

Princes and the Revolution

The Central Line is currently closed due to a problem we can't quite hear. Hastily, we make alternative tube plans and, with time to spare, find ourselves at Notting Hill - just a hop and a skip from our destination of Holland Park. Furthermore, the sun is shining and the walk will do us good.



Case Study

We're in fine spirits anyway. Why shouldn't we be? We're in a smart, cool part of London, and we're on our way to meet with a smart, cool company at its smart, cool new premises. In fact, it doesn't get much cooler than the movie industry – and we're heading to the home of one of the leading edgy, independent film distributors around – Revolver Entertainment.

The leading UK and US film distributor Revolver commissioned Fiona Kennedy Design to design a cinema, events space and production and distribution headquarters for its 50 London based staff in Holland Park, in a 7,300 sq ft warehouse facility.

The brief was to create a space where, once you get inside the gates, anything can happen; where the staff can have an idea in the morning and by afternoon it can be moving towards a reality. All this, within a tight budget and a challenging 12-week programme. We've got the camera, there's plenty of light – so let's find the action.

We find the Revolver headquarters tucked away on the idyllic Princes Place, proceed through a fantastic little courtyard and are greeted by FKD's Fiona Kennedy in the open multipurpose, collaborative Revolver space.

Taking a coffee and a seat, we begin by asking Fiona about the choice of location.

'Originally they were based in Notting Hill, in a mews house – this is very important to this project, let's come back to that' Fiona tells us. 'Justin Marciano – Revolver's CEO – was looking for a very particular new space. He was ambitious with his building brief and not content to take a 'regular' office space in a regular part of town. Revolver are a unique company, doing their own thing in their own way, it was a must that their new premises reflected this.

'I think Justin had seen this space from the outside a number of times, although he didn't really know what was behind the somewhat hidden and humble facade. When it came up for rent, he simply jumped on ▶▶▶▶▶▶





found herself appointed as the new Revolver designer.

'We wanted Revolver to get the best and most realistic advice from the off,' Fiona recalls. 'Our advice was that, as they were working with a limited budget and an insane timescale – moving in 12 weeks – the project should be costed-out straight away and they should involve a trusted contractor extremely early to ensure the do-ability, whilst the design team met the staff and set a program of workshops and meetings to understand the business and their needs. I think Justin felt that he'd found a safe pair of hands in us, that we understood them and understood what they wanted and we could make it happen. And although we talked very little 'design' at the beginning and focused on the practicality of the project, Justin also trusted that we would get the right Revolver look and feel. Before we were officially appointed we presented the big idea, 3 variations on the same theme working to different budgets –I don't think the design has changed too much from our very first conversations, although the project was challenging the ideas flowed very easily, it was a very co-creative project in that way.'

Fiona tells us a little more about the previous Revolver home. 'It was a 1,650 sq ft mews house over three floors in Notting Hill. The day we met I asked to go there to understand the company a little more. I couldn't believe how many people they had crammed in there! It felt like complete chaos, not the most efficient environment, messy, awkwardly laid out, inconvenient – but it had a real spirit, it felt like an exciting place to work, there was real energy in there, a real sense of what they did. I kind of loved it.

'But they needed more space, they needed better space, they'd grown into a much bigger and better company. As a player in the movie industry they needed a space that not only reflected that but supported them to be even bigger and better – to allow them to be the best they can be. We had to be careful though, they had such a great atmosphere in their old office and it wouldn't be easy to replicate that in such a big and multi building premises. That greatly informed the way we laid things out here. We believe an office must reflect the company not the designer, I think you have to understand the people, feel the atmosphere of a company, what they do, find the personality – and then illustrate that in the physical environment. That's what we did here and that's the most▶▶▶▶

▶▶▶▶ it. Revolver then invited design ideas from a number of companies. 'We didn't pitch for the project, I was introduced to Justin through recommendation' explains Fiona. 'We met to discuss the pitches he had received and just to give some informal advice, but when you meet a client like that, in a building like this, I think my enthusiasm got the better of me and rather than talking about the designs on the table we just walked through and talked through the great potential of the building, the project and what Revolver could do there. It was very exciting. The space also has some interesting history as scenes from the film *Blow Up* were filmed here and it had been the home to a number of architectural practices over the years. It just felt right.

'Although I could see and feel the potential, the space was not in good shape, it was far from a blank canvas and needed serious intervention and big ideas. It was clear they had to clean up the space and start over, but there was little time to dream,

we got straight to the point – when did they need to move, how many people did they need to house, what was the budget. As designers we work within the constraints of every project, that's the process, but this time not only were the aspirations incredibly high, it was a very daunting project given the tight budget and even tighter deadlines.'

