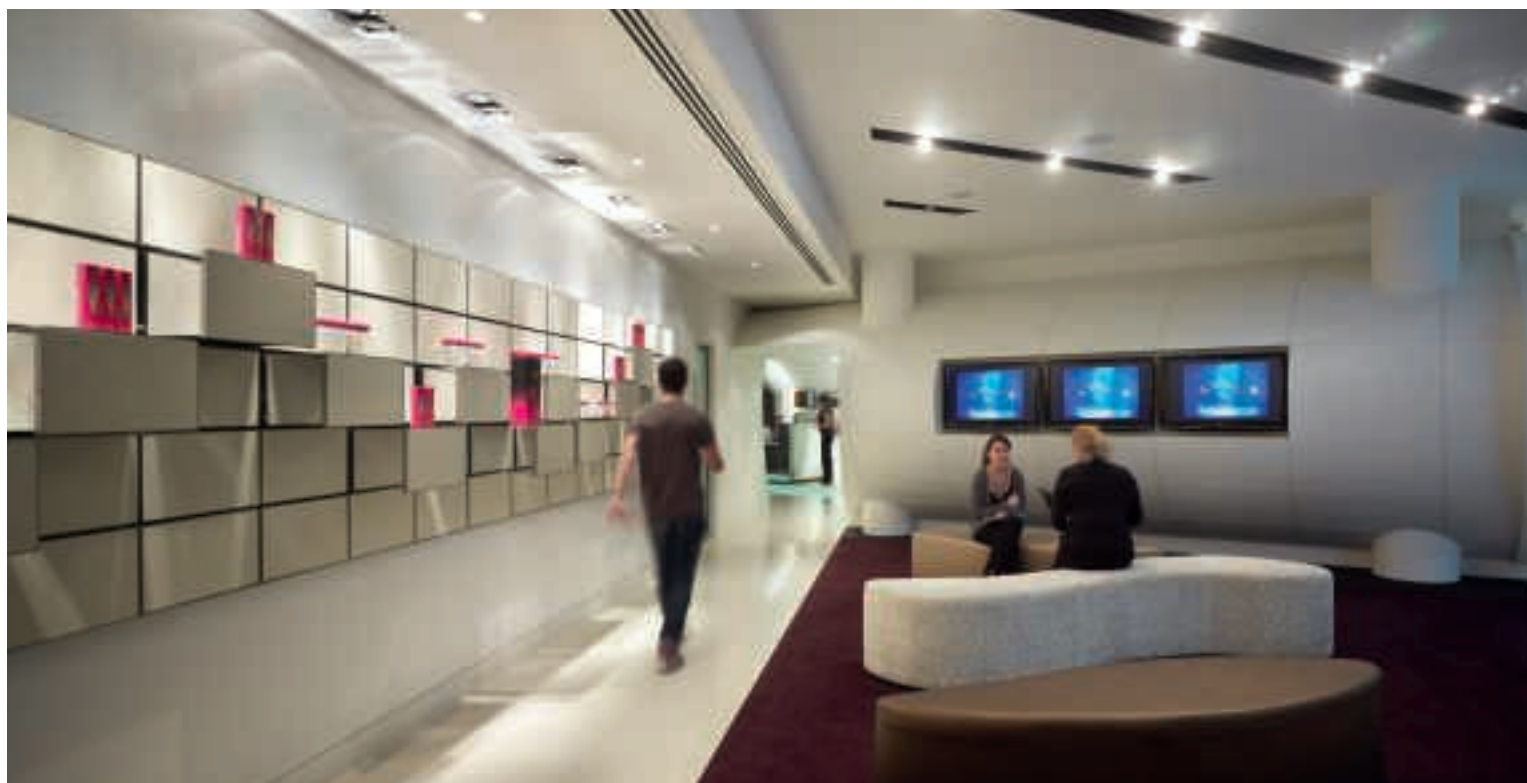




We do like Leeds. Despite the fact that *Mix* spends the majority of its time in London, and has historical ties with Manchester, Leeds constantly excites us. Leeds has little pretence. Leeds, unlike the majority of English cities, allows the student drinking holes to coexist alongside the champagne bars. The Pound Shop and Harvey Nichols sit in harmony in Leeds.

In fact Harvey Nichols is something of an exception as a visitor to this forward thinking city. The majority of its success stories are born and bred Yorkshire. Leeds has produced as many exports as it has welcomed imports – therefore it was little surprise to us that the leading hair products brand ghd originated right here.

For those of you who are unaware of this phenomenon, ghd produces an extensive range of both critically acclaimed and widely loved hair styling products which are available through selected salons. Founded in 2001 by Yorkshire entrepreneur Martin Penny, the company was named in the 2005 Sunday Times Fast Track as the Fastest Growing Company. The scheduled revenues in year two of the ghd business plan were between £3 and £4 million – the company did £12 million. The plan for the third year was £5 million, yet the reality was £37 million. The first of its kind, ghd is synonymous for the revolutionary ceramic stylers, which kicked off the trend for straightened hair. Thanks to the celebrity and salon



hair stylists, they wanted a space where they could market what they do, they wanted office space, and that was really the starting block for the brief.

