

CREATIVE WORKPLACES

A special report from Creative Review
in partnership with Allied London

CREATIVE REVIEW



Introduction

Welcome to Creative Review and Allied London's special report on creative workplaces. In this document we present the findings of our extensive survey on workplace design in order to shed light on what makes these unique environments tick and what creatives need and want from their particular space.

We wanted to find out what makes a workplace more conducive to creativity and how the working environment affects the work that creatives do. How can workplaces be organised to maximise creative thinking? The results offer a snapshot of where the creative industry is right now – and where many of its practitioners want it to get to.

I talk to David Drews, Allied London's Associate Director of Design about how the company is creating places that dynamically improve the ways in which people work and live. As part of Manchester's new St. John's neighbourhood, for example, Enterprise City is one of Allied's major workspace projects and aims to unite creative businesses across five diverse buildings. David discusses some of the thinking that has gone into making this area a unique part of working life in the city.

A creative space can work for other types of companies, too – as law firm Shoosmiths and Soho House & Co show in our focus on two recent developments that have helped to engender a new conception of the workplace and the benefits it can bring.

Mark Sinclair,
Deputy editor,
Creative Review

*Cover image:
Workspace in Sky's
digital technology
hub at Leeds
Dock, courtesy of
Richard Walls.*

*Facing page: Soho
Works, Shoreditch,
London*



Foreword

The essence of place is an imperfect science. What makes us productive, comfortable and creative in one place versus another is a ‘feeling’ that we can’t always easily measure.

At Allied London we create workplaces and workspace hubs across the UK. From Spinningfields, one of Europe’s leading business and leisure districts, to Leeds Dock, our digital waterside community and the industrial workspace Herbal House in London’s Clerkenwell, every place and every building is created with great energy and research.

We care deeply about the envelope of the space, its architecture, design, layout and flow because we want the places we develop to work and to be sustainable. The minutiae of how people want to live their every day in our developments is important to us. From the finish of a door handle, to the way you’ll want to book a meeting room, we want to make sure this works for the creatives and businesses within our workspaces and who better to research this with than Creative Review.

This project is vital raw data for us and we hope also it will be a great pool of information for any others looking at workspace design. We have been lucky to have input from some of our existing and future tenants into this project including agile working pioneers, Shoosmiths and Soho House & Co, as well as utilising our experience working with Sky and Google – all of whom we have worked with to create ‘creative’ spaces and places.

This project’s findings will serve as research not only for our upcoming Enterprise City workspace cluster in Manchester but our other developments to come, as we expand our commercial and enterprise portfolio across Manchester, London and Leeds. We hope you enjoy the results.

Michael Ingall,
Chief Executive,
Allied London

Survey findings

Over half the respondents to our Creative Workplaces survey identified themselves as being part of the ‘design’ industry, with around a third coming from ‘advertising’. Half of our respondents had been in the same workplace for between one and six years; nearly a quarter of them for more than ten.

WHAT IS THE SINGLE BIGGEST OBSTACLE TO WORKING EFFECTIVELY IN YOUR CURRENT WORKSPACE?

42%

Distractions, interruptions, noise

23%

Lack of informal, quiet or display spaces

6%

Lack of privacy

5%

Desk sharing, hot desking

5%

Lighting issues

5%

Network, internet, IT issues

4%

Being tied to desk

4%

Boring, dull office décor

3%

Environment, temperature

2%

Lack of collaboration

1%

Isolation, working alone

A CREATIVE SPACE?

Firstly, we asked participants how conducive to creativity they felt their current workspace was – and the responses were largely positive: with 22% saying ‘very conducive’ and 42% ‘fairly conducive’ (64% combined). However, just over a third of our respondents (36%) claimed their working environment was either ‘not very’ or ‘not at all’ conducive to creativity – so there’s a lot of room for improvement here.

A correlation between workplace design and creativity was something that people were very aware of, however. Over 90% of those surveyed believed that if the design of their workplace was improved it would have a positive effect on the quality of the work that they produced.

The location of the workplace was also significant for many people. Nearly three-quarters of those surveyed (73%) thought it was either ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ important to be working in a part of a city or town that was surrounded by other creative businesses or organisations. Within a shared building, however, this attitude wasn’t so keenly felt – only 58% of respondents considered being with other creative companies on the same site as having any significance on their own working.

HOW CONDUCTIVE TO CREATIVITY IS YOUR WORKSPACE?



1. Not very conducive (27%)
2. Not at all conducive (9%)
3. Very conducive (22%)
4. Fairly conducive (42%)

IF THE DESIGN OF YOUR WORKPLACE IMPROVED, WOULD IT IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF YOUR WORK?



