

A contemporary classic

Consisting of nothing less than a complete makeover of the executive floor with no structural alterations whatsoever, the brief for this luxurious office and lounge space was an interesting one for Atelier Maison architects **Paula Agius-Vadala'** and **Katja Abela Cassar**, and one which they pulled off seamlessly. **Sarah Micallef** learns how they achieved it.

The space the architects worked with, Paula explains, was originally made up of a long corridor, with a lounge area half way through and an executive office at the end of the corridor. And while the client gave the architects a relatively free hand when it came to design, there were a number of considerations to be made. "More storage and shelving was needed in the office, which was to incorporate a desk, boardroom table and small lounge, and it was also important to retain the existing lounge area and give it a new lease of life."

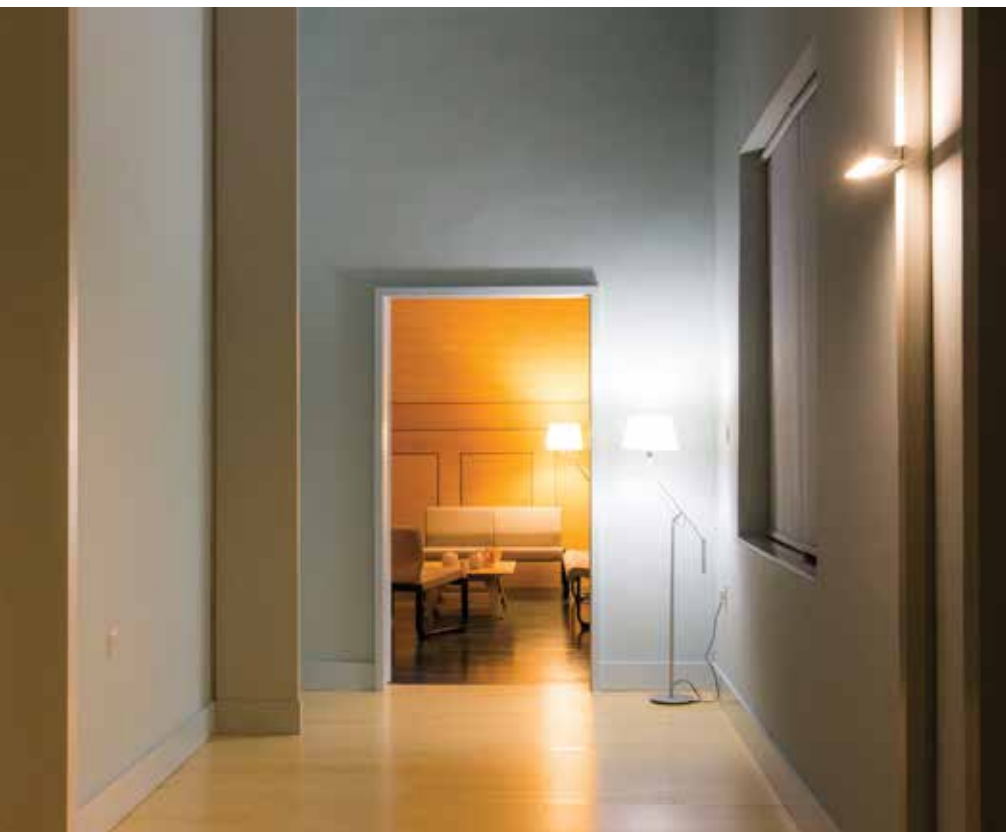
The original corridor suffered from a lack of light, making Paula and Katja's main focus to lighten up the space. "We started off by painting the walls a light blue and carrying the colour on to the ceiling. Next, a

series of portal frames - which also acted as architectural lighting - were introduced to the corridor, in order to break up the space, and for it not to look so dull and long," she continues.

"The corridor was previously very long and very wide, but it wasn't being utilised, so we used two of the portal frames as two screens and mirrored them, so when you look through, you never see the whole length of the corridor. In doing so, we used the extra part of the corridor as an extension of the lounge area," Katja adds.

Apart from providing architectural lighting and extending the lounge area, the portal frames also served a tertiary function, Katja continues, affirming, "throughout the corridor was a series of doors that the client

