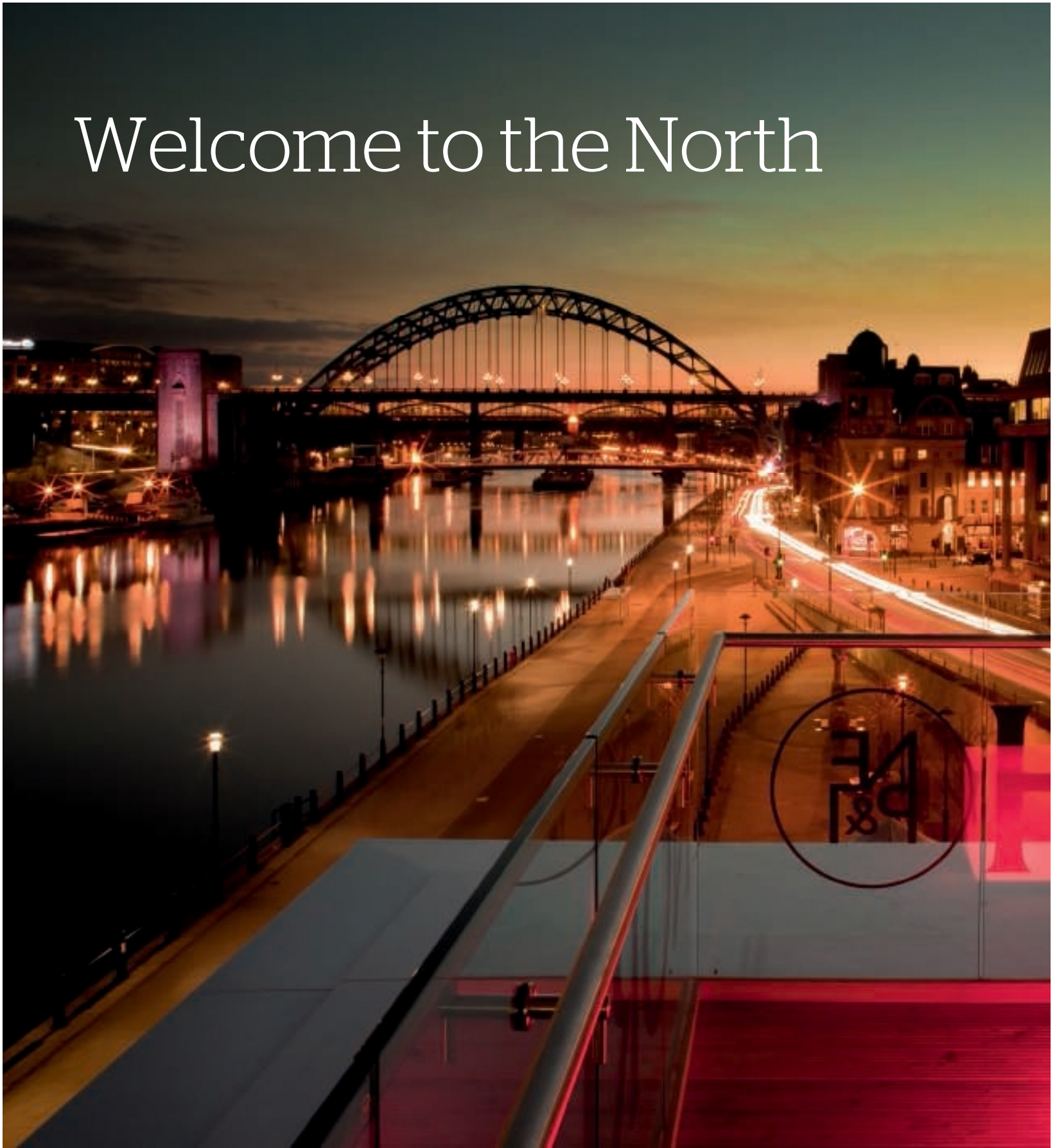


# Welcome to the North





Photography by Kristen McCluskie - [www.kristenmccluskie.com](http://www.kristenmccluskie.com)

