





# king of the castle

When is an office more than an office? When it's an extension of a brand. Castleoak has achieved this at its new 24,000 sq ft headquarters in Cardiff, creating a stimulating working environment with a unique personality.

Castleoak is the UK market leader in designing and building care homes. The firm has a £60 million turnover and is regularly listed among the best UK companies to work for. But, with expansion and an innovative management style, it had outgrown its offices and was looking for a bigger, more efficient space.

Castleoak Chief Executive Melville Knight explains: 'We had a 6,000 sq ft two-storey building in Cardiff Gate in which we'd inherited the fit-out and the furniture, but we were bursting at the seams.

'It was also an unhealthy environment in terms of business productivity. Feedback from staff surveys on the environment we were working in was negative. Neither did it work for us culturally as a business. With one team in this place and another team in that, there were barriers between departments.

'Cardiff Gate, just a few minutes drive from the M4, was a good location. We had no need to be in the city centre but with most of our ▶▶▶▶▶



work in England and half the staff travelling off-site, the M4 connection was important.

‘So we found something suitable being built nearby on a brownfield site. We met the developer and were able to have some influence on the specifications. Then we engaged Richard Powell and Partners to provide the office fit-out for us.’

A team was established to manage the internal design and logistics of migrating to the new premises, as Melville can further expand upon. ‘There was an internal project manager, a mechanical and electrical designer, an IT manager, a graduate trainee looking after the numbers, an external project manager linking with the developer,

someone from the fit-out company and several others. The team was creating some excellent concepts but I realised there was something missing.

‘The interior design, the flow around the offices, the colours and aesthetics – I knew the importance of the working environment in creativity and the need to stimulate the right side of the brain. Ultimately, this was important to our productivity.’

The building – a conventional three-storey stand-alone office block from the outside – had to provide an environment that would bring the creative best out of the staff. It also needed to make a statement

about Castleoak and something to make a big impact on visitors – a real wow-factor.

Melville turned to brand communications agency Stills, with whom Castleoak had worked regularly since Chris Carpenter, the Managing Director, first developed its branding.

‘It was June or July when I got Chris involved,’ Melville recalls. ‘I wanted someone to provide coherent thinking. We’d worked with Stills for many years and I thought Chris would have a strong interest in the project and be very good at it.’

‘We met and talked and it just evolved from there. There was no written brief – I entrusted it all to him. This was quite a brave decision as it was a big investment.

‘The whole design had to be a collaborative process – everything we do as a company is. And it was slightly sensitive. Chris could have trodden on the toes of the others involved. He changed a lot of the furniture that had been suggested by the fit-out company – all the chairs he introduced were funky as well as ergonomic and very comfortable – but they established a rapport and worked very well together.

‘His interest escalated. He took on the light fittings and feature lighting, the wall graphics, the signage and designed the counters – he went way beyond the call of duty to get the detail right.’

The move into the finished building was made over Christmas in 2007. The staff, who had been kept out until then, were divided into four and taken in one group at





‘We’d gone through a big debate about open-plan or celled offices,’ says Melville. ‘We were prepared to do away with celled but the feedback from staff was that there was an expectation that directors and the Chief Executive should be in their own offices so we’ve a balance between the two and it seems to work.’

The boardroom features a bespoke 18-seat table designed by Stills. It is made from American black walnut with an illuminated glass strip down the middle that flips up to reveal powerpoints. The table has an aluminium edge and is supported by three massive legs through which services run.

Pendant ceiling lighting mirrors the lighting in the table. The wall at one end is cupboarded in matching materials while the other end is a dedicated media wall. Humanscale’s Freedom Task Chairs with headrests add a presence to the room.

Outside, the simple signage is deliberately low key with Castleoak’s oak leaf illuminated at night. ‘Chris took the corporate identity and transmitted it into the final look and feel of the building,’ explains Melville. ‘Yet our purpose and value statements are the only corporate element in the building. People know who they are working for – they don’t need the company branding constantly in their faces. We’re giving them the right to be themselves – it’s connected with this concept of inspiration.’

‘What Chris has done is validate my thinking and create an exciting environment that really helps communicate who we are as a business.’ ●

►►►► time. They had a cup of coffee in the reception, were taken to a meeting room for a presentation and given a guided tour of the facilities. Their reaction, we are assured, was fantastic.

Castleoak’s logo – an oak leaf split down the middle into blue and green – is hardly to be seen but a sub-palette derived from these colours provides the muted backdrop from which big slabs of colour punch out. These take the form of larger than life images of inspirational people, accompanied by short quotations – eventually lyrics from pop songs were found to work best. So Martin Luther King appears to utter ‘You may say I’m a dreamer’ and JK Rowling appears to sing ‘All the roads we have to walk are winding’. Roger Bannister, Hillary and Tensing and Ellen McArthur each have their say and Einstein greets you with the engaging ‘Don’t worry, be happy’.

The bespoke granite reception desk overhangs backlit glass panels with Komac black leather sofas for visitors. The reception flows seamlessly into a relaxed meeting space where a coffee and food bar with Allermuir chairs is used by staff for breaks and meetings, creating a warm buzz around the entrance throughout the day.

‘I love the reception,’ Melville enthuses. ‘Bringing visitors into a dining area works really well – it’s like inviting someone into your home. We sometimes leave meetings in the boardroom to have a buffet there. It gets us out and enables us to chat.’

Lighting is fitted into the ceiling grid to give ambient low light with directional spotlights illuminating the wall graphics. LEDs provide a sense of visual direction and the flow is helped by S-shaped aluminium mesh screens which define meeting areas in the open-plan space.

## essential ingredients

Client:	• Castleoak
Design & Planning:	• Stills Design <a href="http://www.stillsdesign.com">www.stillsdesign.com</a>
Systems Furniture:	• Senator <a href="http://www.senator.co.uk">www.senator.co.uk</a>
Carpets:	• JHS Carpets <a href="http://www.jhscarpets.com">www.jhscarpets.com</a>
Boardroom Seating:	• Humanscale <a href="http://www.humanscale.com">www.humanscale.com</a>
Refectory Seating:	• Allermuir <a href="http://www.allermuir.com">www.allermuir.com</a>
Visitor Sofas:	• Komac <a href="http://www.komac.co.uk">www.komac.co.uk</a>
Partitioning:	• Komfort <a href="http://www.komfort.com">www.komfort.com</a>