

True Faith

That London. Those of you who, like us, were avid viewers of Stewart Lee's Comedy Vehicle will be all too aware of the phrase. That London. We love saying it - especially on our jaunts up, down and around the country.

Slightly ironic then that, having recently visited Tyne and Wear, that we are now back in the Capital, visiting a Newcastle based company, and walking around an interior designed by a Newcastle based firm.

Simon Grundy Commercial Interior Design has designed the London office for financial services company True Potential. The fact that both Simon Grundy and True Potential are headquartered several hundred miles up the A1 is however neither here nor there - as Simon Grundy can explain. 'We're working nationally for a company that's based in the North East - I don't want to sound parochial about it. I don't want it to sound like we've just come down to London...'

Within minutes of chatting with Simon and True Potential Senior Partner Daniel Harrison, we can see how the partnership between the two works. This isn't about the plucky outsiders heading to where the streets may be paved with gold. This is instead about trust, collaboration and vision. Let's face it, if a New York based bank chose a New York design firm for its London HQ, no-one would bat an eyelid. 'It's about being there,' Simon reveals. 'The main thing is that this is a new office for True Potential. The majority of the day-to-day business co-ordination at that point was going on in the North.'

'We spent a lot of valid time, a lot of hard hours locked in a room in Newcastle,' Daniel recalls. 'We're a national company and we're a big believer in finding the right people - it's not about the location. We had a great relationship working with Simon in the past and it doesn't matter where he's based - as long as we know he can get the job done.'

True Potential provides support services and a Wealth Platform for independent financial advisers, including a software system for IFAs and an integrated computer interface for use with clients, streamlining their whole business operation. The company was established in 2007, has a turnover of £202m and, as we've said, is headquartered in Newcastle upon Tyne. Over 780 IFA firms use True Potential with around 4,200 individual IFAs.

The 3,500 sq ft office is just a stone's throw from Victoria Station in a Grade II listed building built in the early 1800s. The building had been split into suites on each floor and fitted out to a basic specification. The True Potential space on the ground floor comprises a suite of six high quality meeting rooms, conference facilities and an open plan office.

'The reason we are here today is that we've just changed business direction,' Daniel explains. 'The independent financial advice sector is quite old fashioned. It's not

Photography by Kristen McCluskie
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Case Study





►►►► unusual to go into the majority of firms in this sector and find rows of filing cabinets, lots of paper and fax machines – people still send faxes! We’ve always done things differently and we’re proud to be different – but not different for different’s sake. We believe that proper financial planning should be professional, it should be clean and it should be proud. Financial planners used to get a bad reputation for being old fashioned, underhand and even dishonest.

‘When we looked to move to London we really needed a space that would epitomise the brand and would have the potential to create something quite special and unique for us.’

‘Simple, effective, unique’ is the strap-line we’ve used on the glass here – and something we used on the first office – that hasn’t changed,’ Simon takes over. ‘This is a set of core values that we made sure runs throughout everything here. What we also wanted to do was to capture the current market – we did the first office three or four years ago now and things have already changed. The guys here all use iPads, and there was an opportunity here to

reflect that. You come in and it looks a little like a boutique hotel, it’s high end and it all ties in with the Grade II listed façade – but it’s also got the technology built in. It’s all wireless, it’s got projectors that drop down for presentations – it’s all there. That’s why



we went for the Vitra Joyn furniture – which is almost a celebration of modern technology.’

Daniel reveals that the company first looked at the top floor of the building, but realised that it was slightly too small for True Potential’s requirements. The ground

floor, however, despite a ‘pretty standard’ CAT A fit-out, would fit the bill. ‘The space on the top floor was pretty special,’ Simon admits, ‘as is the space as you come into reception. We didn’t want to come in from this great shared reception area into a space

