

# Garden's Gate



Smart design goes hand-in-hand with smart business. Therefore, when we receive a story, we make sure we find out a little about the end-user – the business.

A story which begins ‘We moved here because it’s easy for our MD to get to...’ probably won’t make the final cut.

One sector which continually brings with it smart design for smart businesses is

the legal sector. We’re fascinated by the design of the modern law firm. There are so many considerations; open plan or cellular, modern or traditional aesthetics, formal or informal – we’re sure you get the picture.

This is a study, in our humble opinion, that perfectly illustrates how smart design and considered business structure can come together to drastically enhance a company. The key to this success may well be that

both client and designer have put business first. Quite simply, the offices we have come to see today make absolute sense – and that is a massive compliment.

We’re talking about Fladgate LLP – one of the UK’s top 100 law firms, with a strong reputation for both commercial and private client work. With a global reach, the firm has a broad skills base that covers a wide spectrum of legal services. The firm has an ▶▶▶▶

Have you ever considered the many project stories we are offered and yet graciously decline? Well, we like to think of ourselves as honest people - and we like to think that this title reflects the entire market, its trends and smart design.





firm – but not flash. They didn't want the space to feel like an airport lounge – they didn't want it to feel intimidating or ostentatious. They wanted it to feel businesslike. In terms of the choice of location, Covent Garden brings together the commercial approach of the West End and the gravitas of the City, reflecting the evolution of Fladgate's business.'

The firm was previously housed in two buildings in Mayfair, and has now brought its entire staff under one roof in larger premises on Great Queen Street. Although it has been based in W1 since the 1950's, the firm was actually founded in Suffolk Street, Charing Cross in 1760, just a short distance from the new building.

The move, we discover, has actually been five years in the planning, and the firm has long-recognised the need for larger, more modern premises to support its future growth plans. Having scoured the property market and looked at a number of prospective properties, the Great Queen Street building immediately caught the Fladgate eye and imagination. 'It was shell and core throughout the floors,' Festus recalls. 'The building is configured in two blocks; there's a tower element and a podium that run at 90° from one another.

'Furthermore, this part of this wing is a new penthouse space, which means this space is higher and more generous and therefore was an obvious choice for the new client suite here. We actually demolished the old 8th floor and built the new 8th and 9th floor. So effectively clients only come to this floor – whilst all the other floors here are fee-earner floors.'

We walk through to the clean, bright reception space that sits in front of an equally impressive client meeting suite. A great deal of attention has clearly been paid to the finishes and palette here, with neutrals and woods combined. 'The existing building has a very limited floor to ceiling height, which makes it quite a challenge,' Festus admits. 'Squeezing everything in – in terms of both the CAT A and the more bespoke elements – was quite a challenge in particular.

'Picking up on the palette we have used, we have taken the flooring from the lobby through into the client reception, matched with a very simple, natural straight grain oak panelling, which we've twisted a little with an almost random match design.

'We also did a lot of analysis with Fladgate, and found out that many of their meetings were one-to-one, not necessarily the big corporate meetings. So a number of

acknowledged expertise in undertaking complex corporate and property transactions, as well as commercial, tax and trust matters and disputes.

Fladgate combines a flexible and responsive style of service with practical, in-depth experience, to provide legal advice that reflects the commercial context in which it is sought.

The firm's clients are drawn from all sectors of commerce and industry and include multinational corporations, public sector bodies, entrepreneurs and individuals.

The location of the new Fladgate London home sets the tone; previously situated in the West End, the firm has now put its clients first and moved to Covent Garden – providing easy access for, well, just about everyone in London. We are met on the 9th floor of the Covent Garden space

by John Robertson Architects Director Festus Moffat, who is happy to guide us through the new Fladgate home and tell us a little more about the background to the project. 'Fladgate was previously in North Row in Mayfair,' he begins. 'They wanted to move, and they also needed to move because the lease was up there. The buildings were pretty tired – and they were also right opposite the new Park House development and they didn't fancy being opposite a building site for three years.'

The move comes in the firm's 250th year and marks the beginning of a new chapter in its history, underlining its confidence, ambition and plans for future growth. 'They were already thinking about the brand and what the firm stood for before the project began,' Festus reveals. 'They wanted to present themselves as a smart, established



▶▶▶the meeting rooms within the suite here are purposely designed so that people won't feel lost in a huge space, but are comfortable for smaller meetings.

'Also, there are a number of rooms along the other side of the suite that are designed to accommodate between six and ten people. The larger rooms are extremely flexible, so you can break them down into two or three smaller spaces, or you can open them right up so that the space can accommodate up to 70 people. It sits as a really neat space and we have put quite a lot of technology into here. Everything is controlled centrally.

'This is a considerable upgrade from what they had in the West End. I think they are really increasing the profile of the firm on the back of this building.'

In total, JRA has provided a spacious reception, 15 meeting rooms, and flexible seminar and board room space for 150 people here. Again, the palette, and the use of timbers in particular, catches the eye, providing a clever contemporary twist on the classical wood panels associated with the classical law firm.

Walking through to 'the tower' wing, we find more than a touch more ingenuity built into the design. The aforementioned height limitations were a clear challenge for the team.

'What we've done here is we've created thick walls that accommodate all the M&E, and that means there is essentially nothing in the ceiling other than the lights, so we can get as much floor to ceiling height in here as we can,' Festus reveals. 'All the air conditioning units are behind the panels as well – so everything is integrated into the service walls.

'We also cut the walls down on the other side and put in the floor to ceiling windows, allowing 180° views and lots of natural light.'

It's important to note that this is a firm that is growing – and not just in numbers. This is clearly a firm growing rapidly in stature and reputation. The JRA-designed space helps accommodate that in every sense.

'Because the space splits between client-facing and back of house, there are tea points where the tower and the podium

meet,' Festus says as we continue through the space. 'There are also external walkways or balconies which open up from the new penthouse floor, which are great for summer.'

Moving down to the fee-earner floors, we find a real hive of Fladgate activity. Something of a change from the serenity and demure nature of the client facing areas above us, these working floors feature open support 'avenues' through the centre of the space, with glazed fee-earner cellular offices lining the perimeter. This doesn't feel like an 'us-and-them' space however, with virtually every office open and accessible. Each floor has its own smart tea point cum breakout space, whilst the finishes of naturals and timber are continued from upstairs.

The new mid-town offices of Fladgate achieve that clever balancing act; smart, welcoming, impressive, yet not flash, not ostentatious and definitely not showing the firm's clients exactly where their money is being spent.

It's found its place right in the middle – in pretty much every sense ●

## essential ingredients

Client • **Fladgate LLP** | Interior Design • **John Robertson Architects** 020 7633 5100

16 Great Queen Street Main Contractor • **Skanska** | Landlord • **Henderson Global Investors**

Furniture • **Wilkhahn** 020 7324 2900

Seating • **Wilkhahn** 020 7324 2900

Carpets • **Shaw Contract Group** 020 7490 4006

Partitioning • **Straehle** www.straehle.de