





special agent

The recurring theme of this, our 100th issue, is of brand and brand awareness. We're pretty sure that, over the past 10 years, we've never explored the offices of as unique, carefully considered, provocative (of course!) and cool a brand as Agent Provocateur. Of course, for this all male editorial team, we've never been faced with such a mystical and exotic brand.

For our fellow uneducated males out there, Agent Provocateur is the leading high end lingerie company. This, however, is a truly unique organisation, as a look at any Agent Provocateur store, brochure (and do take a look at the quite brilliant *The New World Order* literature, complete with Marvel-style comic strip) and, of course, product will reveal. This is a daring, original and aspirational brand. What's more the company's new London headquarters truly and absolutely reflects this.



case study

»»»»»Situating on Clerkenwell Road (they were previously situated in the West End) in touching distance of the furniture industry's adopted village, the Agent Provocateur HQ instantly adds to the mystique of the brand, with its jet black exterior and enticing red lighting beyond.

As soon as we enter, we know we are the world of Agent Provocateur; a world dominated by strong, sassy women. We, quite clearly, are not the core target audience here. We are met in reception by Base Interiors' Richard Bray – the man responsible for this astonishing interior scheme.

We understand there are certain areas of the building that are no-go to us – not because there are top secret meetings taking place, but because there are number of scantily clad ladies being photographed. We promise not to accidentally interrupt.

We were also pre-warned about the horse. What horse? We don't know either – and so we ask. 'It's behind the curtain,' Richard answers as though we've just asked the most obvious thing in the world. Surely enough, behind the curtain at the back of the reception space is the model of a horse. And not a small one either. This is, near as dammit, Kauto Star size. Apparently it's for Christmas window displays. Its work is over for another year.

Adopting a near-straight tone, we ask Richard about the background to the project. Had he worked with Agent Provocateur previously? 'Never,' he tells us. 'We were working on the building with the developers that had bought the building and then Joe Corre – the founder and the then-



owner of Agent Provocateur – phoned us out of the blue and asked us if we would could go and look at the building with him. We talked about the building and what he wanted to do with it and he asked us if we could start on Monday. This was the Thursday.

'We had 22 weeks, so we stripped it out, put in a complete new infrastructure, fitted it out and, 22 weeks later, left it in the state it is now. They are an awesome client. Richard Suskins, who are their agents (and probably the Clerkenwell agent) told us, on completion, that we had just raised the bar for buildings in Clerkenwell!

As we talk, we move up the building to the top floor, where we immediately

whisked out onto a terrace overlooking our most recognisable London borough. 'They have three terraces in total,' Richard reveals. 'They have this one here and then at the back of the building they have two more on different levels.

'To explain the extent of the works, the building was essentially stripped back to a shell and we started with the windows and worked our way in – and everything had to be in a particular style. Agent Provocateur is the most fantastic brand, and everything had to be in that brand. So, as you walk around the building, you will see that everything is so Agent Provocateur. This is now something of a landmark building.'

Back inside, we walk through a sleek, informal meeting room that is dominated by a large pink table and black Vitra Panton chairs. Black and pink, we realise, is something of a corporate theme here.

'The furniture throughout the building is mostly Vitra, with a little bit of Edra and we worked closely with The Furniture Practice,' Richard tells us. 'The vibrant pink and black continues throughout – the look, I think, is very louche!'

Moving down a level, we pass more pink and black decoration, coupled with fantastic artworks along the tight stairwells. 'This is their corporate space, where the top guys hang out,' Richard breezily informs us.

'There's a very low ceiling here – they liked that loft feel, although we have kept the same character here as the rest of the building. These are the only cellular spaces here, and even then they wanted glazed offices for visibility etc. The windows were designed specifically for them to reflect the»»»»»



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►►► feel of the area and the space itself. The furniture, again, features a lot of special colours. Everything had to be ‘their’ colour – they were extremely strict in that sense. The Humanscale chairs, the Maine storage, even the sprayed ceiling – all in Agent Provocateur pink. All the lifts were replaced with a polished finish because they didn’t want brushed stainless steel. This all reflects their brand. They really do live and breathe the brand here.’

We should also say that, beneath our feet, the Forbo floorcovering features a fantastic crocodile print, while elsewhere we find Starck seating, complete with Agent Provocateur branding, more fantastic large scale Agent Provocateur artworks and a number of brilliant design touches that have clearly translated perfectly from store to office.

As we continue our descent of the building we ask Richard about staff levels here. ‘They’ve essentially doubled in size – so this building was necessary in order for them to expand as a business and as a brand. To accommodate this growth the entire ground floor is set up to be totally flexible space. It can be configured to be offices, for press days it can be opened up for launches, if they are doing a fashion show it can be used as a catwalk even.

‘In the West End they were used to small rooms, so the open plan and the bench desking is new for them, although they are delighted with how the space works for them.

‘The next floor down, which is the press floor, does very much the same thing, and

can be reconfigured as they need it. They have the press room, which is designed to look much more like one of their shops, with the large Chinese lanterns and the Agent Provocateur carpet. It is all set up with the shop rails and the mannequins and you often find models walking through here wearing very little.’

We should mention the partition system that separates the press room from the rest of this floor. Again, nodding towards a feel of the Orient, it ties in perfectly with the boudoir feel of the press room and the window design beyond. Richard tells us that his client didn’t want standard partitioning here, in fact Agent Provocateur was looking for something totally original, and this bespoke system was created specifically for them. The system, however, won’t be completely original for too long as its success here means that Richard and the team are now looking to roll it out into other suitable Base Interiors projects.

The partition system is again utilised on the ground floor, alongside the reception space. Here, yet again, we find lantern lighting, Edra lip sofa, ‘new’ antique wood flooring, cool fluorescent signage/branding which is visible from the street and, of course, just a touch more pink and black.

‘Because everything was so quick here, the budget ‘flexed’ all the way through,’ Richard tells us, ‘although we were always making decisions on the fact that we only had a finite amount of money. So we were putting things in and taking things out all the time to get the best results – the best bang for your buck. They were probably

one of the most demanding clients I’ve ever worked with as an individual, but definitely one of the most rewarding.’

This is very much the key to the project; Agent Provocateur clearly pushed Base Interiors all the way, looking for innovative, original solutions throughout. Knowing what we do about this client – and we must say that we now know quite a bit more than we did before our tour – Agent Provocateur will not mind one bit that others might follow in their wake. After all, the great brands always take the lead ●

essential ingredients

Client:	• Agent Provocateur
Design & Build:	• Base Interiors 020 7487 3222
Furniture Supply:	• The Furniture Practice 020 7549 5454
Systems Furniture:	• Vitra 020 7608 6200
Task Seating:	• Humanscale 020 7566 7990
Flooring:	• Forbo 01592 643777
Storage:	• Maine 01908 271688
Occasional Seating:	• Edra +39 0587 616 660 Vitra 020 7608 6200
Partitioning Design:	• Base Interiors 020 7487 3222