings, while others are in nondescript towers of glass. Together, they show that the corporate world is a dynamic, exciting place to be in, even as the spaces' designers attempt to keep up with how fast business is changing. We also chat with some of the city's leading experts in workplace interiors, to get their perspective on how things have developed locally, within China and around the world – and how their designs have evolved with the times. The projects here illustrate that the office design discipline is one that will continue to break new ground for a long time to come.

# Stephenson Harwood

## Hong Kong Spatial Concept

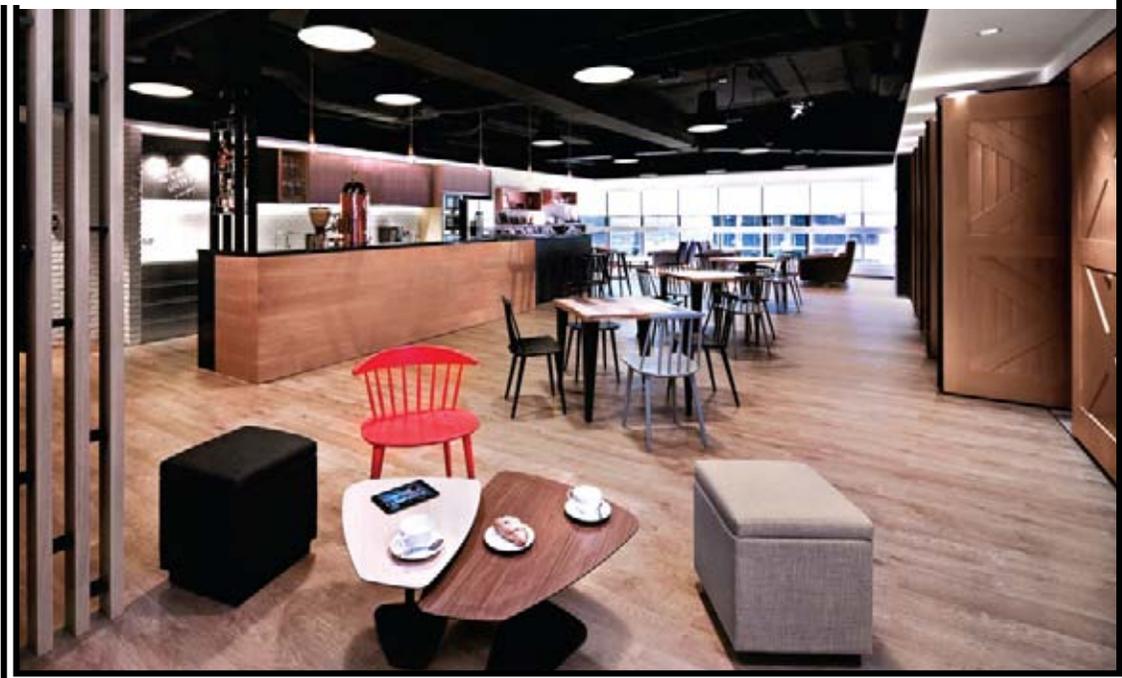
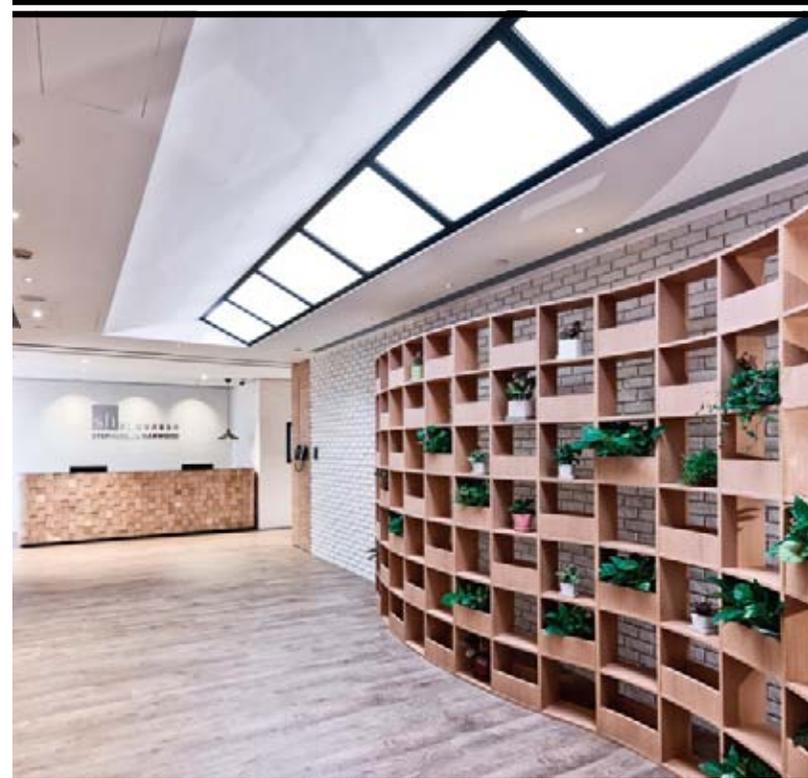
Photography by John Butlin

