

THE FUTURE DESIGN ISSUE

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242

# designer

## TIME FOR A RESET

Why now could be the start of a brave new world for both the home and workplace

## SIR TERENCE CONRAN

The British design visionary who set the lifestyle agenda

## IN THE RUNNING

The 2020 Designer Awards shortlists revealed

INSPIRING  
PROJECT  
CREATIVITY

# Redesigning the Office for a Post-Covid World

*Designer* asked a round table of experts from designers, architects and engineers through to flexible workspace operators for their views on how the workplace will look in a post Covid-19 world

According to Leesman, a consultancy which specialises in gathering data about workplace effectiveness, 81% of respondents in one of its latest surveys believed that their home environment enables them to be productive while a slightly higher proportion indicated they have all the information they needed for the work they do at home. So clearly there's some work to do in persuading people to return to the office and at the time of writing, the government's rallying cry for a wholesale shift from homeworking just hasn't happened.

Design can play its part in all of this of course as our panel expand upon: from the technology that enables staff to feel reassured and safe as they enter office buildings to the visible design features such as space planning, materials and colours to those they can't such as air circulation. Homeworking for a lot of people is clearly here to stay and so it was also interesting to ask the panel to consider how the fundamental design principles from a domestic set-up can influence workplace design in the short and longer term, as well as what people gain from being at a desk or a break-out space instead of their kitchen table.



**ADRIAN GRAY**  
Group Director  
with engineers  
HDR | Hurley  
Palmer Flatt

There isn't a magic bullet but certainly among the things

that can be done to mitigate the risk of Covid-19 is to look at ventilation. Ventilation with fresh air is good as it reduces the potential concentration of the virus and therefore lowers the risk of picking up an infection. For this reason, it is advantageous to get as much fresh air into the space as possible, maximising the performance of mechanical systems and extending the hours of operation to purge the space. I believe that people really feel safer in a building when they themselves are able to open a window and I see 'mixed mode' buildings with ventilation that can be controlled by occupants becoming more common.

Touchless technology can mean that you can enter a building, enter the lift and arrive at the floor you require without having to push a button. The same goes for toilets. Whether we like to talk about it or not, Covid-19 can also be contracted from faecal to oral transmission. There are ways you can enter the bathroom and lock the toilet door behind you without touching it, self-opening and self-closing toilets as well as taps with sensors that we're familiar with. As far as selection of materials goes, research shows that the virus dies very quickly when it comes into contact with copper, that is currently

Words: Helen Parton

what the science is telling us. So copper or copper/nickel might be materials that would be beneficial to include on doorknobs, taps, handrails, toilet flushes as the virus dies in a very short space of time on them.

There are some very encouraging other emerging technologies, such as UVC lighting which can be used to clean spaces or inside ductwork to clean the air. You need to take care though as UVC light is very dangerous if you come in direct contact with it.

Something else I see an interest developing in is bipolar ionisation. Historically, this has been used to clean the air in medical and food production applications. Laboratory tests have shown that when ionised air is supplied to a space will eliminate Covid-19 from air and surfaces in a short space of time so has the potential to be used in a wider range of applications.



"It's not necessary to do anything overly dramatic – just look at human behaviours and how they relate to the physical environment"



"Break-out spaces were really a luxury created where it was financially possible to do so but now, they are very necessary to ensure distancing."



**LAURA O'HAGAN**  
Director with  
architects  
Buckley  
Gray Yeoman

Approaching the post-Covid workplace is something we've been looking at and talking to clients about a lot recently. Firstly, we're asking ourselves what the reason people go to the office is: collaboration and that sense of office culture. Those are things you can't get from home. Now more than ever the design of the office has to reflect that company culture and sense of place for people coming in, away from their homes. Design can help answer these questions.

There's definitely going to be an increase in agile working. Flexibility and agility are the things that are going to keep offices relevant and desirable. There's an opportunity for design to help in this new way of working, rather than relying on signage, lines on the floor and plastic screens. Occupancies are going to have to be reconsidered towards a sweet spot where offices can create flexible layouts, taking into account social distancing, with a focus on flexible furniture that can easily be rearranged. There are also new opportunities to be playful because we're no longer tied to those old norms with rows and rows of desks. Before, break-out spaces were really a luxury created where it was financially possible to do so but now, they are very necessary to ensure distancing.

We need to be creating offices that are as attractive to work in as at your home, for instance being able to sit near a window with natural light or near plants. Materials are going to be more reflective of your home, more comfortable, more tactile, like natural materials such as wood for the floors as opposed to carpet. Colour palettes are going to be more earthy against a palette of pastels, quite a domestic feel.

Comfort is going to be huge, that way of informal working that is about softening the space, allowing people to work more collaboratively and more freely. I'd liken it to why go to a café instead of making a coffee at home or going to a restaurant when you could cook something yourself. I firmly believe that people will go to the office again, we just have to make it relevant for them.



**KATRINA LARKIN**  
Co-Founder and Head of Experience with flexible workspace operator *Fora*

The first thing we did when the UK locked down was form a core group made up of operations, FM and commercial, to really make sure we worked together to understand our residents' needs.

We work upon the ethos that to them, *Fora* is their home and you need that community around you. *Fora* partnered with the Cleveland Clinic in the USA, so we were able to make decisions based on what they were saying, creating a very safe space to return to work. It was really important to be able to adapt our spaces.

