



PHOTOS: MICHAEL CALLEJA, STUDIO KONNECT

Holistic and holy

These offices are essentially of a religious nature. So the architects entrusted with their refurbishment aimed at projecting a calm environment of reflection, while keeping the feel formal.



ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN: Atelier
Maison

PROJECT BRIEF: Interior design and refurbishment of the offices of the headquarters of a religious institution. The project involved a complete makeover of the executive floor. More storage and shelving was needed and it was important to retain the existing lounge area and give it a new lease of life.

Being a workspace of a spiritual nature, did you think this refurbishment project would be challenging and, at the same time, limiting?

We knew it was going to be a challenge, but we did not see it as limiting. We had to approach the project differently and think outside the box. It was important to understand the way the space is used by the clients, and also to respect their way of

thinking and beliefs. Working on an office space was refreshing.

What, in fact, was the biggest challenge given the nature of the project, your own style as architects and the type of jobs you've worked on?

One of the biggest challenges was how to address the long corridors and high ceiling. We are not exactly fans of corridors, and when we have the opportunity to redesign the architecture of a space, we avoid them at all costs.

Since we were working with an existing space, we went for a series of portal frames, which would act as light sources and, at the same time, break up the long corridor with repetition. Their installation on site – getting them in and actually placing them upright – was, in fact, quite a headache since they are 4m high.

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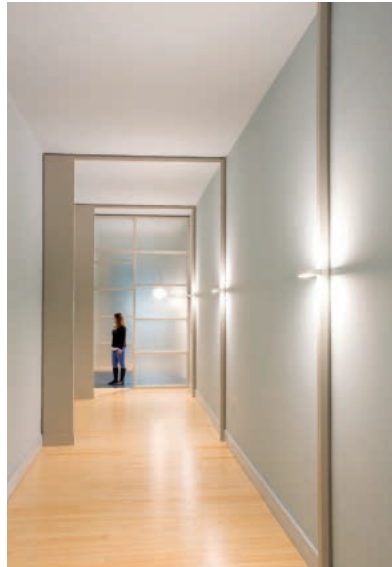


WORKSPACE

To tackle the issue of the long corridors, we also added two glass partitions, with 'window panes', to define the lounge area in the middle of the corridor. The wire glass created definition and also gave the impression that the corridor continues beyond. Mirroring the glass partitions helped to extend the 'enclosed' lounge area, making use of the corridor space, while creating the feeling that you need to walk further to see what is beyond.

And what was the biggest constraint?

The height, length and lack of natural light that reached the different spaces.



between the height and the width. The portal frames are a light warm gray.

A low beam, which crosses over the lounge area, formed a bold definition between the lounge and the corridor. It was painted the same pale blue to tone it down and avoid looking so heavy, as well as used as a shelf for pots. This beam ended up casting interesting shadows.

The natural wooden floor was a good element to define the different spaces. In the lounge area and office, the wood was stained a royal blue, which turned out to look good even though it was a first for us and the carpenter.

One of the walls in the office is clad in oak veneer panels and all the office



Did the clients give you carte blanche, or did they need much convincing?

We were lucky the clients liked the original concept and practically nothing was changed. They understood the proposal was based on a holistic approach, where the entire floor was tackled as a whole. They also helped to achieve the final look. The only thing that had to be 'toned down' was the panelling in the office. The original proposal had quite a 'young' design, which, we decided together with the client, would be more formal and mature.

What was the look and feel you set out to create? What particular considerations did you make, given the type of project? And what materials, colours and other design elements did you use to achieve your vision?

We wanted to create a calm space that was welcoming and felt fresh. The corridor did not get much light, and the original ceiling was a dark maroon, which made it look heavy. To reverse this feeling, a pale blue was used on both the ceiling and walls to highlight the proportions



furniture was designed and custom-made using oak veneer and sprayed gray wood. Since the office is overlooking a main road, a wave sheer curtain was used to surround the boardroom table and act as a sound absorber.

It is important that workspaces don't look and feel clinical. That was the last thing we wanted. This wasn't just any office, and that's why we referred to it as a workspace.

How did the religious aspect come into play? How and where does it feature?

Just outside this space is a small meditation room designed by Richard England, which we were aware of and had to respect. Even though it is a completely different room, we could not ignore that the nature of the building is essentially spiritual. Having said that, we did not actually use any 'religious' elements in the space because it is a place of work after all. However, the overall feeling is tranquil.

The portal frames were designed to create a rhythm. These vertical elements, together with the colours chosen, lighting and glass, were all combined to achieve a calm and spiritual, yet formal, look.



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In the lounge area, a copper-coloured light fitting emits a beam of light onto an armchair. This was intended as a reading area, but can also be interpreted as a space for reflection.

What aspect of the interior design are you most proud of and what would you consider to be the most important feature?

The portal frames are an architectural element that not only looks good, but also acts as a light source and helps make the corridor feel less long. The oak panelling in the office, instead of a paint job, makes the space feel a lot richer and warmer, while we also left our mark on the flooring by staining it – an experiment that turned out to be effective.

How important do you think it is for a work environment to be updated and freshened up now and again? What kind of ambience do you feel your new interior design has created for those who are using the space?

This workspace hadn't been renovated for about 35 years, so it was in need of a facelift. As regards updating work environments now and again, we haven't even been in our office premises for two years and we have already moved things around because we felt we needed a change. You don't necessarily need to carry out a fully-fledged makeover, but moving a few bits and pieces around can also work to freshen up a place – especially if you are on a tight budget.

We like to think that the kind of ambience we created here makes the end users feel calm and positive. At the same time, we tried to give the space a timeless feel; a canvas where the clients can add their own touch now and again.

More than anything, we wanted to create a space where the clients could enjoy their time at work. It is important for the work environment to be pleasant. After all, that's where most of us spend much of our day. ■