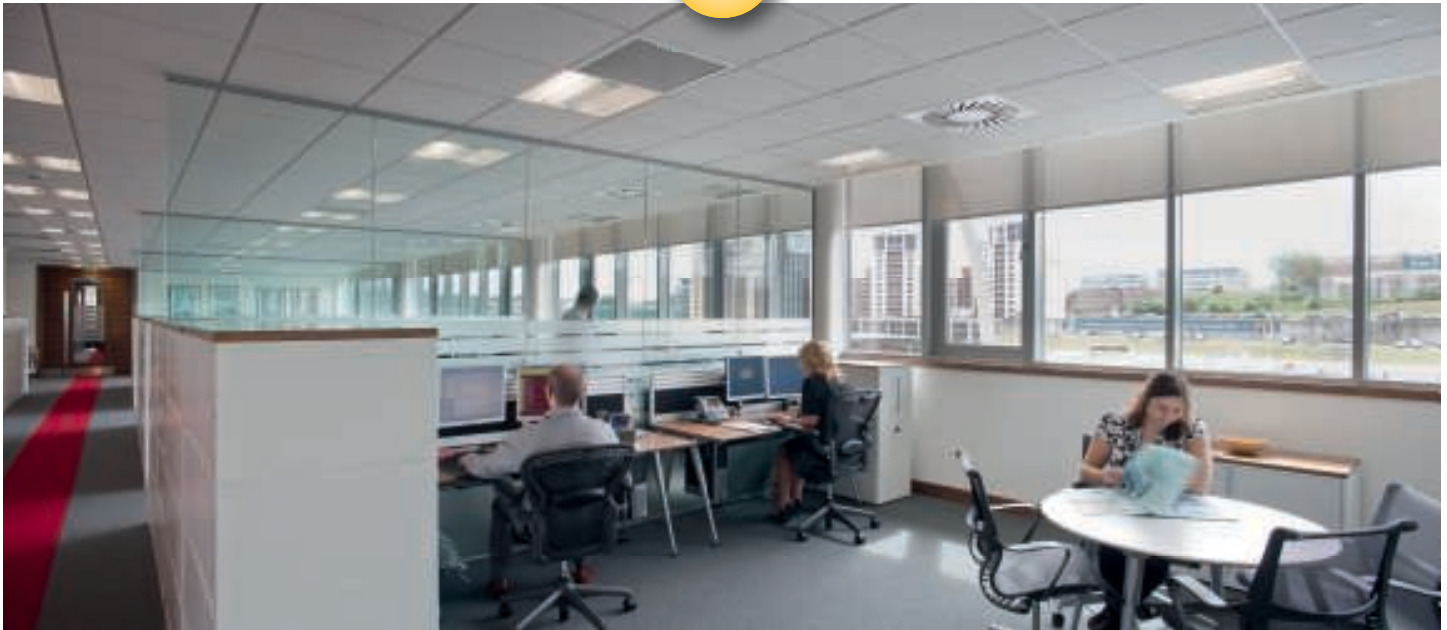
'North stands by its values – service, strength and quality.' These words, extracted from Chairman Albert Engelsman's 400 word foreword to the organisation's latest newsletter, are the only parts of the text in bold type.

**W**e notice things like this. Then later on, re-reading notes of our conversation with Offices Services Executive Lisa Clish, we got another nudge. We'd asked Lisa about the impressively high level of design and fit-out at North's Head Office 'It's because of our commitment to service,' said Lisa. 'We want to provide our staff with an inspiring and engaging environment in order to continue providing our shipowner members with the highest standards of service and care.'

That's exactly what North is about – service, strength and quality. As an interpretation of values – we'll avoid the word 'brand' – the refurbishment, extension and interior design of the flagship head office would take some beating.

Let's take a step back and explain who North is. North (North of England P&I Association) is a leading marine liability insurer and this year celebrates its 151st anniversary. P&I Associations are clubs that protect the interests of shipowners through allowing the shipowners to spread the risk of

Case Study



▶▶▶▶▶ their liabilities amongst their members. And it's a big business too, the 13 P&I Associations of the International Group of P&I Clubs between them provide liability insurance for approximately 90% of the world's ocean-going tonnage...and North insure 12.1% of that.