In the spectrum of industries that require corporate offices, the legal profession is considered one of the most conservative. It makes sense. When it comes to having someone represent your interests or argue on your behalf, you want confidentiality to be one of the top priorities. For the Hong Kong office of global law firm Stephenson Harwood, the 18,000sq ft space takes up an entire floor in an Admiralty tower. While Gary Lai of interior design firm Spatial Concept couldn't get away from planting rows of private offices along the windows, he did manage to inject energy into the space through an informal vibe. And he did it by taking a page out of how millennials work – or like to work.

It is immediately apparent once the lift doors open that you're not in an episode of *The Good Wife*. Embodying an Urban Garden Playground theme, a serpentine wall of open shelves greets staff and clients with leafy green plants, set against a white brick backdrop and hardwood plank flooring. It loosely separates a pool table and dartboard area from the more formal reception desk at its opposite end. The duality continues on either side of the reception desk as you venture further into the space. To the right and immediately behind is a suite of meeting rooms

ranging from casual lounge setting with sofas and chairs to a full boardroom setup that seats twenty. Four of the five meeting rooms can be opened to form one large space, with pivoting timber-clad doors that lead to a cafe.

The cafe is essentially an open lounge also accessible from the left of the reception desk; it is the heart and soul of the office. Featuring a vintage brass coffee distiller, the area is dubbed 'refreSH' and contains a variety of seating options. Staff can saddle up to the bar and chat casually on timber barstools painted black and placed against a black marble counter. They can sit down on simplified fanback Windsor chairs at one of the square dining tables. Or they can lounge on soft sofas and complementary chairs while enjoying the view. The warm tones of natural timber contrast with stainless steel appliances, black ceilings and the occasional pop of red paint. "The relaxed atmosphere of the cafe transports attorneys and counsels away from their computer screens and box folders," says Lai. "As expected, the cafe has now become the most popular place for occupants to come together, consult with colleagues, reassess cases or simply take a short break and refresh their minds."





The fun and games don't stop there. To keep staff members' minds sharp, Lai included a fully equipped gym on the opposite end of the cafe. Plants were incorporated into the tops of shared file cabinets in open-area workstations, and a leaf mural feature wall. Sliding glass doors maximise the space in every private office, which is typically shared between two colleagues, while allowing natural light from the windows deep into the core despite the double hallways in some parts of the office. The colour palette is predominantly white with black trim, with the occasional splash of indigo, yellow or pink. Even the loos got special treatments: the gents' got a mountain ski resort look while the ladies' received a cherry blossom aesthetic.

"The cafe, the Urban Garden Playground and the green design elements have all contributed to the noticeable boosts in productivity and team morale in the past few months," says Lai. "But the most important improvement is the induction of a more relaxed and open communication between attorneys and clients."