1. Probably wouldn't (8%)
2. Definitely wouldn't (1%)
3. Definitely would (45%)
4. Probably would (46%)

Survey findings

HOW MANY OTHERS DO YOU SHARE YOUR BANK OF DESKS WITH?



- 1. 11+ (15%)
- 2. 6-10 (32%)
- 3. 1-5 (53%)

IS YOUR OFFICE ENVIRONMENT CLOSED OR OPEN?



- 1. Closed (32%)
- 2. Open (68%)

OFFICE ENVIRONMENT

So what kinds of amenities were beneficial to the working experience? ‘Cafes/restaurants’ were considered either ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ important by 92% of those surveyed, with ‘pubs/bars’ deemed important by 71% of people. Next in terms of importance were ‘creative suppliers’ (67%), ‘galleries/museums’ (62%) and ‘retailers’ (56%).

In terms of the collaborative nature of the working environment, 68% of those surveyed reported that they worked in an ‘open plan’ office, with 32% in a ‘closed’ space. Just over a quarter of participants (29%) recorded collaborating on work projects with other businesses in the same building. When it comes to working from home, 35% said they regularly did this – yet when asked how important the ‘ability to work from home for some of the time’ was, nearly 80% of respondents marked this option with either ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ important.

When asked to rate how significant a range of environmental factors were in improving the quality of their work, 97% of respondents put ‘natural light’ as either ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ important. ‘Wi-fi connectivity and/or workplace app’ was rated equally as high.

WHAT WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO CHANGE ABOUT YOUR WORKSPACE?



Dedicated space for specific tasks



More space, storage



More modern design décor



Better desk or chair



Better lighting, natural light



More privacy



Environment, air con, heating



Tidier, cleaner space



Less noise



Better atmosphere, more collaboration



Working from home

DEDICATED SPACES

Regarding the office space itself, the ‘ability to work in quiet areas when needed’ (97% marking ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ important), access to ‘private space’ (89%) and more space for ‘collaboration’ (90%) were also deemed high priorities.

Interestingly, space to ‘display work in progress/visuals’ was seen as significant (80% saying either ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ important), while adequate ‘meeting spaces’ were also seen as important (90% noting ‘very’ or ‘fairly’). Space for ‘making/prototyping’ was also seen as important for 63% of our respondents. Flexibility of employees’ relationship to the office – and within the office space itself – was also evident.

Yet 80% of our respondents said that they still have a dedicated workspace that is solely for their use only – and when it comes to sharing banks of desks, just over half those surveyed identified themselves as sharing with a group of five people or fewer; 32% worked among a group of six to ten, and 15% in a group of 11 or more people.

MUSIC AND FOOD

Music also played an important role in the office environment for most of those surveyed, with only 11% of people recording that there was no music played in their workplace.

While 47% said music was on for everyone to hear, 42% reported that they used headphones. Desk culture also impacted on lunch times significantly – with 57% of people saying they ate lunch at their desk, 29% saying they ate together with colleagues and only 14% saying they went out of the building for lunch.

THE OPEN OFFICE

When asked to specify what were the best things about an open office environment, respondents most frequently referred to the potential for collaboration and communication; that this kind of space encouraged the exchange of ideas and that there was increased opportunity to talk face-to-face instead of using the phone or email.

It was also a positive experience for some who saw the lack of hierarchy as being linked to a more inclusive workspace. Another positive reaction was that an open plan office could ensure there was a general buzz about the place and that this could even generate a feeling of being “inspired by seeing everyone in the space and creating work”.

Conversely, the worst aspects of this kind of environment were, by far, the potential for noise and distraction; interruptions resulting in a lack of focus. Also, the physical environment could be a source of problems for some; namely, the ambient temperature, lack of airflow or air con issues. Similarly, some respondents felt that there was a lack of privacy in open plan designs and that they could sometimes be dull and boring spaces.

DESIRE FOR CHANGE

Participants were also asked what they felt was the single biggest obstacle to working effectively in their current workspace. By some margin, the most frequent response related to distractions – from noise levels to interruption. A general lack of space for quiet or informal work was the next most noted obstacle, followed by a lack of private areas. In terms of personal desk space, ‘hot desking’ was considered by some to be an obstacle, yet being tied to a particular desk was also something that a similar amount of respondents believed did not help their working. Environmental factors – from lighting and temperature to the general office design and décor – were also recorded.

In terms of what people said they would want to change most about their working environment, the majority of responses were concerned with having more dedicated spaces for specific tasks – be they areas for quiet, focused work or break-out spaces – followed by the wider desire for more office space and storage in general. Modernising and updating the design of a space was also noted frequently, with improvements in the quality of both desks and chairs, access to natural lighting and more privacy also recorded. Various environmental factors were also noted – from better temperature regulation to issues of tidiness and cleanliness being significant for some.

