

THE BLEISURE PRINCIPLE

Above The clean workspace provides somewhere young entrepreneurs can develop their ideas and keep costs at a minimum

Bleisure describes the blurring of business and leisure. In the 1980s, business was about competitive advantage and using left-brain characteristics. In the 1990s, it was about knowledge economics and using the right side of our brain. But now it is about firing up both sides of the brain and merging left (work) with play and creativity (right)

Nextdoor project

Designers Studioquint
and Jos Roodbol

Client Centre for Amsterdam
Schools of Entrepreneurship
(CASE)

Cost £40,000

Start date September 2009

Completion September 2009

Floor space 275sq m



From socialising with workmates of an evening in the pub to the blinking of a BlackBerry on a bedside table, the boundaries between work and play have undoubtedly become blurred in recent years

In terms of travel, there has been a marked trend in business people extending their hotel stays to enjoy a few days away with their partner, and in workplace design too, the term “bleisure” coined by trends research body the Future Laboratory, is set to become one of the big buzzwords for 2010 and beyond.

We’ve already seen this in Maurice Mentjens’ PostPanic project (onoffice, March 2010) and now a student workspace, also in Amsterdam, is further reflecting this change in attitudes to working life.

Ten fixed work units and 40 flexible work areas, each one suitable for one or two people, are part of the second phase of the Nextdoor project, designed by Studioquint and Jos Roodbol for their client, the Centre for Amsterdam Schools of Entrepreneurship (CASE). An advisor at the university called them up to see if they’d like to come on board. “There was no competition. We were lucky,” says Roodbol. The idea behind the workspace is to provide somewhere young entrepreneurs can develop their own corporate identity, business concept and marketing strategy without the constraints of high rents and other substantial upfront business costs, or the isolation of being on their own.

“The client wanted it to be something new, where students can start their businesses,” says Jos Roodbol. “It’s organised for young

people who could not afford normal office space. For such a place, they wanted something special; something attractive.”

The budget here was extremely tight, and this is reflected in the specification. “We had to do something very cheap and the cheapest way to build is to use these standard door elements, which is where the name of the project, Nextdoor, comes from. We ordered a lot of them as they are a practical choice and offer a good deal of stability and are extremely lightweight as well. It’s just a normal door, which we used in a different way, in order to respond to the needs of the building.”

Keeping costs down further, the plasterboard ceiling was removed but the structure was kept intact, exposing the building’s

structure including the wiring and the air vents.

Each unit is essentially a white cube, with the addition of black plywood for storage. "The black and white of the units projects a strong image while the yellow of the chairs adds a sort of dynamism between the units."

There are three different types of cube design and they are arranged in a linear fashion. "Because of the repetitive nature of the design, they create a kind of order, so actually it is as if they are one element," explains Roodbol. On the outside of the cubes at least, the designers didn't want to give the students too much choice in terms of how they looked. Too much customisation would have ruined the aesthetic they maintain. With its minimal colour palette, strict black lines and rectangular shapes, the workspace is reminiscent in some ways of a Mondrian painting.

Given the building's industrial past – in a former life it was where newspapers used to be printed – and the symmetry of the arrangement of the desks now, one could also argue it's like a 21st century creative factory.

The students come from a handful of different universities across the Dutch capital. "The only criteria that was asked of them, was that they wanted to become an independent company," says Roodbol, "There are all sorts of students who want to do something for themselves, from engineering students working on lighting projects to business students and industrial design students."

This chimes nicely with the bleisure principle, where in the workplace, work is now not seen as something you do for the money to buy leisure, but something you do as a hobby, or in this case something you studied and developed a passion for, which becomes something you do for work.

This trend is encouraging young professionals to become more flexible in the way they work and the world of office design has to work hard to keep up with their nomadic nature.

"With its strict black lines and rectangular shapes, the workspace is reminiscent of a Mondrian painting"



Left A typical unit, in the shape of a white cube, with the addition of black plywood for storage. The yellow of the chairs adds a splash of colour for inspiration

Below The architects' sketch for the project's floorplan

"Nobody knew what was going to happen, certainly the client didn't know what to expect," Roodbol says. "When the students are successful with their businesses, they will then have to move out. This is just the beginning and therefore what is interesting is how these small businesses will develop and grow."

Roodbol and Studioquint work out of the same location, along with a number of other creatives such as graphic designers and photographers. "We each have our own offices and sometimes we work together. There was no separation of tasks – there was just one team."

One can easily see how this spirit of collaboration can be echoed in their project here. Maybe we'll see those engineers getting together with the industrial designers or the business students. It's definitely a more progressive learning environment than simply sitting in a lecture hall and hopefully educational establishments in other countries will take note.

CASE only leases the space, but even this has been turned into a positive. "The building may be redeveloped in the future. It is only temporary. Because of this, you don't need to invest a lot in the building."

This student entrepreneur workspace is located in Wibautstraat, in the east of Amsterdam, an area fast becoming the city's answer to Berlin's Neukoeln or London's Hackney Wick: a Mecca for young artistic types, who want to work together but also socialise together at the same time. "There is a good atmosphere there. Nearby, there are restaurants and clubs: it is a good place to be. There are lots of creative people in other parts of the building."

This project is just the beginning, says Roodbol finally. "When this is successful, the university may be interested in continuing it on an even bigger scale." ■