Fiona goes on to explain about the existing space. 'There were a lot of existing old meeting rooms in here which were badly constructed, the space was awkwardly divided, floor finishes were poor and poorly laid, power and data had to be updated throughout – it had to be totally stripped back. It was clear that it would require a great deal of intervention to meet their business needs.

Fiona walked through the space with Justin and offered advice as to how to work with the budget and develop the space. Having come in as an informal consultant at the start of the process, Fiona suddenly

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humour reflecting Revolver's personality, whilst also encouraging adaptation for collaborative work, launches and events.

Large scale neon signage, bright pink railings, the all red amenities room, a giant Raging Bull image and much, much more illustrate the point perfectly.

Although not what you'd call corporate, the boardroom and private meeting areas are – to use Fiona's words – 'more serious' in nature, although the open, inclusive Revolver approach is even visible here through the use of glass. There are even future plans to add more meeting space in the currently disused cottage in the courtyard.

Before we take our leave, we manage to grab a few minutes of CEO Justin's precious time. We ask him, first, about the Revolver/FKD collaboration. 'We'd seen about five other companies and a few of them put some stuff together for us, but they were either really naff or really corporate – no-one had anything original, it was all stylised and not the style we wanted. We were blown away by the space itself in the first place, and what was great about Fiona was that we sat down and she was immediately able to translate what we wanted and ask all the right questions and make it all achievable. I think that's a really difficult thing to do. I'm not a designer and I don't know how you'd go about translating something like 'Make it feel like Revolver!' She was able to take that away and translate that and make it happen.

'It is so rare for me to ask for something and for someone to then come back with a first draft and have got it. It was a real eureka moment.

'We'd like to think we're independent, edgy, fast-paced...we're full of energy and we needed this space to reflect that. We had a major American film sales company come here recently and he wanted to come and see our new offices – and he said 'No-one's got an office like this. It blows everyone else away. These are the coolest offices!' This was about creating a space where there are so many 'wows' as you go through it. Just walking people through here does half our job. It gives you a sense of what the experience would be like working with us.'

Now that's praise indeed. Cut ●

▶▶▶exciting thing about a workplace and workplace design.'

That's not to say that Fiona has splashed colour all over the space, or filled every available wall with movie memorabilia – far from. 'We believe that you can keep the work environment quite controlled because in the end people do different things in different ways throughout the day, everyone looks different, everyone dresses differently and that's what fills an office with personality.

'It's about the about the business, the staff and about what they do, and you need to build a space to holds that – oh, and don't be afraid of a bit of mess; this is work and you have to be open to creative chaos or just chaos, the design armature needs to be strong enough to hold that.

'This is quite a young and energetic work studio, music, noise, movies playing, people coming and going. But at the same time it's most definitely a place of serious work. This is a serious business, with serious and stressful work being done, with serious clients and buyers coming in – the space has to reflect that too. Amongst the more informal social areas and screening areas are more serious zones, even the social zone is quite controlled and simple so that when they have events they can dress it appropriately for what they are promoting or celebrating.'

At the heart of the office are the collaborative spaces – which can be used for non-territorial work, informal meetings, lunch gatherings, launch events and parties – and the all-important cinema facility.

Largely left white and with flexible furniture throughout, the collaborative space can be transformed at any time. The area, throughout our visit, is a hive of activity, with Revolver staff meeting, chatting, enjoying a break and a drink – and all of this is backed by a cool soundtrack.

The large open work studio space has been broken down into definable intimate work areas of two to 12 people. The walls of the main work studio have been injected with a rollercoaster graphic by graphic agency Windjammertruck, symbolising the creative energy surging through the company.

A strong connectivity between the work space, cinema, events space and meeting areas was achieved by opening up a circulation route through the two main buildings and creating a central link bridge to encourage staff to circulate through and make the most of their new facility, whilst also providing an intimate focal point to the lofty, bright and open plan warehouse spaces.

The intention is that the fit-out is flexible, robust, relaxed and uncomplicated, yet unquestionably cool, with a twist of

essential ingredients

Client • **Revolver Entertainment** | Designer • **Fiona Kennedy Design** 07957 420 718

Main Contractor • **Barley McNaughton** | Graphic Designers • **Windjammertruck**

Systems Furniture • **Vitra** 020 7608 6200 **Coexistence** 020 7354 8817

Storage • **Maine** 01908 271688

Task Seating • **Vitra** 020 7608 6200

Breakout Furniture • **inc. Lamhults, Established & Sons, e15**