‘Over time, as we kept working and working with ghd, this evolved into more finite detail leading to a greater understanding of the brand and what it stood for.

‘They wanted to bring trainees and hair stylists in here, obviously, but they are also looking to attract other people. The percentage of men using the hair irons, for

example, has risen and they are also aware of the residents passing through this area and being able to attract them.

‘One idea is to get girls to come in here before a night out in Leeds and have their hair done as a treat. People can walk into the front of house area, look at the products, watch the videos of hair stylists on the screens and pick up information. They are even given access to the entire atrium several times a year so they can host major events out there. It’s a pretty flexible space in that way.’

The space is currently home to approximately 75 staff, although, as Scott has already alluded, the breakdown of the premises is rather more involved than simply housing a workforce. ‘The ground floor has the marketing area and the academy,’ Scott explains. ‘Upstairs we have the boardroom, soft seating areas, director areas and office space.’

‘Upstairs is more traditional pure office environment,’ Simon adds, ‘whereas this floor is the education, the marketing, the retail element – this is the shopfront for the brand.’

ghd wanted careyjones to design a ‘wow factor’ for the atrium/ entrance to the space, and they now have that in spades. Scott explains the ‘wow’ process: ‘We were pretty much given carte blanche when it came to styling and colour palettes. The process involved more workshop style meetings as opposed to presentations. We worked through things in a very collaborative way, with people throwing ideas in. We spent a lot of time with images, ideas, places that were actually nothing to do with the project, but it got us to understand where they were coming from.

‘They wanted an intimidating entrance here. They wanted to create a sense of occasion and yet uneasiness, which I think we’ve done with the catwalk. This is quite brave I suppose, and could be the thing that tips you over the edge in deciding whether to come in or not, but the balance is the products and the displays which soften that▶▶▶▶





▶▶▶▶ as well as the video screen at the back where you can watch yourself walking down the catwalk.’

The extraordinary entrance – and it is a bold move to employ such an intimidating, yet theatrical atmosphere – will certainly attract more than it repels. And, after all, ghd is not looking to attract wallflowers.

There is also a lot more to this space than first meets the eye, as Simon explains. ‘The structure here is made of timber which is internally and externally clad, and all skimmed. This structure alone took 15 weeks to build – and the project was only 18 weeks. It was all made on site.’

The catwalk sits within a tunnel structure and provides a stunning opening impression for ghd. To further exaggerate the impression of space and distance and to add to that feeling of occasion, the catwalk even cleverly narrows. Incredibly, it really does feel a much longer (cat)walk than it actually is!

Either side of the catwalk are spaces developed for a variety of purposes. As previously mentioned, prospective customers can walk through to these areas and browse through the products on show

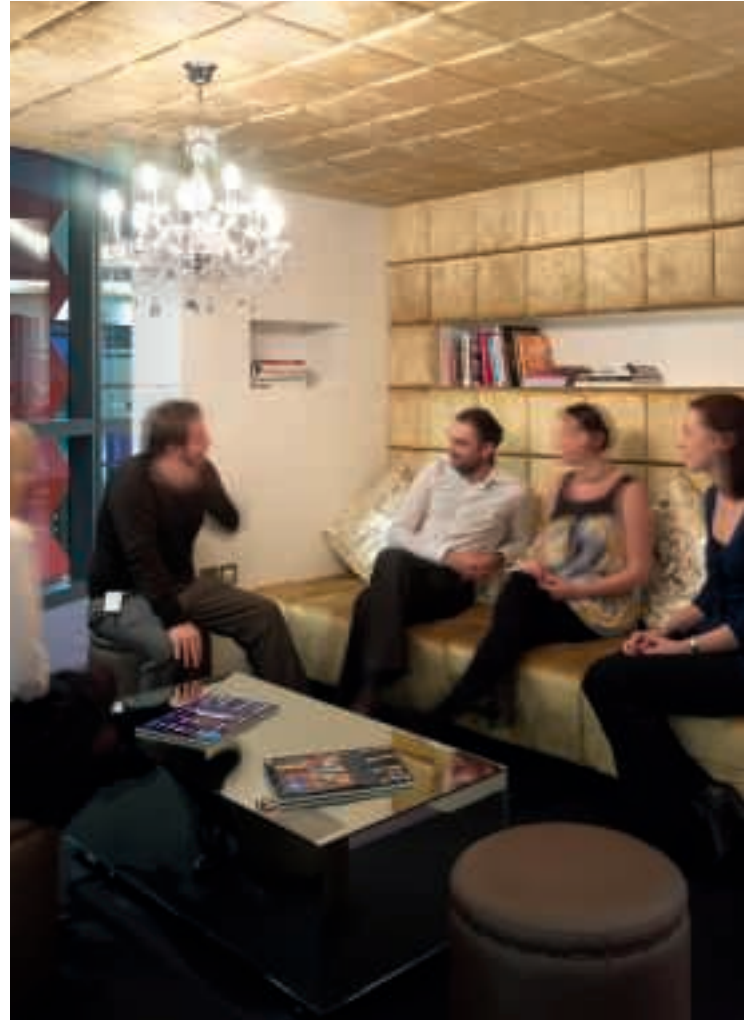
through a series of sophisticated POS displays or product walls, or can sit on the curvaceous seating and watch said products in action on the large plasma screens adorning other walls here. Furthermore, these contemporary spaces can be used to hold guests, trainees and stylists before they are taken they are taken through to the inner sanctum of the ghd home.