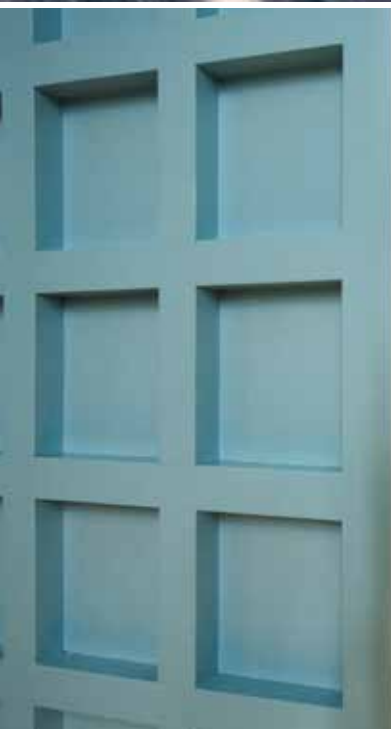
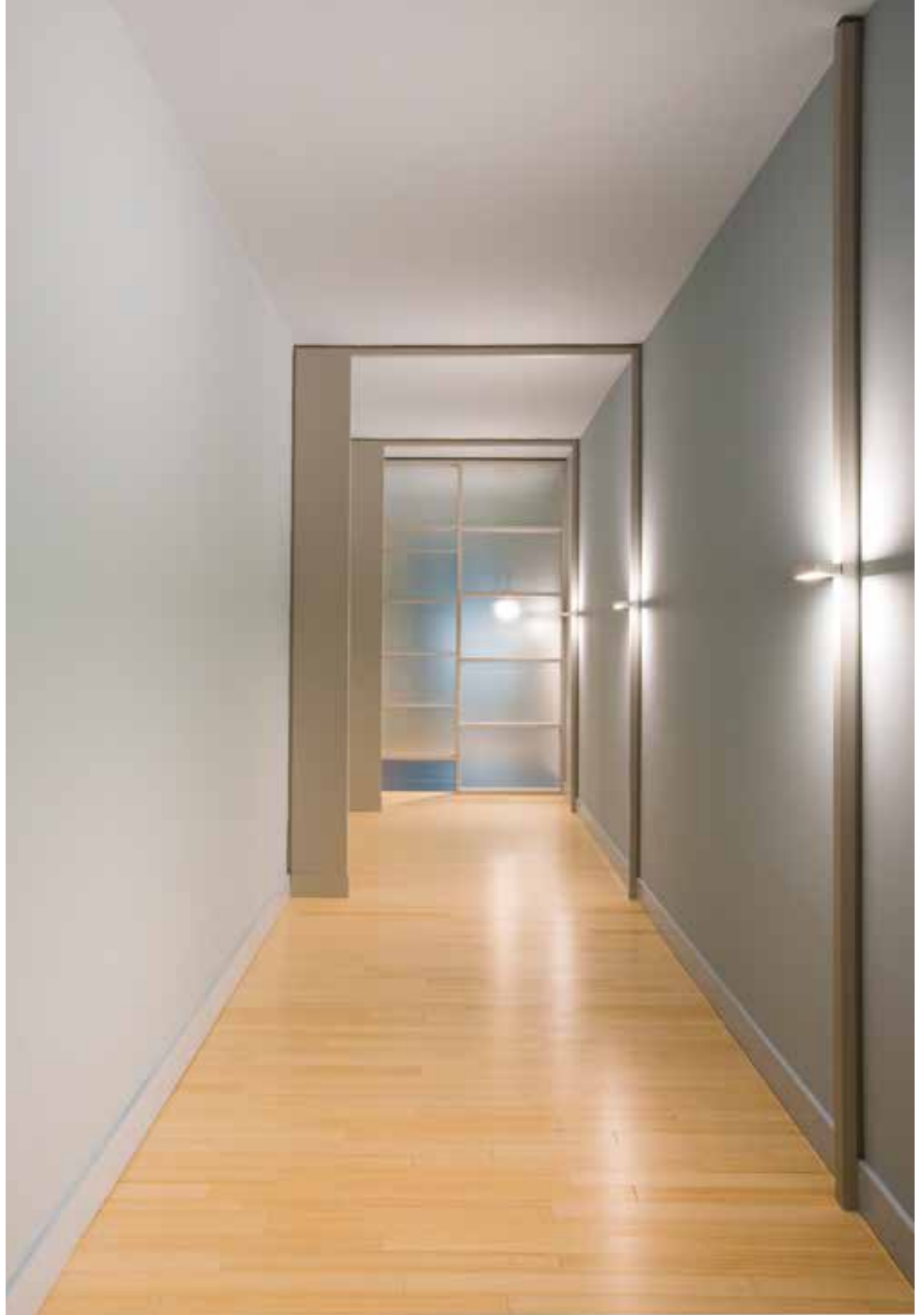
Photos by Michael Calleja, Studio Konnect





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wanted to keep, so we came a bit further out from the wall with the portal frames in order to hide them, while at the same time marking where the doors are.”

As for the colours and materials, the designers opted for a selection that gives off a tranquil feel. Apart from the natural wood of the parquet, wire glass was used within the screens for a hazy effect, and in the office, oak panelling along the wall added warmth, while a sheer curtain in a neutral green was used along the walls to break up a corner and give the effect of an enclosure. Meanwhile, Paula and Katja opted to take a risk with the parquet in the office and lounge area, choosing to stain it blue so as to help break up the space. “The supplier of the parquet told us that they wouldn’t be responsible for the staining and it was up to us, but the client was willing to try. We bought a sample and tried it, and saw that it worked,” Katja explains, adding that the experiment certainly paid off.

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Asked whether they believe the space has any particular defining features, Paula maintains that while the portal frames in the corridor and the oak panelling in the office may be considered the more notable elements, the philosophy at Atelier Maison is to focus on the whole rather than the constituent parts. “We design everything custom-made, so we give attention to all of the elements within the space. For us, all the elements are important - we try not to look at things in isolation, rather, we adopt a holistic approach,” she says.

Katja uses the skirting as an example. “While skirting usually looks ugly, it’s practical and needed in an office. So, we designed the skirting to come up to the same height of the plinth of the portal frames, making everything appear seamless. These are details that you wouldn’t really notice,” she explains.

The project took about four months to complete, from the designers’ initial sketches and resulting 3D renders to completion - a process that was facilitated by the fact that no structural changes were to take place. “The client was very efficient so the process didn’t take long, and the carpenter was booked in advance to construct the furniture. Because we didn’t do any structural changes, any measuring could be done straight away, and we used that to our advantage.”

And how did they go about tackling the delicate balance between aesthetic appeal and practical usage of space? Because of the pair’s technical backgrounds, being



architects first and foremost, they say, “we don’t just think about the look, there is always a function to whatever we do.” Here, for example, the portal frames double up as light fittings - so they’re not there solely for aesthetic reasons, they’re there to light up the space - apart from the panelling in the office, which also serves as storage.

The overall effect achieved, according to the design duo, is contemporary yet classic - a common feature among their projects - while also retaining practicality and functionality. “When it comes to interiors, you have to be careful that you don’t do something that will date,” they explain, maintaining, “we strive to create something that is timeless.” **cc**