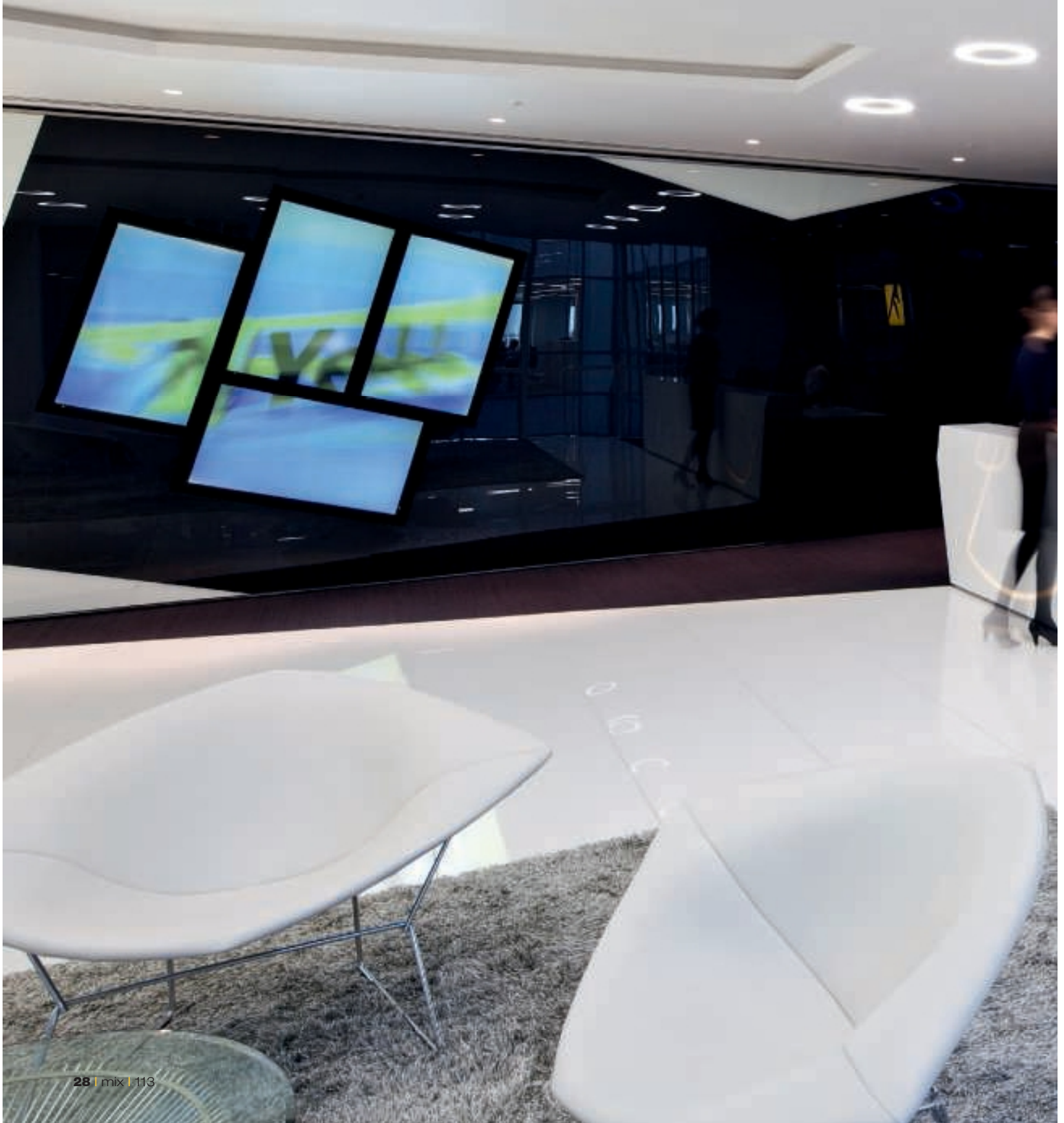


Yell's Like Team Spirit





One of our great dislikes, upon entering a major headquarters building, is having to endure that ‘walk of shame’ towards a far-pitched, straight-ahead reception desk. Eyes are upon us and there is nowhere for us to hide. Maybe this is simply an inhibition on our part – scruffy journalists (our words, not ever our gracious hosts), looking a little shifty and constantly surveying their surroundings. What are they doing? Scoping the building?

The reception at Yell’s One Reading Central headquarters could not be more removed from this. Situated on the 9th floor of the impressive 10-storey building, we are first transported upwards via glass elevator, giving us a fantastic opportunity to overlook Yell’s other seven floors here, before moving round to a buzzing, contemporary and bright reception space where a (thankfully) short stroll brings us to a sleek reception desk and a smiling, welcoming face. Good start.

We are met in the busy reception space by Simon Taylor, Head of Property at Yell and Broadway Malyan Designer Fiona Chong, who lead us through into the impressive meeting suite here in Yell. With coffee delivered and comfortable sofas and armchairs chosen, we begin by finding out a little more about the print and media leader’s decision to relocate to One Reading Central. ‘This facility brings our people together – it is a consolidation,’ Simon informs us. ‘We were in four old buildings in this area previously.’

Photography: Matt Livey

Case Study



were old buildings and they didn't reflect the organisation.'

'We certainly wanted the space to reflect who we are as a company,' Simon agrees. 'We did look at what companies such as Google have done, but this is really a stage further on from that, in a way. They are slightly whacky and colourful, and we liked the idea of bringing colour and vibrancy here, but we also wanted to remain professional.'

