





# devon cream

Now this is the kind of story that does the heart good in these days of economic misery. To précis the forthcoming 1,500 words, this is the tale of a leading public relations firm – Cohn & Wolfe – and its fantastic new office space, developed by a leading design practice – MoreySmith.

So, all you eternal pessimists out there, the design world has not come to a sudden halt and, furthermore, PR executives are not all being frogmarched to the employment agencies.

The leading PR agency in question has been described as ‘the agency for the new communications landscape’, has been recognised as such with a host of major awards and boasts some 50 offices across the planet’s key markets. This is clearly a forward-thinking organisation, who has taken that attitude and mindset into the design of its new London headquarters.

Situated on the leafy Tavistock Square, just a couple of minutes’ stroll from Euston, the new Cohn & Wolfe home certainly starts as we hope it will carry on, with not only an ▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶



‘They started looking at The Qube as well, funnily enough – they were thinking of taking one of the floors in there – but in the end they came over to Lynton House.’

Lynton House is a multi-tenanted 1930’s building that has recently been reworked to Cat A standards. Cohn & Wolfe’s floors have a beautiful outlook over the green treetops of the square. ‘The brief to us was that they wanted a flexible open plan workplace with about three offices for key people and for the rest to be entirely open on bench style desks – and they wanted to go very contemporary and very clean.’

‘The old office was a real mixture of cellular and open, even the open plan spaces were broken up, which meant teams couldn’t all be grouped together. They did have a central space which formed a team/cafe area, but it was a far cry from somewhere they could bring clients into. What they wanted was to be able to host parties, to put on events and to be able to have big client presentations in a space which is professional, exciting and creative.’

Flexibility clearly was the key here; Jennifer and the team needed to develop a scheme that would work for the agency’s corporate clients, appeal to the gregarious side of the business and also work for the Cohn & Wolfe staff – be it for in-house get-togethers post-working day or for daytime meetings and team working.

A tall order then? ‘To be honest this is the sort of challenge we’ve had many times before, but often on a slightly larger scale’ Jennifer tells us. ‘This time we created a perfectly compact central hub that included reception, waiting area, the meeting rooms, ▶▶▶▶▶

▶▶▶▶▶impressive ground floor shared reception facility, but also an accompanying Starbucks coffee house, both part of the newly refurbished basebuild.

It is in this latter modern-day meeting point that we catch up with MoreySmith’s Jennifer Hamilton, who is happy to buy us a frothy number and tell us about the background behind the project. ‘This was a really interesting one for us because we were doing this around the same time as we were working with Vizeum, and we’ve always said we should be working with more advertising and PR companies, but for some reason we still haven’t done many. Perhaps some think we aren’t quite whacky enough maybe – we don’t do the swings and the grass sofas and things like that! But

we prefer to design schemes with more longevity and less gimmicks...then suddenly within a couple of months we were doing Vizeum at The Qube and we were doing Cohn & Wolfe here. It was brilliant because they were also so different; Vizeum wanted something cool and relaxed with an industrial edge; whereas Cohn & Wolfe wanted something fresh, elegant and glamorous, to suit their creative staff and client base!

‘They were previously based in Orange Street, behind the National Portrait Gallery. It was a dated and inflexible office in many ways, but they were happy there because they had a great office culture – team drinks on Fridays, lots of cross team communication and cake – much like us!



## case study



▶▶▶ the social space and the flexible team meeting/presentation room all within the one area.

‘It works brilliantly well and is a great use of space. There are about 180 staff in the office and they wanted to be very efficient with the space. Every time I come here they are using it exactly as it’s meant to be used – which doesn’t always happen. They really get it. They have always worked in this way, but they just didn’t have the right space for them before.’

We move on to talk about the scheme, the palette and the finishes. We noticed the female dominance of the office and we wonder if this played a major role in the look and feel of Tavistock Square. ‘What was great here was that they did want a bit of a feminine feel to the space. The CEO really wanted this to feel like it was their own space; she wanted to maintain their own identity, slightly separate from the global corporation. We did have to run a few of

the branding elements past the global branding teams, but generally they were after a separate UK headquarters feel.’

Cohn & Wolfe now occupies the 4th and 5th floors of the building, with each floorplate split into two wings. ‘One of the key things was to ensure that the two wings on each of the floors are linked,’ Jennifer explains, ‘new steel framed glass doors to the lift lobbies add that connection, with Cohn & Wolfe branding completing the first impression. We haven’t gone mad with the branding throughout – we’ve used it in strong but subtle ways in the key areas and filtered this through the office.’

‘They love the clean minimalism of the main hub, and they maintain it really well. Every time I come here it looks immaculate. You can see just how flexible the space is for them; it can be a bar, they can use it for brainstorming, for stand-up meetings... the large space at the back is where they sit and hold their major team

meetings, and this breaks apart so they can do whatever they want with it. We have designed in a large projection screen that drops down from a concealed slot in the feature ceiling and allows them to have presentations for up to 130 people.’

The hub features an intriguing mix of domestic styling and contemporary gadgetry, with brilliant pinks and eggshell blue, fantastic ‘softening’ teardrop light fittings, even larger scale beanbags and fantastic wallpaper prints mixing with white screen writing walls and advanced AV facilities. This may be feminine, but girly it ain’t – despite the impressive tea and coffee point holding more flavours of tea than we thought existed.

Clever design, such as the central ceiling rafts and large scale white lacquer display walls actually conceal the complicated mechanics inherent in what was quite a tricky building to work with.

In the meeting suite, the subtle corporate branding fuses with the aforementioned wallpaper and classic, furniture styles. The rooms contain a brilliant diverse mix of seating and subtle colour schemes, and are named appropriately ‘The Living Room’, ‘The Engine Room’ and so forth. The sofas even have those most non-masculine of additions, cushions.

Moving through to the second wing of the 4th floor, we get our first glimpse of the large open floorplates the agency’s previous habitat simply couldn’t provide. There is plenty of space for cool breakout areas, all-important open shelving and storage for the masses of media the staff require and of course crisp white bench desking systems courtesy of Vitra. It’s refreshing to note there is no clean desk policy here – and this is far from the first refreshing thing we have seen here at Cohn & Wolfe’s new home. Like we said, does the heart good ●

## essential ingredients

Client:	• Cohn & Wolfe
Design:	• Moreysmith 020 7089 1470
Systems Furniture:	• Vitra 020 7566 7990
Carpets:	• InterfaceFLOR 08705 304030
Task Seating:	• Orangebox 020 7837 9922
Shelving units:	• Habitat <a href="http://www.habitat.co.uk">www.habitat.co.uk</a>