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colour in the workplace

Helen Parton finds that designers are using colour to innovate in the workplace

Can colour enhance a workplace? Gensler's regional design manager Jon Tollitt thinks so. "We have been creating a variety of spaces with very different responses to colour. In break out spaces and meeting rooms, for example, colour becomes a dynamic tool." A case in point is law firm Reed Smith on the edge of London's financial centre. Here, the canteen area, also suitable for informal gatherings, is a vibrant vermilion shade, contrasting with the rest of the office's more muted palette.

Tollitt continues, "There are cultural issues with colour too. In China, the use of red is seen as lucky, whereas elsewhere it signals danger. In the Middle East, they use colour in different ways, preferring golds and more opulent finishes, which may be seen as rather 'bling' elsewhere. It's also about heritage; using colour in geometric and more dramatic patterns."

At a GP's practice in the Hague, realised by Dutch architects VASD, colour was crucial to delineating the function of a workplace. Says designer Anne van Abkoude, "It's a really warm, relaxed environment which has a calming effect on those who use it. We had a creamy shade for the walls and a lot of wooden furniture as well as accent colours such as bright blue and orange in each consulting room." The red shelving and couches, meanwhile, reference its purpose as a medical environment.

The thinking behind international advertising agency Wieden + Kennedy's London base in Brick Lane was to fire up and stimulate its young, creative employees rather than calm them down. The refurbishment and fit-out by architects Featherstone Young of what's known as



ID:SR: Newham Council



VASD: GP's surgery in the Hague



ID:SR: Newham Council

'The Cole' creates a multi-functional event area, which also functions as part of the floating space used by students of its in-house school when collaborating with the rest of the team.

This workspace includes a red, tunnel-like corridor, which is conceived as a mouth with its tongue sticking out. Elsewhere there's a yellow staircase here, a royal blue beanbag there and part of a wall painted bright green, all of which is intended to complement the industrial aesthetic of the office. Colour helps answer the brief for fun and flexibility from the shocking pink floor inside one of the garage 'lock up' private meeting spaces, to the second hand cabinet handles in the kitchen, which is also used for less formal gatherings.

Helen Beresford, head of designers ID:SR (part of Sheppard Robson), maintains that the reception of Newham Council's offices in East London is "a benchmark for public sector workspace." Colour here and in the adjacent business centre has been used to encourage 'professional dialogue' with local firms and other boroughs. It's also about reinforcing a neighbourhood concept and collaborative approach working throughout

the workspace, as well as provide a way-finding function. A timber 'ribbon' wraps up, over and around the floorplates with pink, green and orange in the 'Living Room' and 'Study Space' areas. Green also dominates the 'Park Life' areas where staff can eat and gather more informally, while purple is reserved for the larger, more formal meeting rooms.

According to storage specialists Bisley, the most popular finishes are still high gloss white preceded by silver as this part of office specification tends to operate in slower cycles, but explains Gensler's Tollitt, finally, that's not to say colour can't bring about more regular change.

Tollitt explains, "as well as creating a sense of identity and belonging, the colour of furnishings and fabric is not as fixed as other elements of the office, so you can continually refresh and develop the interior." ■

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Gensler: Reed Smith