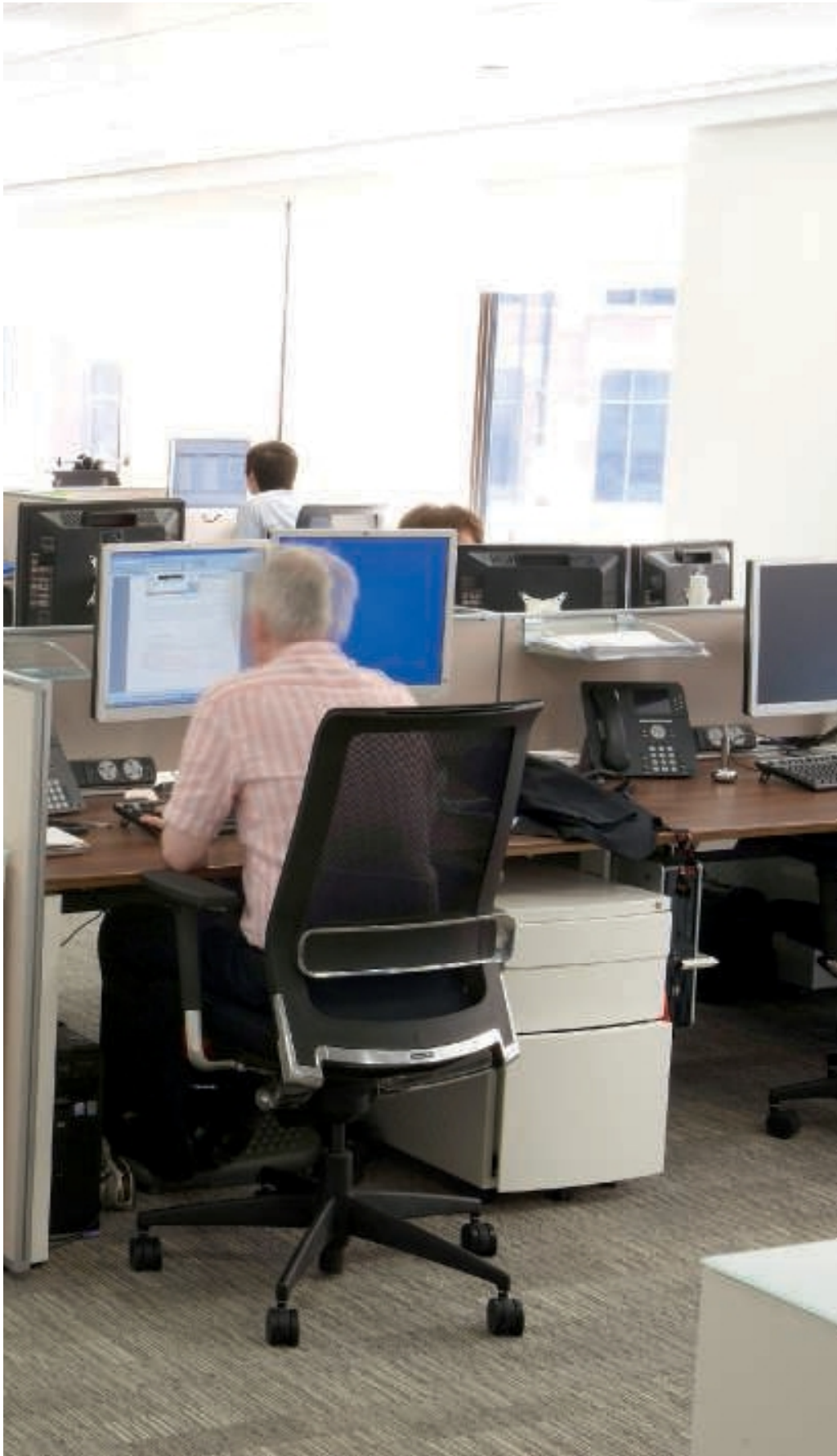




Sunflower Seeds



The second, and certainly most famous, set of oil on canvas paintings created by the Dutch master Vincent van Gogh in 1888 is the Sunflower series. The most recognisable of the series is currently owned by Sompo - the leading Japanese insurance company.

