

# rouble shooter





There is a certain amount of frenetic and slightly nervy activity on the street as we reach the new UK headquarters of VTB Capital. There is a very obvious reason for this; the HQ sits within 14 Cornhill – formerly the Lloyds Building – immediately opposite the Bank of England, and, within 24 hours, thousands of protestors are expected to swarm the area in response to the Gordon Brown and Barack Obama roadshow.

The Russian bank VTB is a recognised leader of the national financial industry having gained a sustained competitive edge in all segments of the banking market. To put it into simple terms, the assets of the Bank as of September 2008 amounted up to US\$113 billion. In 2007, The Banker magazine ranked VTB the 60th among the world's 1,000 largest banks in terms of capital. Now that's a major enterprise.

Presently, the Government of the Russian Federation is a major shareholder of VTB, with its share accounting for 77.5%. During the Bank's IPO, made in May 2007, 22.5% of VTB shares were placed among Russian and international investors. The total amount of funds raised approximated US\$ 8 billion, making VTB's IPO the world's largest public offering in 2007. It also proved to be the first truly public IPO in the history of the Russian stock market, since it resulted in more than 120,000 Russians becoming VTB shareholders.





explains. ‘The important thing for me was that we got the brand and image right within the confines of the fit-out. It was important to add to that with elements like this breakout space here, which we made a little more funky and added colour to. It’s incredible how much this space – and the one we have on the floor below – are used.

‘When we first looked at this, it was clear that, as Max says, the brief we had given was a little woolly. To be honest, the brief had been given by bankers, who had no real idea of what they were trying to create. My view was, and I made it very clear with these guys, that we have a budget of money, we’re going to manage that but we’re not going to cut corners for the sake of quality. What I convinced our board of was that we were creating a new bank here – a new image, a new brand – and we will live and die by that first impression. A lot of people, for example, go to our 6th floor and say ‘Wow – this is impressive!’ and that’s what we were looking for.

‘What I liked about Overbury was the whole quality programme they run through when they do their delivery – Perfect Delivery. That’s what this project was all about.’

‘There is a pool of talented staff that VTB will be recruiting in the process,’ Max takes over, ‘and so it was critical that the design delivered an attractive work culture and environment. They wanted an environment that was different from the other banks.’

‘Just because everybody else uses SBFI trading desks, does that mean we’re going to use them as well?’ Stephen asks rhetorically. ‘No, we’re not going to do that. We decided that we’re going to use system-based furniture, so we sat down with Faram and we redesigned what we wanted to do. I must say that Faram were really good and helped us design the system we required.’

‘So the traders aren’t actually working on conventional trading desks. The technology that the design team built the infrastructure on enabled Faram to make a few tweaks to an otherwise standard kit of parts and we developed a solution that integrates and is very visually consistent with the more standard workstations – which sit adjacent. We went into quite a lot of detail with the development of features like monitor arm stability and fast IT equipment access’ Max reveals.

A lot of thought, time and effort was put into the issue of the trading floor facilities of course, including heating and ventilation, and the integration of leading edge

▶▶▶▶▶ Striving to diversify its activity, VTB Group continues to expand the scope of its operations in the Russian market and offers its customers a wide range of banking products and services applicable worldwide.

Exiting the elevator into the VTB world on the 6th floor (the bank occupies three floors and lets out two floors here), the thoughts of frenetic activity on the streets of the City are long forgotten. We head through to one of the bright, vibrant breakout / cafeteria spaces where we meet with VTB Head of Corporate Services Stephen Sharp, Swanke Hayden Connell’s Max Lishmund and Overbury Senior Project Manager John Penny. We sit with a coffee and ask Stephen to tell us about the origins of this project. ‘About 2-3 years ago part of the bank was IPOd and part of that was a strategy to create an investment bank – to create a champion Russian vehicle,’ he tells us. ‘A business strategy was put together to look at how that was to be achieved, and the resources that would be required. It was decided at this point that they would need new premises and they went through the whole process of selecting buildings, and Cornhill was selected in October 2007. I came on board in January 2008 to pull together the whole delivery of the fit-out here.

‘Swanke Hayden Connell were already involved, along with Cushman & Wakefield as our Project Managers and Meinhardt as M&E consultants. We went out to tender on the fit-out, and finally selected Overbury to do the job.’

