

The space has had a marked effect on the working process in the office



JOY

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OFFICE SPACE

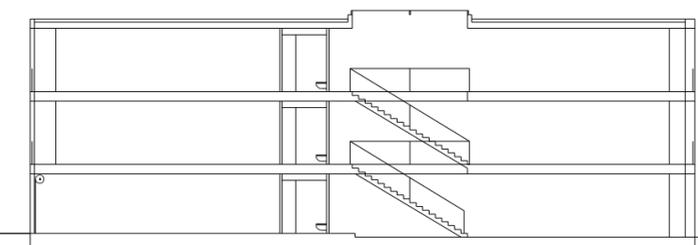
"You can't hate a colour, but what you can hate is your experience of it." It's a bold statement by Paul Hecker, but one that actually reveals a rather more reflective approach to the flamboyant design the practice is known for. For Melbourne-based Hecker Phelan & Guthrie, design is ultimately about the experience. "You want to make people feel good," he says frankly.

The diverse projects that have emerged from the practice over the last decade are testament to an instinctive ability to manipulate the experience of interior space. It is interesting to see how this thinking shapes the company's own working space.

Driven by the need to expand, Hecker Phelan & Guthrie moved into the Richmond office almost a year ago. They felt lucky to secure one of just a few spaces they were considering at the time, and even more fortunate that it was a clean concrete shell they could easily move into. It meant they could also fill it with their favourite objects, in the most part chairs, an object all three directors have a clear passion for. "Chairs are at their best sculpture and at their worst functional," says Hecker. By no means randomly placed, they are "the joys of the space" and a number of recent acquisitions from around the design world build upon an existing collection from the previous office. The intention is that over time, the collection will grow and move as they do. "As you grow, your taste matures and you become less obvious and more discerning," says Hecker. "You try and challenge yourself with what you choose."

Inevitably with the new office, the way a client experiences Hecker Phelan & Guthrie has also changed. This has forced the team to think critically about what they want to happen when a client arrives. "The clients are buying an experience as well as an environment," says Hecker. "If you want to woo people as interior designers, then you need to be really involved with this experience also." He believes it is something interior design practices in particular have the advantage of controlling and that it also reassures clients that theatrical and quirky can still be professional.

The building is split into three levels, connected via the stair and a light core. The reception and entry is at ground level, the directors and client areas in the middle and the working studio on the top. "The space has had a marked affect on the working process in the office and because of the freshness of perspective we have each time we look at a project it ultimately affects the outcome," says Hecker.





In giving the staff the upper level to themselves (with no client or trade rep access) they have a haven of their own and "a place to escape". Even the three directors rarely go upstairs, so project discussions and critiques take place in the middle level and in the meeting room. Eliminating the directors' involvement in the day to day running of a project gives a critical distance which, Hecker believes, has been a huge benefit given the diversity of the projects they have running at any one time. "Distancing yourself from the designer directly responsible for the project gives you more clarity," says Hecker. "It facilitates a more formal review process and therefore a more candid and critical discussion."

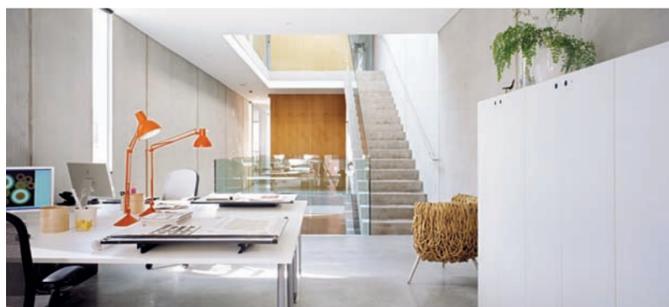
But it is not just their chair collection that is growing. So, too, is the complexity of projects within the office. A decade of experience and an extraordinarily diverse portfolio of clients, projects and budgets, sees Hecker Phelan & Guthrie at a time of change. Serendipitously, working in the new office has been an influence in this. Not only has it allowed them a chance to reflect on past projects and review internal processes and protocols, it also seems to have given them clarity and focus into the potential of the Hecker Phelan & Guthrie brand. It is almost certain that this future will be about design for, and from, experience, but one could hazard a guess it will also be an experience that will surprise.

Architect FABBRICA
 Designer Athol Whimp
 Builder FABBRICA
 Structural Engineer Bland Connard Menzies
 Project Budget \$900,000
 Site area 150m²
 Total floor area 450m²
 Time to complete 12 months (discontinuous)

Hecker Phelan & Guthrie
 (61 3) 9421 1644, hpg.net.au

FABBRICA
 (61 3) 9663 7622, fabbrica.com.au

Furniture
 'Oblique Shelving' magazine shelves in boardroom and 'Dickie' bean bag style chairs both by Moooi, from Space Furniture. 'Favela' wooden chair in boardroom and 'Vermelha' rope chair, both designed by the Campana Brothers for Edra, from Space. All other furniture existing.
 Space Furniture (61 3) 9426 3000



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