We move on to talk about the process behind the project, and how, as Fiona explains, the project coincided with a Yell corporate rebranding: 'The rebrand was going on through the actual project. It was purely coincidental. It actually worked very well – we worked very closely with the marketing team when it came to the main colours and the graphics. It actually worked out that the main colours we were using were the colours which were going to be part of the brand anyway – which was slightly bizarre!'

'When the branding strategy started to change, we were going down the same road – coincidentally,' Simon confirms. 'If you look at elements such as our large glass wall in reception, where we have put all our overseas subsidiary names, were not affected by the rebranding – we were going to do these anyway and simply carried on.'

'We did reintroduce the walking fingers to our logo, and we have added this – very subtly – throughout the space. The glazing manifestations, for example, subtly feature the fingers. We didn't want to be too bold with the brand. We wanted a colourful, vibrant scheme, but at the same time we didn't want to put yellow everywhere. We have been far more subtle and smart than that.'

We ask about the choice of venue – not only the building itself, but also Reading as a whole. 'I came to Yell about six years ago,' Simon explains. 'That's really when we started looking around for a new building. Reading was already our home and we decided we wanted to stay in Reading. The problem was that there was no building in Reading we could actually acquire – we were too big for anything that was here. We did scratch around, and tried to work with and persuade developers. We actually had about three false-starts. We looked at an out-of-town business park, we looked at Thames Valley – we spent quite a lot of time on this.'

'We did have some time – 2009 was our first break option – but then it started getting a little tight. Then, as luck would

▶▶▶▶▶ 'We also wanted to give our people a modern working environment because we're a hi-tech, leading company that needs hi-tech space. It was quite a journey between the sites and, of course, we were paying four times as much for things such as post. All of that added to the lack of communication and interaction we had.'

'It's also been about increasing morale,' Fiona reveals. 'It's about making sure that, when people come to start working here, they enjoy it and feel valued. It's about Yell's branding really. The previous spaces weren't necessarily branded as Yell; they might have had a sign up, but the receptions didn't say Yell, the general space didn't say Yell. They

Case Study



▶▶▶▶ have it, whispers started coming through that this building was going to happen, so we immediately went and spoke to the developers early on and really got into bed with them. We were then able to use our acquisition to share with the development.'

How did the relationship with Broadway Malyan begin? 'As with virtually all the consultants we work with, we interviewed about 10 design firms,' Simon recalls. 'We liked Broadway Malyan right from the off – so much so, in fact, that I can't even remember who the other nine were!'

With Broadway Malyan firmly on board, the project team soon turned to the issue of space planning. Simon tells us the number of staff here has not radically changed from 2005, although, thanks to forward-thinking working practices, a radical upgrade in terms of technology, information storage and people to desk ratios, massive space saving has been achieved here. In fact, Simon tells us, the equivalent of three entire floors has been saved!

Yell now fills eight floors of the 10-storey One Reading Central building – some 15,000 square metres in total – which, even if you have the most rudimentary grasp of maths, will tell you that, under Yell's old space planning system, would have been unworkable here. 'As I

mentioned earlier, it's cheaper for us to be here – despite the fact that it's more per square foot,' Simon reveals.

Most floors here consist of open plan workspace for the 1,500 employees, with an extremely high ratio of meeting to workstation seats. The design encourages movement and interaction between staff members, with clear sight-lines through the space and the creation of small 'neighbourhoods' at focal points throughout each floor. The scheme throughout is bright and colourful, yet subtle and professional.

There is a fantastic fully-equipped gym, treatment room, superb restaurant, training and conference suites, as well as a variety of meeting and breakout areas, from quiet zones and one-to-one rooms through to presentation rooms. A rigorously designed space plan, as well as integrated AV and services, has given Yell the ability to work in a flexible manner. This space suits the way in which Yell works now and in the future.

'The ratio of meeting space to desk space is much higher than usual here,' Fiona explains. 'We have something approaching 1,250 seats here and also 1,250 meeting positions as well, with 50-odd meeting rooms – and these meeting rooms are busy all the time. People here now bump into other people here that they've never

actually met or seen before. That has worked really well. That's what Yell wanted to achieve here.'

And all this has been done with Yell and its people in mind – as Simon explains. 'Rarely do we get customers coming in here – its more suppliers and consultants. Our customers are totally dealt with by our sales people – who actually go to the customer. We rarely get advertisers or customers come to us, unless it's a particularly big one.

'We do get a lot of our people coming in here who are not based here. This reception is pretty busy all the time. We have a great booking system here, which has worked really well.'

Despite being limited by a base build BREEAM 2006 rating of Very Good and an early Stage D sign off of finishes, architectural and M+E design in 2008, the project team still managed to deliver a fit-out project that will be awarded BREEAM 2008 Very Good and SKA Silver.

Completed during a recession, the Yell HQ project has rejuvenated the business. It has improved morale and injected life and a sense of purpose and professionalism into the Yell community, at a time when it was most needed. There's certainly no hint of anyone doing a walk of shame here ●

essential ingredients

Client • **Yell** | Lead Consultant • **Broadway Malyan** 020 7261 4200

Strategy • **Alexi Marmot Associates** | Project Manager / QS • **Arcadis AYH** | Main Contractor • **Overbury** | M&E • **Hoare Lea**

AV • **CBI** | Joinery • **Chiffen** | Furniture Supply • **Furniture Solutions** 01252 745200

Systems, Meeting, Cafe & Conference Furniture • **Vitra** 020 7608 6200

Task Seating • **Haworth** 020 7324 1360

Flooring • **InterfaceFLOR** 08705 304030 / **Desso** 020 7324 5500

Seating & Tables • **Hitch Mylius, Arper, Noughtone, Knoll, Girsberger**

Monitor Arms • **Humanscale** 020 7566 7990

Artwork • **Allan Forsyth**