Enrico [Sanna, co-founder and CEO of *Fora*] and I made a film showing residents what to expect from our buildings when they return. There are now handwashing facilities in the foyer and there is also thermal imaging, which is a non-intrusive way to check people's temperatures. We've increased the airflow using state-of-the-art ventilation and there are hands free, zero touch washrooms.

We want to treat people as adults. This is their home so we very carefully considered the colours, messaging and signage we used. We didn't want to have an entrance which was just '2 metres apart' signs. This is why we worked with the artist *Frea Buckler* on a series of vibrant installations in a graphic-style entitled 'Onwards' at the entrance of all of our locations in London and also in Reading. Elsewhere, we have adapted

all the meeting rooms reducing the capacity and increased our cleaning regimes accordingly.

In terms of still maintaining that sense of community, we initially switched everything to online but events are now hybrid so you can also watch them online, as well as in person. We've starting a new talks series with *Champs*, who are a mental wealth consultancy, and another called *Boom* where people who are creating ideas within their sectors talk through their experience. We've also recently signed a lease on an office building in Cambridge. *Fora* has always been an ambitious company and based on our success at our Reading space, it made sense to offer opportunities within other locations outside London.



"We want to treat people as adults... so we very carefully considered the colours, messaging and signage we used"



"What Covid has really brought out is the need for wellness in the workplace, with much more of a focus on health and safety in the long term"



**TIM GLEDSTONE**  
Partner, *Squire & Partners architects*

From working like battery chickens, I think what people want in an office now is to be more free range,

that's essential. What Covid has really brought out is the need for wellness in the workplace, with much more of a focus on health and safety in the long term.

A human solution is having more space with lower density. When we designed our own offices – the *Department Store* in Brixton – we recognised this, so everyone has their own workstation and then another adjacent space. Also,

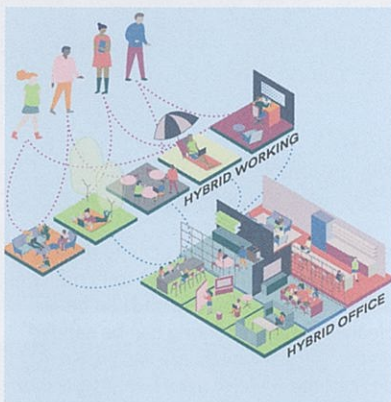
we all need to amplify the creativity sometimes, whether that's gathering in a group or having somewhere where you can be quiet. At the *Department Store*, we looked at how we work best and how to engender creativity and flair. We wanted to do things that would generate better collective thinking. Everyone who comes to visit us is blown away by how calm and relaxing the space is but there's also an energy to it. That was achieved through the generosity of space compared with our old space which had large desks but only a little bit of café space. To us, having an office is having a brand presence.

In terms of materials, I don't think there should be a kneejerk reaction to make everything super sanitised. Instead you should look to the materials that can be most appropriately in the long term. It's

not just about the levels of sanitation. If we use leather, yes that's a luxury material but it's also very durable and can be cleaned; parquet flooring can be sanded down. You can use paints like the *Keim* paint brand, which do not emit toxins into the air. And you do not have to have an automatic door, you could instead have a door person.

Really the *Department Store* was already Covid-19 ready and we've applied what we've learned there to other projects. The next phase, the *Department Store Studios*, is a mix of shared workspaces and private studios which have access to social and meeting areas. There are generous floor-to-ceiling heights, openable windows and a really beautiful façade in brick and stone. Why go to *Oxford Circus* to an office when you can stay hyper local?





**BEN GILLAM**  
Founder/Owner  
at workplace  
consultancy  
ThirdWay

With the take up of technology, Covid-19 has meant work has

become ever more intrusive in people's lives than being able to check emails after hours or on holiday. Often, it's also taking up a lot of space at home. With our Hybrid Working programme, which we launched in May, we aimed to respond in an appropriate way to businesses navigating their return to the workplace. We're creating a stable solution for the future, balancing office and remote settings and supporting individuals to work safely and productively from the office, home, or other locations. The concept uses three phases.

The first, 'Fit For Now' looks at practical measures such as social distancing marking, removing furniture, introducing temporary signage for one-way systems and lifts, essentially fast tracking evaluations and plans over two weeks. The second is called 'Fit for Tomorrow' and looks at more permanent adjustments and on-site refurbishments, including new furniture, technology, AV and telecommunications upgrades, as well as working from home assessments so that remote and office-based workers are more aligned.

'Fit For the Future' is the final phase, over 12-36 months and includes a full building and cost evaluation, including the introduction of satellite offices, helping businesses to reduce property costs and increase productivity for the long-term.

We also identified four tiers of business to come out of the crisis which are the Business As Usual, The Temporary Pivoter, The Shape Shifter, and The Re-Inventor. Each one of those will require different amounts of intervention. If businesses are currently operating on a remote working to office based ratio of 90:10 and it was the other way around pre-lockdown then the new ideal ratio will vary between 25:75, 50:50, 75:25.

The message we're trying to get across is that it's not necessary to do anything overly dramatic – just look at human behaviours and how they relate to the physical environment. For example, we looked at how to make spaces more Zoom-friendly in terms of acoustics and how to present to clients if they are unable to attend in person. Looking at the flexible office sector, I'd say two thirds of operators will stay and a third will go. Landlords will increasingly be offering a CAT A+ solution where tenants can fit out a space more how they require and on much more flexible lease terms.

*"It's not necessary to do anything overly dramatic – just look at human behaviours and how they relate to the physical environment"*