DO YOU HAVE A DEDICATED WORKSPACE FOR YOUR OWN USE ONLY?



- 1. No (20%)
- 2. Yes (80%)

DO YOU HAVE MUSIC PLAYING AT WORK?



- 1. No (11%)
- 2. Yes, through headphones (42%)
- 3. Yes, for all to hear (47%)

Interview

David Drews is Allied London's Associate Director of Design. As the first architect to be employed by the developer, he now works with a range of external firms and also interior designers. Currently, his main focus is Enterprise City, the collection of buildings in Manchester's St. John's development that includes Old Granada Studios, Manchester Goods Yard and the Bonded Warehouse. He has also recently completed work on the co-working spaces the XYZ Building in Manchester and Herbal House in London

Spatial awareness

CR: If you're designing a space for creative people, what kinds of factors are paramount and what kinds of needs do these types of companies now have?

David Drews: What I see more and more is that people want a variety of spaces to be able to work in. The traditional fixed office desk, with your landline and PC is becoming quite obsolete. People are tending to work more and more on their laptops. There's a rise in people working from home as well. People need to be able to work in different locations, so there's that aspect of being mobile – but within in a fixed location.

If I think about what we're doing at XYZ, we're offering [people] a variety of different spaces that they can work in. So we have what we're calling an 'agora' which is a like an amphitheatre space where presentations can be given. We've also got a 'knowledge wedge' which is like a mini lecture theatre.

We're also providing lots of spaces for 'hot desking'. This used to be actual desks but now what we're doing is providing lounge seating areas with coffee tables. And we're starting to rent those spaces, so you have your own little lounge space as a space to work.

CR: Does that relate to the idea of more people working in non-office spaces, like cafes, where the 'desk' space is more about the environment?

DD: Exactly. And even here in our



“PEOPLE WANT A VARIETY OF SPACES TO WORK IN. THE TRADITIONAL FIXED OFFICE DESK IS BECOMING OBSOLETE”

Below: First floor area of the XYZ Building, one of Allied London's latest projects in Manchester

Interview

London office we have a variety of spaces. Right now I'm in a little room we call the 'library' – there are two armchairs in here and it's where we all tend to come to do calls. It's one of the most used spaces in the office because it's just a really nice space to come to, out of the general office environment. It's an enclosed space but it's also relaxed. It allows me to come away from the desk and stop seeing emails coming in and be able to focus on what I'm doing.

CR: Does that concept of 'distraction' come up a lot in your research? If people can focus on one thing, surely that's where the best work comes from?

DD: I guess it depends on the task in hand at the time. People who are writers, for example, are very aware of the isolation of being a writer. People do need to be around people. And also, depending on the work you're doing, it can be good to have things going on around you.

CR: What's interesting is how much of what you're saying tallies with the results from our survey: things like natural light and good wifi are important things for creatives to bear in mind, but this variety of spaces seems to be exactly what people are saying they want – from meeting rooms, to private spaces and areas for collaboration. Would you look to create spaces that can be used in a number of different ways?

DD: Absolutely. One idea that might be going into XYZ is that



**“DEPENDING ON
THE WORK YOU’RE
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THINGS GOING ON
AROUND YOU”**

*Below: Inside
Tower 12, the
12th building in
Allied London’s
Spinningfields
development in
Manchester (the
structure also has
twelve floors)*

Interview

we'll be providing meeting rooms on our 'club' floor, but one will be a kitchen, one will be a lounge, and one will be a dining room. So you can rent the kitchen for the whole day, which means that you have the kitchen and the island unit which you can sit around and it gives a very different feel to sitting at a conventional meeting room table. It loosens [people] up. Psychologically it's a big difference.

CR: The XYZ space, designed by Cartwright Pickard Architects, embodies the 'co-working' ethos. What's the thinking behind that?

DD: One of the floors of XYZ is going to be a co-work / multiple-occupant floor. We've seen lots of models of co-work – basically small, glass-partitioned offices in the middle of floor plans. What we've chosen to do is make small units all around the perimeter of the floorplate, so that everybody who rents an office, no matter how small, will get a window. XYZ has really high ceilings, exposed concrete sockets and we know that every single one of those spaces will be a good space to work in.

Then they have use of the communal area which contains the elements I described earlier, the agora and knowledge wedge, the different kinds of lounge seating in the middle and then they've got three private meeting rooms and a cafe bar. So basically everybody has

that flexibility about where they work – they can come out of their office and work in the middle area. That really is the crux of it at the moment, that ability to move away from your desk and be able to think differently in a different space.

