

## 'Offices are for administration, BDP is about creativity'



When BDP's lease on their West End office space expired after 35 years in 2003 it gave them an opportunity to look for a new location that would better suit their needs.

The firm wanted the new space to be more than just an office, it wanted to create a working environment that supported and nurtured the BDP culture and suit its working practices.

The first step was to find the right building and the second to develop it in a way that clearly reinforced their desired culture. They found a building on the City boundary in Clerkenwell, an old building previously used as a brewery and warehouse.

As well as meeting key practical requirements the choice of the building itself reflected BDP's commitment to sustainability and reinvigoration.

### Reinforcing the culture

BDP already had a strong culture. The development of the new building provided an opportunity to reinforce this culture and at the same time take it to another level. Martin Cook, said 'Offices are for administration, BDP is about creativity. We were not looking for an office but a creative studio'.

So, the key cultural objectives of the redevelopment were to:

- Create a studio culture that enables creativity and reflects the nature of the business
- Create an open and accessible space
- Encourage collaboration within and across teams (including clients)
- Create a simple and flexible space that facilitates different working styles

### Making it happen

Martin Cook managed the internal project team and his key client was the BDP London Chairman. His first challenge was to gain buy-in on the objectives and the high level change principles from the senior team.

In order to do this, he talked to each of them about the objectives to understand their own requirements. This created the first real challenge. Whilst everyone agreed that BDP aspired to have an open culture, many senior managers were sure they still required an office.

It was Martin's job to listen to the requirements but to champion the values-driven approach. He persuaded the team to have faith in the process, put their own personal requirements to one side and try an officeless environment for six months. Since then, they have not looked back!

### Communicate, communicate, communicate

Martin believes that one of the critical success factors was involving all members of the team every step of the way. This was made easier by visible buy-in from the top – the Chairman personally checked how long it took to walk from the surrounding underground stations. The communication was comprehensive, all the plans were presented and everyone was given the opportunity to post concerns. Monthly meetings provided the opportunity for more interactive communication and everyone was able to have their say.

The result is a spectacular workplace that clearly reflects the BDP values and which the employees really appreciate.

### **First impressions matter**

Possibly, the most striking feature of the design is the vast reception area on the ground floor that opens out into a changeable hub space which can be adapted for differing uses including formal seminars, working areas, gallery, parties and eating space. In every aspect this space quietly and confidently oozes the BDP values:

- There is no reception desk acting as a barrier between visitors and employees
- Receptionists stand up to greet you by name, you are treated as a human being and you are not expected to walk around the building displaying a label proclaiming you as a 'visitor'
- The space is both flexible and varied, there are tables and chairs of different styles and heights creating different visual perspectives and stimulating creative thinking

### **Getting the job done**

Behind this great reception, the working spaces are designed to enable the BDP teams (that often include client representatives) deliver high quality work. There are, of course, no offices. The space has helped engender such a sense of openness that even appraisals are held in open areas (albeit often in an appropriate cosy corner).

There is a huge mix of space that provides choice and recognises each individual and team has different working styles. The desks look like large banqueting tables, around which project teams sit and people move desks according to which project they are working on. This has created a real sense of team togetherness.

### **Constant improvement**

Many of BDP's objectives for the new space have now been achieved which was largely down to excellent project management and great design. However, much of its continued success is based on constantly looking for improvements and at the moment the focus is on harnessing new technology. BDP are committed to develop wireless technologies to further develop dynamic, flexible working practices and enhance team working. BDP's new client wi-fi system is now available in the building. They already

know that their next challenge is developing knowledge systems that better support the way they do business.

The BDP building is a testament to how the workplace can be used as a powerful strategic asset. They worked hard to create the right sort of space and are now reaping the benefits. Martin believes that because of the building more high calibre people want to work at BDP than ever before and ultimately it these people that will drive the future success of the business.

---

*The Workplace Intelligence Unit was founded by forward thinking inc. and Herman Miller*

**[www.workplaceintelligence.co.uk](http://www.workplaceintelligence.co.uk)**

---