‘We were on board from around September 2007,’ Max confirms. ‘We’d started trying to learn about the bank and put ideas and concepts together. I think it’s fair to say that, before Steve joined, it was quite a woolly brief. Quite a lot of financial companies nowadays don’t really get to grips with the briefing process because they tend to have predetermined aspirations and standards that they expect will streamline the process. The nice thing about working with VTB was that they didn’t have these. The project was partly an historic salvage operation and partly new. Where other organisations would have said ‘We don’t want the hassle of English Heritage, we want the conventional systems, VTB were far more open minded on that front and we had the opportunity here to create a new workplace culture, rather than just inheriting a set of standards and ending up with a familiar workplace culture.’

‘The thing is that we were essentially creating a whole new bank here,’ Stephen

## case study



▶▶▶▶technology. It is the latter, together with Swanke Hayden Connell's intelligently simplified design, that has enabled a space that is not originally designed for trading to be transformed into a space efficient but attractive trading floor. There might not be the generous floor void here, yet the combination of technology and design has made short work of the fact. 'It was a nice isolated area for us to work on,' John says of the far from straightforward Overbury fit-out of the trading floor. 'It wasn't spread out over floors, it was contained in one tight area – which was a benefit to us all. One thing we did that I certainly hadn't done before was a full test to make sure that the banking systems remain up and running should there be a power cut. We had to bring the whole building into that – and that was quite a challenge.'

Another major challenge facing the project team was the integration of the old with the new. While walking through the contemporary reception space, cutting edge trading floor or fun breakout rooms, it is easy to forget that much of this building is listed and far from modern.

The first glimpse you get of this fact is through the circulation areas, which are

elegantly preserved and add an amazing comparative to the views through the building. This, however, still does not prepare us for the design applied to the meeting suite, boardroom and, especially, the auditorium. 'It was clear that VTB wanted an auditorium for the 5th floor, but a facility that could quickly reconfigure for events,' Max explains. 'We have created a multifunctional space that showcases the best of the history of the building. It is a statement space where many clients will visit and it gets away from fixed seating and what people would expect to find when they enter. The space carries a rich history, but is very modern in its function now – it is quite refreshing. Again we used modern products to achieve quality without compromise. The original plaster ceilings were re-created using acoustic plaster in order to overcome a whole host of sound issues, a technology that was not immediately taken on by English Heritage. The quality of finish Overbury achieved was very high indeed. Then there was the six metre wide multimedia wall, right in the middle of the space which was essential to our vision but initially was met with surprise by EH. But the actual impact on

the room of our design is pretty sensitive considering its size.'

This section of the facility boasts incredible 'original' decoration, with salvaged veneered panelling re-used throughout, and sensitively combined with modern IT (the multifunction room boasts one of the largest plasma screens you'll ever see) and modern furniture elements.

This was a job that required carefully considered joinery and furniture based around the technology that VTB needed within the spaces for video conferencing whilst meeting the expectations from English Heritage.

Bene provided the loose furniture solution for all the executive areas, and meeting and conference rooms. These included a special one-off boardroom table that was 7.6 metres long, in a boat-shape. We are told this is the biggest table Bene has ever made with its AL system, and, when you consider that it still only had four legs and the rest is supported by the centrally mirror clad box, that is some engineering.

The Austrian manufacturer also created special credenzas that matched the table in terms of veneer, yet had to house large mobile AV racks and LCD screens up to 65in which are controlled via remote control so that the user can activate the screen whilst sitting at the table and, when a conference call is over, they can house back in the credenza at the touch of a button.

Sensitive, intelligent, sympathetic, bright; these are all words that spring to mind when considering the VTB Capital home. We're not sure we'll be able to say the same about the hordes hovering outside the building the following day! ●

## essential ingredients

Client:	• VTB Capital
Design & Planning:	• Swanke Hayden Connell 020 7454 8200
Fit-Out Manager:	• Overbury 020 7307 9000
Systems Furniture:	• Faram 020 7456 9400
Executive Furniture:	• Bene 020 7689 1234
Task Seating:	• Humanscale 020 7566 7990
Meeting / Conference Furniture:	• Bene 020 7689 1234