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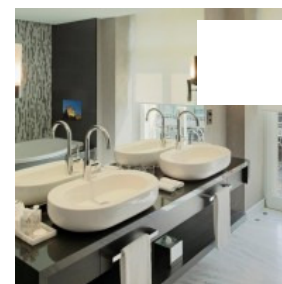
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## Accountable design

JENNY EAGLE



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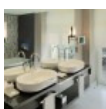
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Pricewaterhouse Coopers, now known as 'PwC', has moved into a new headquarters in Frankfurt where the monolithic architectural structure of Tower 185, the country's fourth tallest building, belies the lithe organic style of the interiors.

Instead of following the conventional route and working with an office designer, PwC awarded the contract to JOI-Design, a European-based interior design practice known mostly for its hospitality projects.

The financial consultancy was looking for a design that would differentiate the business, give it a modern edge and reflect its corporate ideology of being a forward-thinking partnership.

The design brief stipulated that the scheme needed to convey an element of clever sophistication.

At the same time, the firm wanted to break away from the corporate image traditionally associated with financial organisations and to bring instead a fluid, imaginative approach to the interior spaces that would reinforce the company's position as a progressive consultancy.

Since hotel designers are accustomed to making big statements within the constraints of commercial practicalities, PwC recognised the potential for JOI-Design to make them stand out from the crowd.

"The brief given to us was actually rather vague; however PwC's

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intention was for its German headquarters to have an ‘intelligent’ style that would linger in the memory of its visitors,” said Peter Joehnk, founder and co-managing director, JOI-Design.

“Since the services PwC provides as accountants and auditors have traditionally been seen as conservative, it did not want a building that was brimming with cutting-edge design. PwC’s point-of-view was that its clients would be looking for a modern yet distinguished style that would encourage trust in the company.

But, on the other hand, PwC is definitely a young and forward-thinking consultancy, one which certainly belongs in a “state-of-the-art” offices,” added Joehnk.

Work has now been completed in the lower wings of the building, which features a horseshoe shaped courtyard and flanks the 55-storey tower on either side. This first phase included a reception lobby, conference spaces, a small public café counter and a private cafeteria for the company’s employees.

The colossal style of the building’s architecture is characterised by clean geometric shapes and straight lines. To balance its imposing masculinity, JOI-Design introduced graceful curves and playful organic shapes into the interiors that makes a personalised statement and reflects PwC’s corporate culture. The result is a mixture of form and function.

“There were many challenges in realising the reception desk/bar as it has no straight lines. Everything is curved and three-dimensionally formed. Our CAD drawings were completely different from any we’d previously created for our furniture designs. These CADs took 20 times longer to draw than those for a “normal” reception desk/bar,” added Joehnk.

“The next “mission impossible” was to get it built. We sent the drawings out to tender and it became apparent that all the manufacturers calculated a fear-based risk factor into their prices.

“But finally we found a specialist in Austria who could create it out of glass fibres rather than the Corian or LG HI-MACS proposed by others – and for about 15% of the cost as well.

“Since we weren’t allowed to drill into the load-bearing concrete columns, which help support the floors above, devising a solution for stabilising the desk’s structure, especially the web-like overhang that projects above the counters, was a difficult issue. In the end, this was resolved by incorporating an elaborate metal skeleton within the glass framework.”

The focal point of the entrance lobby is an über-hip, UFO-like “island” which functions on one side as a reception desk and then doubles on the other side as a café/bar for social events.

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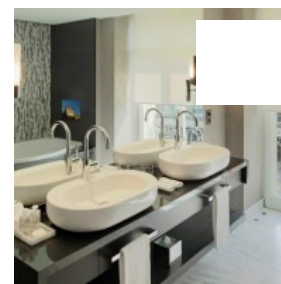
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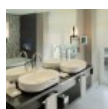


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Made from polished glass fibres, the dynamic, glossy white structure has been moulded into a lacy “web” symbolising a neural network and emphasising PwC’s creativity as a “think-tank” of consultants. Sleek white leather barstools line the café side of the desk.

Within the centre panel, colour-shifting LED lights can be adjusted so that the effect can be more subdued throughout the work day and pumped up to a more vibrant radiance during a reception in the evening. The sculptural design sweeps around one of the building’s central support columns.

“As we brainstormed with PwC to refine the design direction it wanted to follow, we created quite a few different versions of reception desks until at last lightning struck and we came up with the idea of the “think tank”, as symbolised by the neural network,” said Joehnk.

“The result is that the project has an exceptionally designed, classically modern architectonic shell and then inside this “UFO” is the first point of contact for every visitor.

We designed all the other interior elements to be contemporary yet also remain “neutral”, which in the end enhanced the vibrant visibility of the reception desk even more.

“To further enhance its stature as a focal point in the building’s design, PwC decided it would like to add a bar on one side of the

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reception desk – to be used not only for coffee breaks, but also for evening social events.

“I had thought that this sculpture would polarise people to either love or hate it, but it didn't. The only one who has had a problem with the reception/bar counter was the architect, who felt that this “UFO” did not fit into his building – but then that was exactly the intention of our design.” One level up, a small café overlooks the ground floor atrium.

Frosted glass cladding on the exterior of the bar has been backlit with green coloured LED lights to cast an ethereal glow with even levels of luminosity. Contemporary white leather stools line the bar and are used at adjacent tables. Scatter tables and white leather club chairs provide nooks for private meetings and conversations.

The décor of the employee cafeteria has been designed with references to nature to encourage a relaxed atmosphere. Walnut parquet flooring and oak wall panels provide a grounding touch, and a feature wall composed of glass panels with cool grey silhouettes of trees has been backlit with alternating green and orange accent lights.

For employees who only have time to grab a quick bite, JOI-Design has added a “fast lane” to the space plan, with bar-height tables and stools and curved shelving dividers. The predominance of white colour gives a crisp and clean feeling.

In the conference areas, each meeting room is equipped with “SB Points” – self-service bars, which contain a small refrigerator, tableware and cutlery. In a thought to detail, employees don't need to fumble in cupboards looking for items because the silver symbols on the cabinets designate what is held inside.

PwC asked JOI-Design to create “quiet rooms” within the conference spaces for consultants who want to make a private phone call or those who want to carry out sensitive research.

Since the need for privacy was key, these workspaces were also sound-insulated for employees. Each room's footprint is quite small, so extra care was taken to ensure proper ventilation.

The frosted glass doors have a clear “window” so that the users do not feel claustrophobic and can see what's going on outside.

JOI-Design's plan for the second phase of the project is currently being constructed in the highest levels of the tower and involves offices for the senior management, a “sky bar” and spaces for special events.

“We were first contacted about the project around two years ago; the second phase, which is the design of the spaces for PwC's board and prominent clients in two of the building's upper levels, might require another six months to finalise the last details,” said Joehnk.

JOI-Design recently completed a maritime theme for the the newly opened Steigenberger Grand hotel and Spa in Heringsdorf, a seaside town on the Isle of Usedom, Germany.

**JOI-DESIGN**

JOI-Design was founded in Hamburg in 1984 by Peter Joehnk. Known for its hospitality design projects include: Hilton, Hilton Garden Inn plus public dining and meeting areas, The Squaire

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