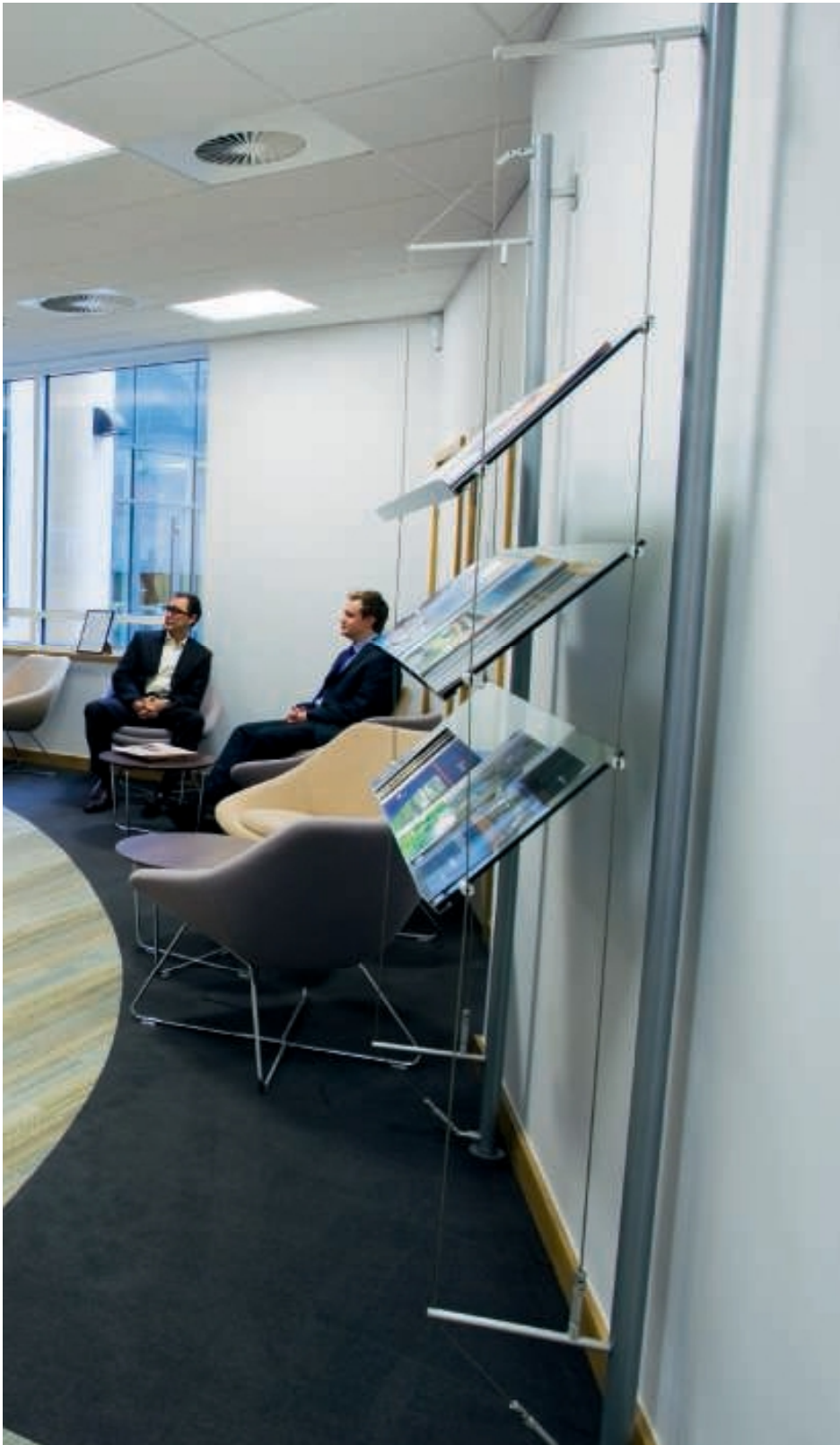




avon calling

case study



It was our venerable Editor who said, on stage at the recent Mixology North event, that the sharpest rise in design and architectural quality in this country can be seen outside the capital. Listening to his wise words (for once!) we decided we should prove him right.

So, we've come to that western melting of Bristol – a city where the old and the new, the traditional and the contemporary, sit side-by-side in happy harmony. In Bristol, Brunel nods to Foster – and Foster nods right back.

Leading national property consultants GVA Grimley unveiled its high profile new offices in Bristol earlier this year when it became the first tenant in St Catherine's Court, the first new office development in the Clifton area of the city for over 20 years.

The firm, which was previously based at University Gate in Bristol, took 10,500 sq ft on the ground and first floor of the five storey building in June 2009.

David Mace, Regional Senior Director for GVA Grimley, explains what prompted the move and why St Catherine's Court was the right choice for the market leading company. 'We had outgrown our former offices and the >>>>

case study



►►► expiry of our lease earlier this year gave us the ideal opportunity to look for a new long term home. St Catherine's Court is in a great location and offered the quality and green credentials that match our company ethos. Vitality, it will also provide us with sufficient space to accommodate imminent future growth. While we have spent the past 18 months or so consolidating, our trading performance shows we are in a robust position to hit the ground running when the upturn swings back round. This new office will facilitate that process well.'