Moving through the ground floor space we discover the academy facilities. Accommodating up to 90 people in a lecture style environment, the space can also be split into two separate training academies via a sliding, folding wall. Finished to the highest hair styling salon standards, the facility looks out over the main road, offering passing traffic a sneaky look into the ghd world. Furthermore, the opportunity for additional product display and large scale branding has not been lost on this external elevation. Particular focus has been placed on the all-important lighting, presentation equipment and finishes throughout the facility – and the facility clearly proved an unusual and exciting challenge for both careyjones interiors and Overbury.

A ‘Big Brother’ style diary room was incorporated on the ground floor to enable staff to provide feedback and ideas to managing directors. The specially designed diary room, incorporating a VideoBooth AV System was an important part of the original concept. Fitted out with a comfy sofa and refreshments, it provides a unique way for staff to communicate their thoughts and ideas and even post footage of their recordings onto YouTube.

On the first floor we are met with a very different, yet equally high standard of finish and ambience. ‘Up here we have the general staff,’ Scott tells us, ‘as well as reps, marketing people, and people who are not intrinsic to the company, so they still wanted that sense of arrival. We have a holding area before you enter the main space, which is based on a hotel lobby style, with soft ambient lighting, soft padded walls and beyond this, through the semi-translucent wall we have a library and kitchen area, so people do not feel entirely remote here. There is a sense of movement and activity.’

‘This is a gateway – they wanted people to reach here and feel that they’d now arrived at ghd.▶▶▶▶



»»»»‘One of the things we were very keen on for the main space was that, although the overall feel is very different from downstairs, there are enough elements that link the two – such as flooring and materials.’

The open plan office space is adorned with smart Knoll systems furniture, which is arranged in a linear layout, allowing team interaction and also providing staff with the benefits of the generous natural light here. The rectilinear form of the building is negated through the clever space planning, with diagonal arrangements, bespoke storage and softer furnishings breaking what could otherwise have proved a harsh environment.

To the centre of the space, a series of glazed meeting rooms and private offices are far from left in the dark thanks to light from the atrium. Further lighting and softening of the space is provided in the shape of chandelier-style fittings.

Walking around the open plan area we also find oversized, colourful soft breakout seating, and a series of fantastic ghd graphics in the shape of artwork from the company’s advertising campaigns; subtle yet striking – and very much in keeping with the overall environment – while also adding a splash of colour to the otherwise muted scheme.

Speaking of muted, the aforementioned library/kitchen area is anything but. Large chandelier, gold padded seating and walls, mirrored table – we’re guessing this is what you’d call a place to escape to!

The dramatic ghd artwork follows through – indeed leads you – into the directors suite and boardroom via an intriguing kinking corridor. The latter is once again a lesson in throwing away the traditional staid design rules of a space in favour of a new and original approach. There is no mistaking this great space as anything other than the corporate boardroom that it is – only it somehow doesn’t feel corporate!

This is a statement space. Interstuhl’s brilliant Silver chair (as seen in the Bond movie Quantum of Solace – and it doesn’t get much cooler than that!) surrounds the large central table, while textured carpets, luxurious finishes, rich colour palettes and bronzed shimmer screens are far more 5* hotel than office building.

And what’s more, like a number of elements throughout this clearly functional environment, it puts a smile on your face.

How we wish more companies remembered to do that ●

essential ingredients

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Client: | • ghd |
| Interior Design: | • careyjones interiors 0113 224 5000 |
| Project Manager: | • Overbury 0161 829 3400 |
| Systems Furniture: | • Knoll 020 7236 6655 |
| Loose Furniture: | • Style Matters 0870 0345 550 |
| Lighting: | • Concorde Lighting 0870 606 2030 |
| Specialist LED Lighting: | • Gordon Addison 0113 263 0633 |
| Carpets: | • Westbond 01226 757757 |
| Vinyl Flooring: | • Amtico 0870 350 4070 |
| Wallcoverings: | • Yarwood Leather 0113 252 1014 Muraspec 01622 871384 |
| Joinery: | • Hurst Joinery 01274 670077 |
| Glass Catwalk: | • Roger Wilde 0161 624 6824 |