





## the new order

Manchester is the centre of the universe. Well, it's certainly feels that way to us. Both the *Mix* Publisher and Editor originally hail from the great city, while preparations are already underway for this year's Mixology North – following the success of last November's inaugural event.

It is only right then that, while we are so preoccupied by all that is Manc, we should take a look at the incredible development continuing to affect the city.

So, we've met up with leading practice Tilney Shane to discuss a forward-thinking scheme in the heart of Manchester. Cobbetts is one of the UK's largest legal practices with offices in three key commercial centres outside the capital – Birmingham, Leeds and, of course, Manchester. Tilney Shane refurbished the Birmingham offices in 2004 and were subsequently asked to fit-out the new offices in both Leeds and Manchester. These projects signal the stature that Cobbetts >>>>



The new office reflects a firm that has shed the traditional and the staid in favour of the contemporary, open and dynamic. The typography and colour palette here is more modern retail than oak panels and Chesterfields.

The new Cobbetts Manchester home is situated in the very heart of the city and comprises five stunning floors. 'We sat in on base build meetings and had some influence on the building layout and finishes from an early stage,' Andrew tells us. 'This is a very different style of building from those they had been working in. With large linear floorplates, it was quite a regimented space and we have used curved lines and ellipsoidal meeting areas to soften this and visually divide the floors.'

Cobbetts were keen to emphasise that the quality of their people is critical to their success. Importantly, they are using their workplaces as tools to recruit and retain the best talent, and therefore one of the ways to retain their ranking of 12th in the 100 Best Companies to Work For (survey published by The Sunday Times in March 2004).

Cobbetts have introduced the concept of an open work environment into their workplace – a rare, yet increasing phenomenon within the legal world. Having seen this working successfully at their Birmingham offices, they were confident it would also work in Leeds and Manchester. With this confidence came an acknowledgement that a strong communication programme needed to be put in place to engage and enthuse staff as to the benefits of open plan working. Throughout the design process, staff were

now relishes in the marketplace, and heralds its position as one of the UK's top 50 full service law firms.

'Our relationship with Cobbetts dates back three or four years now,' Tilney Shane's Andrew Bartlett reveals. 'They were refurbishing their Birmingham offices and, with the project on site and only a matter of weeks to handover, there were clearly some aspects of the design of the project, the 'wow' element, that were causing concern, so we were called in to help out. It was a fairly ridiculous timescale. We went in and just looked at what we could do in the time.'

'We used lots of graphics and photographic images, drawing on their recently updated corporate identity, and some nice finishes and furniture pieces. It actually all worked really well – well enough for them to come back to us when

they started looking at their Leeds office. We completed two floors on that project and then, as that was finishing, we moved on to Manchester – which was a bigger job again.

'As a company, Cobbetts originated in Manchester and whilst this gave an added historical significance to the project there was a clear directive that this was not to be a 'head office'. The new Manchester office was to follow the design lead set by the other two, unmistakably Cobbetts, but with a local 'twist'.

'Manchester was a consolidation of a number of offices into one and consequently some departments were coming together for the first time. It was a great opportunity for Cobbetts to improve and consolidate the way they worked and the way they presented themselves to their clients.'





## case study



▶▶▶ during the relocation – hence the considerable attention to detail and quality of furniture, fixtures and fittings in all areas including the restaurant and toilet areas.’

OPL has helped to create a stunning interior based on the detailed design that the architectural practice Tilney Shane created. The dynamic interactive open plan working environment is ideally complemented with a selection of more private cellular meeting rooms and offices. The quality of the design is reflected throughout the interior. The attention to detail can be seen in the curved glazing and interior walls, lighting, veneer panelling, ceilings and loose furniture.

The strong business identity is also reflected in the extensive use of manifestations, graphics, signage and light

panels. ‘We implemented the full range of commercial office interiors,’ OPL Operations Director Adam Rowe continues, ‘including technology-equipped boardrooms with sliding partitions, video conferencing facilities, a large number of client meeting rooms, partner quiet rooms, staff canteens including full service kitchen as well as more normal tea points and office service areas including printing zones and shower facilities. We were also involved in the relocation from Cobbett’s old offices and providing the full range of loose furniture through our group company Footprint Furniture who procured and managed over 400 items of furniture.’

In creating the workspace it was essential that each department was provided with the required support spaces to cater for

concentrated work, and confidential matters. Through consultation with the users, Tilney Shane ensured that each department had exactly what it needed, whilst maintaining the right balance overall. ‘To sum up, the magic touch is that what we gave was delivery of a great looking, well designed and envisioned project remaining faithful to the architects’ and clients’ vision of what they wanted,’ David is proud to tell us. ‘Over three weekends groups of staff packed their belongings up at 4pm on the Friday and were unpacked and not just ready to work but fully operational, feeling completely at home in their new surroundings by 10am on the Monday morning. In a client facing, fee earning environment that means everything.’

Further praise comes from the client. ‘We have been very impressed with the professionalism and sheer hard work that Office Projects have put in to achieve our strategic office relocation and change management programme.’ Stephen Gilmore, Cobbetts Senior Partner tells us, while Cobbetts Group Property Director Paul Leyland adds: ‘Office Projects did an excellent job in an amazingly short timescale. I was most impressed by the helpful and co-operative attitude of OPL’s staff.’

Cobbetts is the perfect example of a forward-thinking, dynamic and modern organisation. It’s refreshing to know that the cream of the legal profession is clearly not prepared to sit back on its Chesterfields ●

## essential ingredients

Client:	• Cobbetts
Interior Design:	• Tilney Shane 020 7731 6946
Fit-Out:	• Office Projects Ltd 020 8877 6900
Furniture Supply:	• Office Projects Ltd 020 8877 6900
Swivel Chairs:	• EDC 020 7323 3233
Meeting Room Tables:	• Kusch + Co 020 7336 7561
Meeting Room Seating:	• Brunner 020 7309 6400
Breakout Furniture:	• Brunner 020 7309 6400 Hitch Mylius 020 8443 2616
Canteen Seating:	• Arper 020 7323 3233