With the firm set to move into what was essentially an empty shell, a search began for an interior design and build firm who would work with GVA Grimley's own Buildings and Project Management team to transform the space into a South West regional hub. Following a competitive pitch the contract was awarded to Bristol-based Utopia.

David says of the appointment: 'We had worked with Utopia before with a number of developer clients and office occupiers and had liked what we had seen in terms of their enthusiasm, creativity and commitment to finding cost effective solutions. This, along with an impressive tender and design scheme, made it the obvious choice.'

The Utopia team was led by Projects Director Dieter Wood. 'We were delighted to have the opportunity to get involved in such a high profile project both for GVA Grimley and locally,' Dieter says. 'GVA Grimley provided us with an extremely clear brief – to create a regional hub for the South West that met the practical needs of the firm but that also reflected both its brand proposition and communicated the personality of the region and the teams based there.'

The reception area certainly makes an impact. On entering you are greeted by a curved high gloss white reception desk with a walnut and glass top in front of a 'GVA

Grimley yellow' curved partition upon which the company logo is back-lit in polished stainless steel. This is complemented by a curved feature bulkhead on the ceiling – its shape inspired by the corporate logo. The extensive lighting design follows the curves here and the use of LED lighting provides subtle halo effects.

Set behind the reception is a circular hub which forms the centre of the ground floor space. This hub is home to a communications room and coat storage area. Hidden from view but allowing full access to the rest of the floor, this space enables the front of house team to keep the office running smoothly whilst maintaining the sense of space and calm in the public areas.

'We are a very client-focused business and so having a reception and meeting area that makes an impact, gives a sense of who we are and that we are proud to show off was high on our wish list for the new office,' David tells us. 'As well as incorporating our distinctive branding we were also keen to inject some personality into the space and so we loved Utopia's idea of including large photographic images that represent both the region and the people working here.'

These three metre high images, including the iconic Clifton Suspension Bridge and views of the regenerated waterfront at the ►►►►►

case study



strength of our business. We find that getting people away from their desks is a great way of achieving this. It's already working well, and complements the open plan layout in the office area upstairs.'

The corporate colour scheme continues as you move up to the first floor, where Techo bench-style desking has been installed. The decision to introduce banks of desks rather than pod style seating aimed to offer the firm greater flexibility as it grows.

'When the markets return we have plans for further expansion in Bristol,' David reveals, 'so this space needs to be flexible enough to grow with us. We were already used to working in an open plan environment, however, our old, cramped and awkwardly shaped offices with poor lighting created a very disjointed layout. In St Catherine's Court teams can work more closely together and this has given rise to an even more collegiate approach.'

The idea of a centralised curved hub has been carried through to the second first floor, this time to include a tea drinks point, all copying and printing and staff coat storage, breaking up the linear feel of the office space.

Three months on and the team at GVA Grimley's people are settling in well to their new environment. 'We are delighted with our new home, the location is great and more importantly the office supports and reflects who we are as a firm, and the working practices we are keen to encourage,' David concludes. 'We have been proudly showing off the offices to clients and colleagues from across the UK and have had nothing but positive feedback.'

►►► heart of Bristol city centre, were a result of an informal consultation process that included a number of the GVA Grimley Bristol team.

'It became clear as we worked with the team that many of them had a keen interest in the outdoors and so we sourced images that reflected this,' Dieter continues. 'As well as being a great addition to the look of the office, including staff in the decision-making process involved in an office move can be a really positive exercise.'

The sets of images chosen by the staff emblazon the walls not only in the reception area but also flow through into the five meeting rooms and into the staff breakout area which makes up the rest of the ground floor space.

This communal staff area was another key part of the brief, with GVA Grimley keen to recreate the informal meeting and breakout areas that were working well in their other offices around the country.

Utopia designer Tony Lawrence says: 'The team at GVA Grimley made it clear that they wanted to encourage staff to move away from their desks to have informal meetings as well as for lunch and coffee breaks. It can be surprisingly difficult to achieve this, particularly as the teams had not been used to having a separate breakout area in their old offices. To promote this change in culture we provided only very limited tea and coffee points in working areas and made the breakout area on the ground floor as welcoming as possible.'

The staff area consists of three distinct spaces: there is a substantial kitchen, a relaxed soft seating area and café style dining area. Located at the rear of building, there is also access to an outside courtyard.

'A clearly defined staff breakout area was something that we were really keen to introduce in Bristol,' David explains. 'Encouraging communication between different teams is key to the success and

essential ingredients

Client:	• GVA Grimley
Interior Design:	• Utopia 0117 973 3566 www.theutopiagroup.com
Main Contractor:	• Utopia 0117 973 3566 www.theutopiagroup.com
Systems Furniture:	• Techo www.techo-uk.co.uk
Carpets:	• InterfaceFLOR www.interfaceflor.co.uk
Seating:	• Orangebox www.orangebox.com
Partitioning:	• Fastwall www.fastwall.com
Storage wall:	• Spacestor www.spacestor.uk.com