

Digesting Change

Text
Rachael Bernstone
Photography
Brett Boardman



Moving from its iconic building in Sydney's Surry Hills (see Indesign #16) to a converted warehouse in Pyrmont entailed a huge spatial and cultural shift for Readers Digest.

They issued a request for proposals from five suppliers and chose the winning team, MPA Projects and Philippa Randall Architects, based on Randall's design proposal. "The main idea was humanising the office," Randall says. "Previous to the move, everyone was compartmentalised, so we knew it would require a change in culture. We knew it would be difficult, and having won the job, we undertook a consultative and educational process with all employees." That included workshops with individual departments, at the former office, and large scale presentations to the whole company at Belvoir Street Theatre.

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Randall used a town square planning model to create new opportunities for interaction. At the entry to each floor from the central staircase or lift are the building's public spaces, defined by brightly coloured furniture for client or customer meetings. They are delineated by large banner images, reproduced from the magazine itself, that lend a Sydney lifestyle focus to the spaces. Formal meeting rooms add to this vibe, being named after local beaches. Beyond the

banners, semi-public spaces are used for internal meetings or informal gatherings, including lunch and coffee breaks.

Leading off these public spaces, the custom-designed workstations combine desk and shelving systems with modular storage units, thereby maintaining the privacy and extensive storage needs of individuals in the new community-centric environment.

On the ground level, the company's customers and passers-by can also partake in the new community atmosphere, through the installation of a café and bookstore in the reception area that fronts the street. "Most of the company's products are sold through mail order, so the bookstore and café bring people in off the street," Randall says.

Having occupied the space for a year, Readers Digest Managing Director, Paul Heath, believes Randall's design has achieved the goals he outlined at the start of the process. "Philippa and MPA created a modern environment in a very old building, while leveraging the aspects that we liked to begin with," he says. "They definitely achieved our objective in terms of having an open and airy work environment where people can bump into each other.

"Given that we had such a large building previously, it was a big change to move to open plan: even some of the meetings spaces are open plan in the new building. Consequently there was a lot of concern and scepticism from staff before the move, but they were delighted when they moved in – the new office exceeded expectations in terms of how much space everyone has, how clean it is, and how well designed

the fit-out is. It really was a pleasant surprise for everyone, and of course, it's a great location, being across the street from the Broadway shopping centre."

Best of all, he concludes, the new accommodation has had positive benefits on the way people work. "Certainly, in terms of more open communication and ease of communication, it has been terrific. We get to see a lot more people every day than we did in the previous building. It was very compartmentalised before, and now it feels like one team rather than segmented departments."

Architect Philippa Randall Architects
Project Manager MPA Group and Coyle & Partners
Builder MPA Group
PCA Steve Watson & Partners
Mechanical and Electrical Engineers VOS Group

Philippa Randall Architects
(61 2) 8354 0557, philipparandallarchitects.com.au

Worktops

Workbench panels are supplied by Vitrepanel Cladding Systems. Kitchen benchtops are European Elm with butt joint, finished in 'DGI Adeze' polyurethane coating semi gloss finish, supplied by DGI Dale Glass Industries. Vitrepanel (61 2) 4735 4122
DGI Dale Glass Industries (61 2) 9647 2911

Fabrics

General task chair seating and lounge chair seating (level 1) upholstered in Maharam 'Messenger 458640' and lounge seating upholstery in levels 2 and 3 are 'Hallingdal', from Kvadrat Maharam. Bulletin board by Forbo Floorcoverings and workstation screen fabric is 'Galaxy' from Woven Image. Kvadrat Maharam (61 2) 9212 4277
Woven Image (61 2) 9326 0433



Carpets and rugs

'Romany' carpet, colour 'Hand Trial' supplied by Tuftmaster.
Rugs are from Tretford Carpet.
Tuftmaster (61 2) 9555 2177
Tretford Carpet (61 7) 3881 1777

Finishes

Laminate finishes for workstation worktops and joinery to workplace areas are in Laminex 'Waxed Oak' natural finish. General laminate finish to all joinery positioned on timber floor finish is Laminex 'White 00' flint finish. General laminate finish to all vertical joinery for kitchens is Laminex 'Sarsen Grey 320' flint finish. Finish for splashback for kitchen areas is Formica 'Brushed Pewter', also from Laminex. Paints are 'Vivid White', 'Cherry Red', 'Pure Apple', 'Sunshine Surprise', 'Full of Life' and 'Precious Silver Pearl', all from Dulux. Polycarbonate sheeting, colour 'Platinum' is from Laserlite.
Laminex 13 21 36
Dulux 13 23 77
Laserlite (61 2) 9550 2277