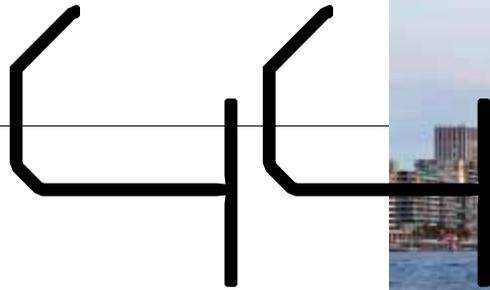


WORDS JAMES CALDER



## Leading the way IN AUSTRALIA?

The workplace, in evolutionary terms, is a recent invention. In this post-industrial age, we are only just beginning to understand its potential. As a practitioner, I have been fortunate to be involved at the innovative end of the workplace spectrum – in a field that is evolving so quickly and growing in knowledge that it makes no sense to be anywhere else.

Up until the 1990s, most of the best workplace solutions were conceived overseas. In the 1950s, the German team of management consultants, Quickborner, introduced the concept of *Bürolandschaft* (office landscaping), which paved the way for the open plan office. Shortly after this concept was brought to Australia, Austrian-born Harry Seidler set the benchmark for Australian office design in the 1960s. Newer buildings, such as Deutsche Bank Place at 126 Phillip Street, Sydney, designed by London's Foster + Partners (1997–2005), are also worthy of global comparisons.

So, it may come as a surprise that Australia is today regarded to be at the forefront of workplace innovation. It is fair to say that along with the Netherlands, Australia now has some of the most interesting workplaces in the world. Perhaps this is because we have always been quick to adopt the technologies that help us compete in our regional market, and we tend to be competitive.

We already boast a healthy crop of homegrown projects, including Lend Lease Interiors in Australia Square

by Francis-Jones Morehen Thorpe (1996), Campus MLC (1999) and NAB @ Docklands (2004) both by BVN Architecture, and Macquarie Group at One Shelly Street by Clive Wilkinson Architects and Woods Bagot (2010). And now, another wave of workplace innovation is set to inundate Australian office markets.

The ANZ building at Docklands in Melbourne, by HASSELL and Lend Lease Design, and Commonwealth Bank Place at Darling Harbour in Sydney, with fit-out by E.G.O. Group and Davenport Campbell, will continue to broadcast our workplace innovations. And the next generation of projects that are currently under construction or on the drawing boards will continue to push the envelope further. Since acquiring MLC from Lend Lease, National Australia Bank (NAB) has been consistently ahead of the curve in providing affordable yet high-quality workplaces that help drive individual and business performance.

The NAB's new building, currently under construction on a spectacular triangular site on the edge of Docklands in Melbourne, is a rarity in that it is seriously designed from the inside out. Unusually, the workplace research and strategy, interior design, and architectural design were all done by the same firm (Woods Bagot), which teamed together in a collaborative relationship driven by the tenant (NAB), the developer/owner (Cbus) and the builder (Brookfield Multiplex), to create an example of where the future workplace is headed.

Three key aspects of this workplace point to future workplace developments. First, the NAB committed to engage with its community and customers in an authentic way. Thus, the building sits above a concourse that provides community amenity, a public facility, a recreational space and a civic waiting area. Unlike the typical glass box with restrictive perimeter security, the NAB campus opens an invitation to passing foot traffic, provides space to volunteer programs and gives the Docklands community its first auditorium – all paid for and maintained by the bank.

Second, only around 25 per cent of people need their own permanent desk, leaving a considerable amount of space allocated to a diverse range of work settings. These, combined with the natural environmental variations of the building, create the opportunity for various micro-climates within the office. This encourages people to move around the building, which has been proven to facilitate knowledge exchange through chance encounters, drive collaboration through social opportunities and spur innovation through moments of serendipity. The physical space is enormously valuable in driving business transformation and embedding organisational change.

Many organisations are attempting to break down their old structures with an aim of creating new business opportunities as they move towards a customer-centric model of operation. They are creating shared platforms across previously disparate customer databases, with the aim of unlocking business value, creating new market segments and being early starters in new markets to gain market share.

A recent project in London has reported a 20 per cent contribution to profit by creating vertical circulation and providing a variety of settings. This single move has created collaborative opportunities across business units that would have never otherwise been able to see each other in a normal high-rise, central-core office tower.

In challenging the normal 22°C (give or take a degree) temperature range across the entire building, and its large energy usage, there is also a sustainability benefit. Increasing the temperature range and recognising that some parts of the building (a small percentage) will be unusable for brief portions of the day, dramatically reduces energy costs, supports mobility, and creates a more natural environment for people.

Finally, the transition to working in the information age is accelerating, with sequential processes and routine giving way to parallel processing and irregularity. The ability to manage business operations in 'real time' is now on the wish list of business leaders.

The new NAB building is designed around flexible project-team space, where projects are easily formed and disbanded, and information placed in team hubs for easy communication. As a result, it will be possible to walk around the building and get a far greater understanding than ever before of what people are actually doing.

This ability to work in real time is the next workplace evolution. We are starting to see the integration of real estate, technology and human resource disciplines in a way that will create significant business value. Perhaps most excitingly, we are also starting to create invigorating places for our people to come to, where the technology is at least as good as what they use at home.

This final evolution of the information age workplace is starting to look more like a management discipline, and it will become even more useful to the success of businesses around the world.

*James Calder is a leader in workplace strategy and design. He recently launched consultancy firm Calder Consultants, and is the Indesign Luminary for this issue.*