



# The Halcrow Road



Now, those of you with a few industry miles on the clock will be all too aware of our destination. We're heading out to West London's Elms House - formerly the home of EMI, once the most talked-about project in the country. Well, there might not be any memorabilia from Floyd or The Beatles here now, but its new resident, Halcrow, might well have made Elms House a headline-maker once again.

**I**n fact, Elms House's history goes much further back than EMI, as the building was once home to J Lyons & Co, who was a genuine pioneer of the open plan office. As we sit in the smart, contemporary new meeting suite, we are shown photographs of Lyons' open plan floors from the best part of a century ago. They don't look too far removed from many of the projects we see today. Not that, as we're about to discover, the stunning new Halcrow scheme can be compared beyond its open nature.

We are joined by a committee of people from both Halcrow and designers M Moser Associates, including Halcrow's Tony van Emst, Chris Townsend and Lizzie Sparrow, and M Moser's David Faichney, Anton Jeanes and Mark Humphries.

Halcrow specialises in design, planning and management services for infrastructure development worldwide. It's a





Case Study



‘started with a blank canvas,’ he says. ‘We were keen to bring Halcrow’s employees in – to engage them in what was happening here. I think that, together with the collaborative approach, was key to the success of the project.’

Floors one to five presented a near-ideal opportunity to create a light-filled, highly flexible workspace. After the structure was stripped down to its basic shell and core, the resulting raw spaces ironically resembled those of J Lyons’ original open plan layout. The new design’s minimal partitioning and unobstructed lines of sight largely preserve their airy, flowing character of the space. ‘EMI had created a very cellular space, while we have opted for an entirely open space, right up to chief executive level, so we created a completely different environment to suit our business,’ Lizzie explains.

Especially notable is a new dropped ceiling whose outer edge stops approximately 18cm short of the outer walls, ensuring that the upper 500mm of the perimeter windows are not obscured. The ‘trench’ between the ceiling and outer

walls and the substantial structural piers between windows are both painted soft grey, encouraging the eye to look through and out of the space, further emphasising its flow and volume.

Once clear of the cellular offices, floors one to five presented a near-ideal opportunity to create a flowing, light, highly flexible open workspace.

The layout of the working floors reflects a delicate balance between preserving skill-based working groups and encouraging project-based collaboration. Each working floor has identifiable areas, separated in subtle fashion by prominent ‘resource nodes’ containing copy points and meeting areas.

The scheme allows for people to work together – either within their skill group or as part of a multi-faceted project team – by simply moving within the floor or the building, rather than reconfiguring the layout around the team.

Flexibility is enhanced through the use of smart Herman Miller systems furniture and advanced telephony and communications systems.

As we walk through the space David, Anton and Mark tell us that, throughout the project, they relocated into a temporary accommodation in the car park, so that they were very much on hand, in touch and part of the Halcrow organisation.

Indeed, David believes this was crucial to the success of the project, allowing the team to really understand the complexities of Elms House, and also to understand their client, their client’s needs and really get under the skin of the project. Furthermore, this allowed the team to have a genuine hub and gave additional meeting/project space as well as mock-up space for Halcrow’s focus groups.

This, we think, says a lot about how the project team approached the challenges that were set before them.

The original Lyons way of working has, at the very least, been nodded at throughout the building. Chris tells us that the building now does a great deal for the business. This is now a shop window for Halcrow – a statement of intent. Elms House really has gone back to its roots. Classic stuff – in the true sense of the word ●

essential ingredients

Client • **Halcrow** | Design • **M Moser Associates**

Furniture • **Herman Miller, Morgan Contract Furniture, Allermuir, Dynamobel, Hitch Mylius, Connection, Kusch + Co, Ligne Roset, HB Group, Orangebox, Andy Thornton, James Burleigh, Maine, Modus**

Lighting • **Intalite, Deltalight, Marlow Integrated Designs (MID Lighting), Clear Vision, Louis Poulsen, Thorn Lighting, Moooi**

Flooring • **Milliken, Porcelanosa**