CR: How important is the location of the building itself and what surrounds it in terms of amenities? How does thinking about that impact the creation of a community?

DD: What Allied London as a developer always strives to do is [create] a good mix of uses. So in St. John's, in terms of workspace, in Old Granada Studios it will have a container park which will house small businesses of two to three people. And then in the Bonded Warehouse, a Victorian warehouse we're refurbishing, that will be for medium-sized companies with flexible partitions that can be offices of different size – where you can grow, to a certain extent. In Manchester Goods Yard, we'll have the bigger corporate [tenants].

So there's a site-wide strategy to keep people, so they can grow with us – from start-ups, to medium-sized companies to big brands. And supporting that is this mix of residential, workspace and retail – so all across the site at ground floor there's retail; we're very much focusing on that in terms of design because we believe that all the activity happens at ground floor level.

I'm an architect and as much as

I love architecture, I know that the average person doesn't actually perceive what's happening above them, they perceive what's happening at ground floor level. So we've paid a lot of attention to the landscaping, the look and feel of the actual streets and creating those really inviting retail units at ground floor.

CR: This idea of fostering the life of a company as it gets bigger seems to be a more fluid way of looking at the life of a business?

DD: More importantly we want to create a community of interesting companies, a thriving community.

CR: You spent some years in Spain working as a project architect with Nike and FC Barcelona. What did that experience give you that you now make use of with a developer?

DD: I learned that while, as an architect, I looked at things spatially, they looked at things visually. So with the design of the cafe at XYZ, which is at ground floor and which will support the workspace above, an architect would typically try to do the layout that works best for the space – and I'm all for that.

But I'm also very aware of what does the person on the street see from the street? When they come up to the door what do they see when they go through? [It's] that understanding of the consumer journey – the things that would apply to a Nike store are [there]

“RATHER THAN GOING FOR THINGS WE THINK ARE TRENDY, WE’RE MORE INTERESTED IN JUST MAKING GREAT SPACES”



in this new era of co-working: 'is that a space I want to work in?'

CR: Can you tell us about your approach to the design of the spaces themselves? Is there an overarching strategy to the look and feel?

DD: Yes, rather than going for

things that we think are trendy or cool, we're more interested in just making great spaces.

Places that everybody can go into and think 'that's beautiful'. More than anything else that's what I'm striving for personally. Beauty rather than trend.

Case studies

The way that workplaces enable people to work is changing – and being ‘agile’ is a philosophy that goes beyond just creative businesses

Agility ability

Soho House & Co's new venture, Soho Works, is hoping to establish a network of round-the-clock workspaces designed to support a membership of creative practitioners looking for flexible working. The company behind the famous House member's clubs (there are 18 around the world, including its Soho base), now has its first Works site, a 16,500 sq ft space in the Tea Building in London's Shoreditch. It offers a café and bar, a member's kitchen, meeting rooms, private phone booths, even editing/post-production suites, plus a library, roof terrace and workshops. A 22,000 sq ft space housed within a 1950s building on Sunset Boulevard in LA is in the works.

And it's not just creative businesses that are embracing new, flexible models of working. Take law firm Shoosmiths. Based across a network of offices in the UK, the company is just about to take on a new space in Manchester's XYZ Building that exemplifies the new approach to working environments. Partner Vaqas Farooq says that he and his team are looking forward to moving into XYZ – the culmination of three year's of research, consulting with colleagues, external advisors including the Claremont Group, and clients such as Marston's who have also embraced an ‘agile’ way of working.

“At the heart of Shoosmiths Agile is personal wellbeing,” says Fa-



arooq. “We don't want our people sat at their desks all day long, which we consider to be dull and unhealthy. To maximise wellbeing and, in turn, productivity, colleagues need to be able to move around freely and collaborate.” Design has been crucial in enabling this, he says. “We've created five neighbourhoods – one for each practice area which is effectively their home base. Traditional desks can be found in each of these neighbourhoods, but desks are just one of 11 workspaces that we have created.” The new workspaces include “a working garden, a special

library, a multi-zonal project room, booths, drafting areas, telecom rooms,” says Farooq. “Layered on top is a unique IT solution that allows colleagues to roam the building whilst staying fully connected.” Shoosmiths have taken out ‘hard connections’ and will instead make use of wifi-only laptops and ‘cloud phones’. Wireless casting will also enable any laptops to project to the large TV screens in the space.

This way of working, in realising how wellbeing relates to productivity, looks set to be a benefit to both the staff and the company at large.

This page, clockwise from top: Private phone booths at Soho Works in Shoreditch, London; Law firm Shoosmiths' new space in the XYZ Building in Manchester.

Facing page: Soho Works, Shoreditch, London