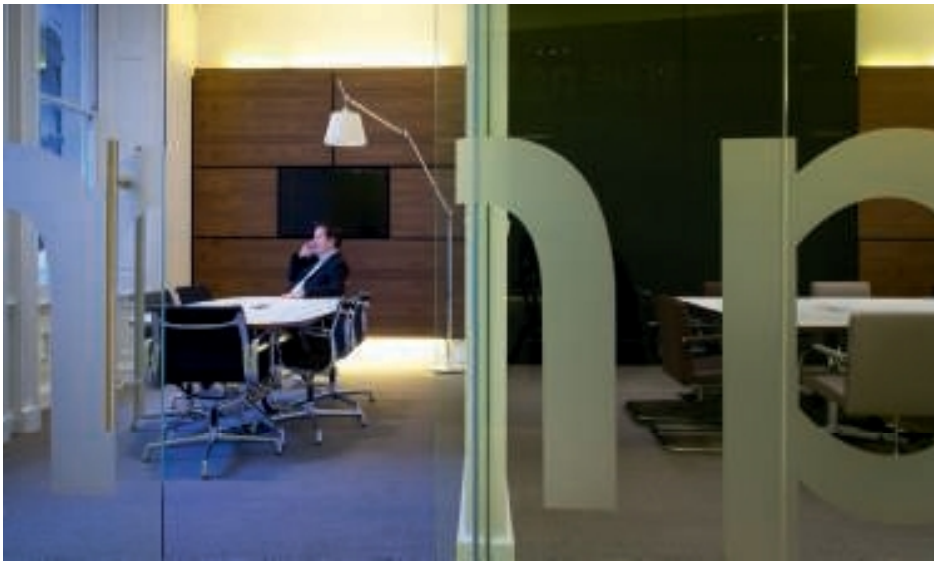
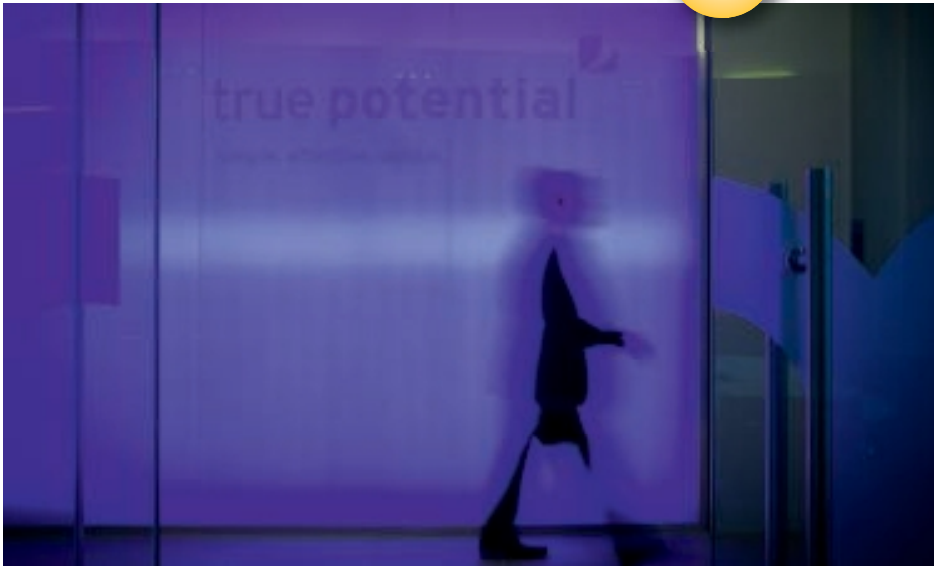
that drops you down. There was a need to take what had been developed as a reception area and develop and offer even more when you walked into this space. We stripped it back a little first, brought some of the original features back in – and then developed something that was more True Potential and not True Potential landing in a standard office. These guys wanted to show that they mean business – they wanted to show a sense of permanence.

Furthermore, True Potential’s clients are people who are exposed to high quality

interiors, so we needed to be up there with them.

‘We’ve got a real mix of modern and classic Vitra products throughout the meeting rooms – which hopefully help to give that boutique hotel approach to meetings and presentations. There really are►►►►

Case Study



they can now drop in to here – and they have full use of a high quality space with leading technology to meet and advise their clients.’

The guys tell us that they are delighted with the response from the advisers to the space – who, most encouragingly, are responding by making full use of both the flexible hot desking facility and the meeting facilities.

As we walk through the meeting suite Simon points out how the front window of the space looks directly out towards Victoria Station. To take full, erm, potential of this, Simon and the team have installed a bold and brilliant light wall (in True Potential purple) that beams out towards the busy station. Now that’s one very clever way to get a bit of presence without upsetting a Grade listed façade.

‘We wanted something to compete with the best and communicate the ethos of the business,’ Daniel enthuses. ‘Simon’s design concept hit the mark and the completed project has massively over-delivered on our expectations by delivering a working environment of the highest quality that we are proud to use with our clients. This is a real clean sweep for us – it hits all the right notes.’

‘True Potential understands the power of good design to create a business environment where people feel confident and relaxed,’ Simon concludes. ‘They have very definite ideas about the feel they want, but they are also happy to give you room to create something fresh.’

Potential realised ●

▶▶▶ a lot of different scenarios throughout the meeting rooms.

‘The building has a really attractive, solid exterior but the original interior fit-out had no character. We’ve used traditional materials such as stone floor in the foyer, sisal carpet and rich dark veneer wood panels with deep skirting boards and cornicing, alongside internal full height partition glazing and contemporary furniture to create a high end corporate business club environment.’

We ask Simon about the Grade II listing, and how that impacted on the scheme here

in Victoria. ‘We did have to be really careful, but nothing touches here,’ he replies. ‘We worked with Westminster Council and had to very carefully organise everything so that we didn’t touch the façade and everything is independent of that. Even when it came to the technology, we clipped panels to the walls so that nothing is fixed. There’s a bit of stud-work, but everything here can be taken out in a week. We’ve left everything intact.’

‘For the most part our business is virtual, as our tools are cloud-based,’ Daniel continues. ‘The financial advisers who work with us may have their own offices, but



essential ingredients

Client • **True Potential** | Main Contractor • **Graeme Ash** 0191 482 2714

Interior Design • **Simon Grundy Commercial Interior Design** www.simongrundy.co.uk

Seating & Furniture • **Vitra** 020 7608 6200

Audio Visual • **K2H Group** www.k2hgroup.co.uk

Flooring • **Desso** 020 7324 5500

Lighting • **Artemide** 020 7291 3853