Impressively, although we're talking about an organisation which is extremely proud of its strength and history, North is forward looking and progressive. Current issues facing the global shipping community include such challenges as increased legislation and regulation, piracy and the criminalisation of seafarers. These are

complex issues, so North stays ahead of its field by trusting in its values and investing in the best people and infrastructure. As a result, North continues to develop. And develop rapidly – this year achieving record levels of entered tonnage. A notable example of investment and growth is the major extension and refurbishment of North's offices on the historic quayside in Newcastle.

'We considered relocation to manage growth,' comments Lisa, 'but we really wanted to stay at the Quayside, just a few hundred yards from where the Club began in the 19th century. It's a prime location

opposite the Baltic art gallery, with the iconic Sage music venue facing us across the Tyne too. There's also real sense of regeneration along the Quayside as well.'

North's original offices were constructed in 1993, and this recent £7 million refurbishment marks the second time the Club has extended the same offices to increase capacity. Adding a further floor to the building has helped to increase capacity to a potential of 300 staff.

Jackie Wilkinson, Director of Ward Robinson, showed us around the quietly impressive space.

'What North wanted was a contemporary, high quality interior design scheme that would stand the test of time,' explains Jackie. 'We've had a long working relationship with North, going back to the early 90's. For this latest development we were appointed as project managers and interior designers – and we assembled a very strong design and build team with Ryder as project architect.'

Our tour revealed an elegant design perfectly attuned to North's values, heritage and forward looking outlook. Subtle touches are chanced upon, from superb photography of Northumbrian castles to intriguing maritime memorabilia. Pride in the Club's roots and heritage is self evident, yet the occasional nods to this are handled with a light touch that avoids sentimentality.

The specification of the workspace reveals Ward Robinson's deep understanding of North's values. This is understated intelligent interior design that exudes quality and strength – yet is pleasingly subtle.





▶▶▶▶▶ As an example of this astute design, let's start with the apparently unpromising area of filing. Considerable storage requirements are handled by stacks of bespoke Meridian units that line walkways. Despite this, sightlines are maintained sympathetically, whilst a clean white finish topped with real walnut veneer creates an upscale impression that significantly adds to the scheme. Simultaneously, the storage banks aid departmental and team delineation.

The furniture, by long-standing supplier Corporate Workspace, is largely Herman Miller. 'Ward Robinson, with whom I have worked on many projects, developed the occupation strategy and space plans,' explains Corporate Workspace's Simon Thrussell. 'Together, we evolved an output specification and drew up a list of suitable manufacturers. After initial pricing and development, it was decided to base the solution around Herman Miller's Abak Environments. We had, over the years, provided some earlier generation Abak to North which had stood the test of time well. Through the mock-up process, we honed a solution which was forward

looking and flexible, but through the use of traditional materials, paid homage to North's long maritime history.

'From the earliest stages of the project, Aeron was a clear favourite in user trials, and its iconic design made it a firm choice. True, proven design was also chosen in the form of Vitra Eames softpads for the boardroom.'

As Jackie explained, a key element of the design scheme was to promote interaction amongst colleagues. A well resolved atrium cafe/bar area is a sleek example of intelligent use of a challengingly shaped linking space. Light and airy, featuring limestone finishes, contemporary light fittings and splashes of North's signature red accent, the atrium impresses visually. As an aid to interaction, it's compelling.

We started by reflecting on North's values – service, strength and quality – and we'll end on the same note. These are serious values – and ones backed with over 150 years of experience. Yet, as our visit to Newcastle revealed, North is anything but a backward looking organisation. Service, strength and quality. In bold ●



## essential ingredients |

Client • **North** [www.nepia.com](http://www.nepia.com) | Architect • **Ryder** [www.ryderarchitecture.com](http://www.ryderarchitecture.com)  
Interior Design & Project Manager • **Ward Robinson** [www.wardrobinson.com](http://www.wardrobinson.com) | QS • **Todd Milburn** | M&E Consultant • **Desco**

Furniture Supply • **Corporate Workspace** [www.corporate-workspace.com](http://www.corporate-workspace.com)  
Bespoke Joinery • **Graeme Ash Shopfitters** [www.graemeash.co.uk](http://www.graemeash.co.uk)

Carpet • **Vorwerk** [www.vorwerk.com](http://www.vorwerk.com)  
Partitions • **Komfort** [www.komfort.com](http://www.komfort.com)