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HIMACS gives Cologne Design Office a contemporary finish with a natural look P13





new home for *shoosmiths*

Law firm Shoosmiths has opened the doors to its new home in the heart of Birmingham's business district at 103 Colmore Row, 20 years after the firm first established a presence in the city...

Mayor of the West Midlands, Andy Street, and more than 140 stakeholders attended Shoosmiths' opening in the city's highest office space, to celebrate the firm's new home, which has reimagined old ways of working and ensures accessibility and inclusion are at its heart.

Office Principles North worked with Shoosmiths' office heads Alex Bishop and Beth McArdle to transform the 32,900ft² of BREEAM 'Excellent' Grade A space into the ideal, hybrid 'workplace destination' for more than 350 Shoosmiths' colleagues and clients across its 11th, 12th and 20th floors.

Storytelling, purpose and meaning are at the heart of the design concept. The space pays homage to the region's rich history and incorporates details that represent Birmingham's position as a city of a thousand trades, having more miles of canal than Venice, the most parks in Europe, and being a global centre for jewellery manufacture.

The floors are divided to offer a range of workspace options across The Retreat (11th Floor) – a zone for concentrated work; The Co-Lab (12th Floor) a collaborative, social space; and The View (20th Floor) a cutting-edge client suite with unparalleled views of the city.

Office Principles North's hospitality-led design offers flexible client hosting areas and event spaces including The Lounge, The Gallery, 'Spaghetti Function' and The Raging Bull Bar.

The 11th and 12th floors are also seamlessly connected by a grand staircase and the entire space is tied together with the symbolic Shoosmiths ribbon sculpture, which runs through to the 20th floor. At the heart of the design concept is agility, collaboration and a drive to innovate – offering a choice of work settings to inspire creativity, connections and togetherness.

Supporting Shoosmiths' ambition to be carbon net zero by 2025, sustainability is a key feature of the design. Planting features prominently across the space, with sunset and sunrise gardens on the uppermost floors that take inspiration from the Botanical Gardens and offer panoramic views of Birmingham's skyline.

The new workspace incorporates a host of innovative features, many of which support the diversity, inclusion and wellbeing of the Shoosmiths' people and are designed to be visible and non-visible disability friendly. These include a wellbeing room, a multi-faith contemplation pod and washing facilities, a platform lift between floors to provide disabled access, braille signage for those with impaired vision, sit and stand desks, dressing rooms and a mindful colour palette.

Design overview

This is an extraordinarily light, open and creative workspace that tells a story, not only about Shoosmiths, but its people, clients and the city of Birmingham.

It delivers a luxurious, hospitality-style experience that's blended and organic, and refuses to conform to traditional demarcations between office and breakout space – Shoosmiths employees are empowered to choose how and where to work and socialise.



Even the shape of its meeting rooms - none of which are square - are free from convention. The office is based on three floors. All three floors are designated for different uses:

Level 20 - social/meeting suite, housing internal garden spaces inspired by Chelsea Flower Show winners.

Level 12 - collaborative, hackable space designed to bring people together, featuring meeting facilities and a social area positioned within the central floor plate for interior views.

Level 11 - open plan working with every workstation height adjustable, a quiet library space, drop-in workspaces and bespoke rooms (i.e. wellness pod, prayer room).

To ensure connectivity between the 11th and 12th floors, Office Principles North created a huge staircase of oak, glass and stainless steel with inset lighting and illuminated branding, and installed a new passenger lift.

It has enabled the creation of a fluid, open plan and collaborative layout reflective of Birmingham's world-famous waterways but it also works incredibly hard with many areas having more than one function e.g. townhall doubles as an event/training space and a daytime coffee bar is used for hosting evening entertainment.

Meeting rooms, call pods and refreshment facilities have been designed to promote inclusivity by catering for people with physical disabilities, with quiet 'snug' areas offering space for focused work - all featuring the latest acoustic properties.

Embracing neurodiversity

This project stands out due to its focus on employee wellbeing, with a design that embraces neurodiversity.

What is especially striking is the way that the space stimulates the senses, with touch, smell, sight, taste and sound all carefully catered for. A natural, sophisticated colour palette is complemented by tactile comforts, plush velvets, polished plaster, warm timbers and mood lighting. There is a combination of bespoke, handcrafted furniture to allow people to sit or stand to suit their needs.

Finishes are designed to look their best at all times i.e. coffee bars have the same crisp, solid surface which is easily cleanable/doesn't mark. Coffee bar flooring has LVT for ease of maintenance/long-life. Office Principles North also used Autex acoustic panels/tiles with Cube in partners' suites and Groove in all meeting rooms, open booths and couple pods.

Extensive planting has created a soft ambience, with air purifying plants providing natural screening, and adorning sunset/sunrise gardens on the building's uppermost floors, take inspiration from former Chelsea Flower Show winners. The effect is a space for all, where equality and diversity is celebrated.

Sustainability features

Sustainability is a key feature of the workspace, supporting Shoosmiths' ambition to be carbon net zero (scopes 1 and 2) by 2025. Project highlights include:

- 99% of project waste diverted from landfill
- More than 75% of contractors based within a three mile radius of the site
- Re-use/maintenance of existing lighting control and emergency lighting system
- Retained high percentage of existing ceiling tiles
- Materials recycled and stored for future use
- Use of BREEAM-approved products (i.e. cradle-to-cradle fabrics and flooring)
- LED lighting
- All acoustics made of PET recycled bottles

As 103 Colmore Row is a new build, the landlord had only recently completed a CAT A fit out of the building. Office Principles North adapted its design to ensure that as many existing ceiling tiles could be retained as possible - 40% were retained on the 20th floor, 70% on the 12th and 60% on the 11th.

An agreement was secured with the building management firm on site which has seen more than 2,000 ceiling tiles stored on a vacant floor. They will be offered to future tenants for fit out and used for damage replacement elsewhere in the building.

In instances where any CAT A lighting was removed, it was replaced with Intra lighting. All of its products are made with a focus on sustainability.

The office features Forbo flooring systems; Forbo was the first flooring manufacturer to publish a complete Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) report verified by CML in 2000. Phthalate free, the chosen floor tiles are made with recycled raw material, and produced by using green energy in efficient manufacturing environments that can boast 100% recycling capability.

Existing furniture was reused wherever possible and Office Principles North partnered with a furniture supplier who blanket wrapped all new furniture so there was no waste on site from boxes or plastic.

Maintaining existing M&E systems posed a considerable challenge as it necessitated that Office Principles North formed an exclusive relationship with the incumbent supplier. The approach delivered the considerable environmental benefit of using what was already in place within a highly sustainable building, rather than removing and installing a separate system.

