

In Vogue



WONDERLAND: Bharti Airtel office (left) in Gurgaon rivals a chic mall. Stylish carpets and low partitions can mix beauty with functionality

spatial environment and air, and basic amenities such as toilets and break spaces," says Bangalore-based architect K. Jaisim.

While every office retains the basic tenets like functionality, much depends on the space available, the number of people occupying it, their functions, and the overall purpose of the corporate house. When Jaisim was approached to transform a tobacco company into an IT services company, he chose to make use of whatever was available on site. "Where more natural light was required, we punched holes in walls for windows. We tried to do away with air-conditioning as much as possible by providing a natural cooling system through which air is drawn in from lower levels and pushed out at the top," explains Jaisim, throwing light on the ITC Infotech office, which he has designed.

If you have a large office, a small corner can morph into a fun area. You could throw in a few beanbags and draw attention to a wall with neon or psychedelic colours. Convert it into a game room with tables for table tennis and billiards, and a few board games, and win the appreciation of fatigued employees wanting to take a break. Remember, all your attempts should be to offer a work-friendly environment, which helps reduce stress levels. This can also be done by creating an oasis within the confines of the corporate office. Mumbai-based architect Hafeez Contractor has done just that in some of his works.

"An open courtyard type plan is being experimented in several places, like the upcoming ONGC office in Delhi. Open spaces provide air circulation and enable easy interaction. Landscaped terraces are another highlight, for employees to rejuvenate during breaks," says Contractor, proprietor of the firm. At the Bharti Airtel office in Gurgaon, Contractor has integrated the traditional Indian courtyard with modern corporate architecture creating an area of relaxation.

THERE was a time when your office was nothing more than a row of cubicles, each having a desk, a chair and a computer. No matter how much you tried making your space comfortable, with a little flowerpot, the picture of a puppy on the pin board and other knick-knacks from home, it just wasn't enough. Having spent over 40 hours a week — almost half of your waking hours — in that cramped, depressing place left you disgruntled. Your productivity suffered.

But things have changed and how. Companies have realised (and research proves it) that there is a direct correlation between employee productivity and happy, cheerful, comfortable offices. And so you have the modern office with its wide open spaces, ergonomic furniture, hang-out corners, lavish pantries and a lot more.

Offices today are more stylised, need-based and individualistic with the mantra being a blend of sound architecture and an employee-friendly environment. "Primarily, the work space is integrated with the five senses and five elements — natural light, acoustics, texture,

WORKPLACE

ROOM WITH A VIEW AND MORE

Does your little space in office fill you with energy, productivity, creativity and happiness? *By Kavitha Srinivasa*



WELL-DESIGNED OFFICE SPACES CREATE THE RIGHT MOOD WITH A COOL AND PRODUCTIVE WORK AREA



INSIDE OUT: An open courtyard and a cheerful cafeteria can add personality into the place you spend eight hours a day

If you are looking at re-doing your office, here's what you need to concentrate on:

Lighting: There is nothing like natural light to liven up an office. Make maximum use of natural resources and not only will you go green, but will also bring down your electricity bills. However, where sufficient daylight is not available, make sure the workstation is properly illuminated. Poor lighting could lead to Computer Vision Syndrome. Ideally, the monitor should be at an angle away from the lights, as direct lighting tends to create shadows. Soft white fluorescent bulbs are preferred to bright lights as they emit a lesser glare. For optimum results, combine low ambient lighting with task lighting.

Workstations: An employee's workstation is his own private place, but too much privacy can make him feel secluded. The aim should be to create an environment that allows free flow of ideas. More and more companies are now going for low partitions, where you can just get up from your seat and holler across the office, rather than walk from one cubicle to another and have a private chat with everyone trying to eavesdrop. Oh, and make sure the workstation has plenty of legroom and is beside a window. Research proves that if you can stare at the sky or trees, you are likely to be more cheerful.

Ergonomic furniture: Given the amount of time we spend sitting at our desks, ergonomic chairs with an adjustable height are absolutely essential. Ideally, the seat should be 16 to 18 inches off the ground to enable you to easily



keep your feet on the ground. You can make them more comfortable by using cushions or foot stools to adjust the height.

As far as the rest of the furniture is concerned, a minimalist look works well. Metal is the ideal lightweight and space-saving material. Bright furniture adds vibrancy to the environment and a "fun" aspect to the work place. You can also experiment with bamboo or cane furniture and can throw colourful rugs in the recreation areas.

Security system: A state-of-the-art security system and a fully integrated IT and pre-installed communications system are a must. After all, the office requires security at different levels. At a physical level, CCTVs monitor people's movements. Software and data needs to be protected through anti-spyware software and anti-virus software.

We have told you what to do to make your office the ideal place at present. But what about future office spaces? According to Jaisim, futuristic corporate offices would be underground, as there would be eco-thermal spaces that optimise on energy. Wonder how employees will stare out of the window!

The author is a freelance feature writer based in Bangalore