Sompo Japan Insurance Company of Europe Limited (SJE) is a subsidiary of Sompo Japan Insurance Inc. (SJII), underwriting a range of commercial risks and providing insurance risk management services to corporate clients. The group has been providing insurance and risk management products and services to its clients in Europe and beyond since 1955, building on client relationships originating in Japan.

SJE is established in seven countries in Europe with its head office in the UK. It provides insurance products and services to clients across Europe through a dedicated team of over 100 employees.

Just so you understand the scale of the company, SJII operates from 149 locations in 29 countries around the world outside of Japan. This, therefore, is a major global organisation.



Case Study



▶▶▶▶ Again, when it came to the architect, we went through the beauty parade, and from the four companies that were invited along, Arcademy seemed the most responsive and in tune with our requirements. One company came along without even visiting the site – and totally got our concept wrong!

‘Cost was something that we obviously did have to look at, but we really needed a company who knew what we were all about and what we were looking for. We didn’t really want to work with a very big company, and Arcademy seemed to know what we were looking for. One of the primary things we needed was extra meeting space. We only had three meeting rooms previously, and we have lots of audits and lots of internal meetings as well, and it was essential for us to improve this – and particularly for our boardroom to have excellent AV facilities.

‘Even though we are not particularly client facing we do have a lot of internal/external meetings – we get a lot of people who come across from our

European offices, and also our head office in Japan.

‘Our Managing Director was quite happy to get on with it, more or less. I did ask him if there was anything that he really wanted to reflect in the design of the space. His answer was ‘Don’t make it too gorgeous!’ Obviously, in a recession, you don’t want people coming from head office and thinking that this is where all our profits are going! We wanted something that gave the right impression – something professional, modern, very different from what we had before, yet not pretentious or opulent. It was a fine balance – but I definitely think we’ve ticked that box.’

The new SJE home at Devonshire Square fits onto a single floorplate – unlike the company’s previous Bishopsgate space. The advantages don’t stop there however. Patricia points out that the building benefits from a fantastic amount of natural light, with windows running around the perimeters of all major working and meeting areas. The main working space looks out onto the hustle and bustle of

Middlesex Street and Petticoat Lane, whilst the meeting and front of house elements overlook the serene square itself.

Incidentally, we agree with Patricia that the view across the busy market scene is far more ‘us’.

Throughout the meeting and front of house areas there is a subtle – and we do mean subtle – nod to the company’s Japanese heritage, as Patricia explains. ‘We didn’t want to be over the top with this, but at the end of the day we are a Japanese company and I thought that some of the design aspects should reflect that, so we’ve used specific flowers and certain finishes.’

As an aside from that, and as a nod back to Europe, the meeting rooms themselves are, through a staff competition, named after the national flowers of the European nations SJE is currently established in.

As previously mentioned, storage was a major concern for the main open plan working area, and this has been cleverly integrated throughout the clean linear bench systems, although a dedicated rolling storage space behind the office allows for much of the necessary documentation to be taken away from the office. Incidentally, the smart beam-based systems have been supplied by Frem and are supported with improved ergonomic seating. ‘We didn’t mind paying a little bit extra for a chair that is completely adjustable and that pleased everybody,’ Patricia confirms. ‘We go the manufacturer involved – got them to come in here and I think that stopped a lot of prospective problems. We used a Japanese company. We liked the design, simple as that. It’s very contemporary.’

We haven’t even mentioned the vastly improved IT facilities, the standalone utilities area (where we witnessed, first hand, how such a facility can foster staff interaction and communication) or the bright, smart staff dining space – which features American-style fridge, flat-screen TV and subtle recycling points.

As we head back through the square we wonder how long it took old Vincent to paint his masterpieces. We bet he couldn’t have done what we do in under an hour. Then again, we’re never going to get £20 million for our own little masterpieces! ●

essential ingredients

Client • **Sompo Japan Insurance Company of Europe** | Project Manager • **Blackburn & Co**

Architect • **Arcademy Architecture** | M&E Engineer • **Chapman Bathurst** | QS • **Blackburn & Co** | Fit-Out • **Ibex Interiors**

Systems Furniture • **Frem** 0207 8317864

Task Seating • **Kokuyo** 0207 8317864

Joinery • **Platonoff & Harris** 01920 444255

Carpet Tiling • **Delta Commercial Flooring** 01268 410226