

What Designers Want

Deborah Erwin speaks to the design experts to find out what their dream office would look like.

Gone are the days of the corporate labyrinth. Yes, the age of the cubicle is over. No longer do workers need to weave in and out of a complex matrix of partitions and filing cabinets to get to their desks. In fact, the entire work environment has undergone a paradigm overhaul. Layouts, are now liberated from heavy and oppressive elements, opting instead for light and modular components. Since the breaking down of these 'walls', each aspect of the workspace has been scrutinized in an effort to configure an optimal setup for productivity and comfort. Those hired to do such fitouts – designers and architects – spend their careers researching alternative solutions to conventional methods of interior design, collaborating with clients and putting theory into

practice. A series of conversations with professionals across the region revealed that the evolutionary process of creating design is not only evident while ripening a concept into a full-fledged project, but also while expressing a fantasy place. Initial descriptions were more like fishing from a petri dish of blurry notions. However, after much rumination and discernment, a high definition image began to emerge. The extrapolated picture revealed a common value system shared among the interviewees, one that is ruled by pragmatism and versatility and yet makes room for the occasional indulgence. Read on to learn about the general configurations and intricate details of these personal visions put forth by these seasoned industry pros:

THERE'S ALSO THE VERY IMPORTANT ISSUE OF ERGONOMICS.

THE LAY OF THE LAND

"I think my ideal workspace is quite industrial. I'd pick a warehouse that didn't necessarily have to have windows. For me it's not about looking outdoors and having a view, it's more about having lots of surface space – like walls that you can pin things up on." **JEFF KAEONIL**

"I'd prefer if the building had history as a landmark... and that we were the building's sole occupier. Historical buildings are inspiring because of their story. They're different from Grade A offices which aren't designed to make you happy. I'd put my own stamp on it through the interiors, updating it and maximising its natural light." **DAVID BUFFERY**

"Renzo Piano has a nice office in Geneva... it's on a hill and has terraces that have a view of the sea. 50-60 people would be out of the office, that would be my dream situation in the sense that I could spend time at home or at a remote location but still be in contact with the office" **MARC BRUILLHART**

"The seating arrangement would have as many people facing each other as possible. It's sort of the concept of sitting around a conference table and discussing ideas. Partitions are great for privacy but they don't really help camaraderie and dialogue." **JEFF KAEONIL**

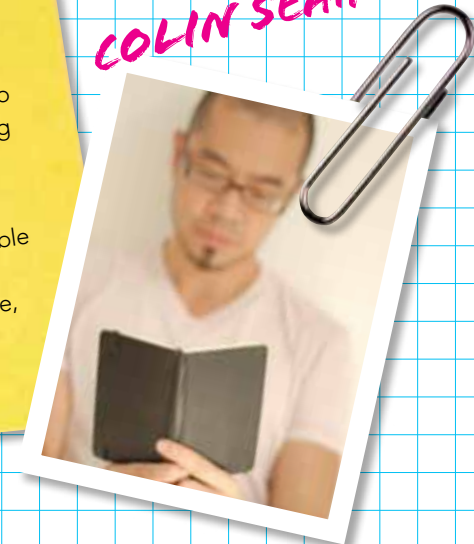
"It would be ideal if it were just a huge warehouse space. It's best if it were facing South for daylight... and an elongated space." **DOUGLAS HO**

"The office would need to be someplace easily accessible for clients and employees. You also are exposed to outside inspiration when you're in the thick of things. If you need to work long hours it's easy to get to and from versus a funky, lofty area somewhere remote." **ARIANE STEINBECK**

"A while back, we designed the BBH office in a warehouse. It is a 9,000 sqf space with double height ceilings, a pitched roof and exposed brick walls. And at the end of the project we thought if the client were to ever move out then we'd move in. It really has a sense of space, with lots of character." **COLIN SEAH**

- Colin Seah**, Ministry of Design
- Ariane Steinbeck**, Gettys
- David Buffery**, Sketch Design
- Douglas Ho**, SLHO & Associates
- Marc Bruillhart**, Marc&Chantal Design
- Sandy Edge**, Woods Bagot
- Bryant Lu**, Ronald Lu & Partners
- Jeff Kaeonil**, HOK
- Mike Atkin**, Head Architecture
- Bernard Chang**, KPF
- William Lim**, CL3
- Greg Pearce**, One Space

COLIN SEAH



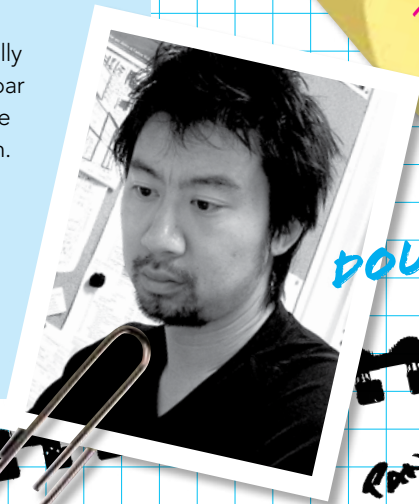
THE CHAIR

"The chair is very important – don't mess around with the chair. You should have a Herman Miller one or something very design-oriented like a vintage Eames chair." **BERNARD CHANG**

"Vitra gave me a chair – bless them! Mark (his partner) has an Aeron chair. Mesh backs are good... if it gets hot, mesh breathes." **MIKE ATKIN**

"There's also the very important issue of ergonomics. When I get to the end of my day and I've still got lots of mental energy but my body aches then I think there's something wrong in my physical environment. Herman Miller's Aeron Executive chair is an excellent chair – there are some great ergonomic chairs and this is a classic. Everyone gets one of these in the office." **GREG PEARCE**

"Just a simple chair. I don't really need anything with good lumbar support or mesh back. Just one like The End by Arne Jacobsen. It doesn't have back support but you don't get distracted by having to adjust it. As long as you have good posture, you don't really need a really comfy chair." **DOUGLAS HO**



DOUGLAS HO

KIT AND CABOODLE

"I'd have few things but of good quality and classic, lasting value. My desk could be from Ikea. I like my leather Bellini chairs. I also love my marble-topped table – Knoll's Saarinen." **ARIANE STEINBECK**

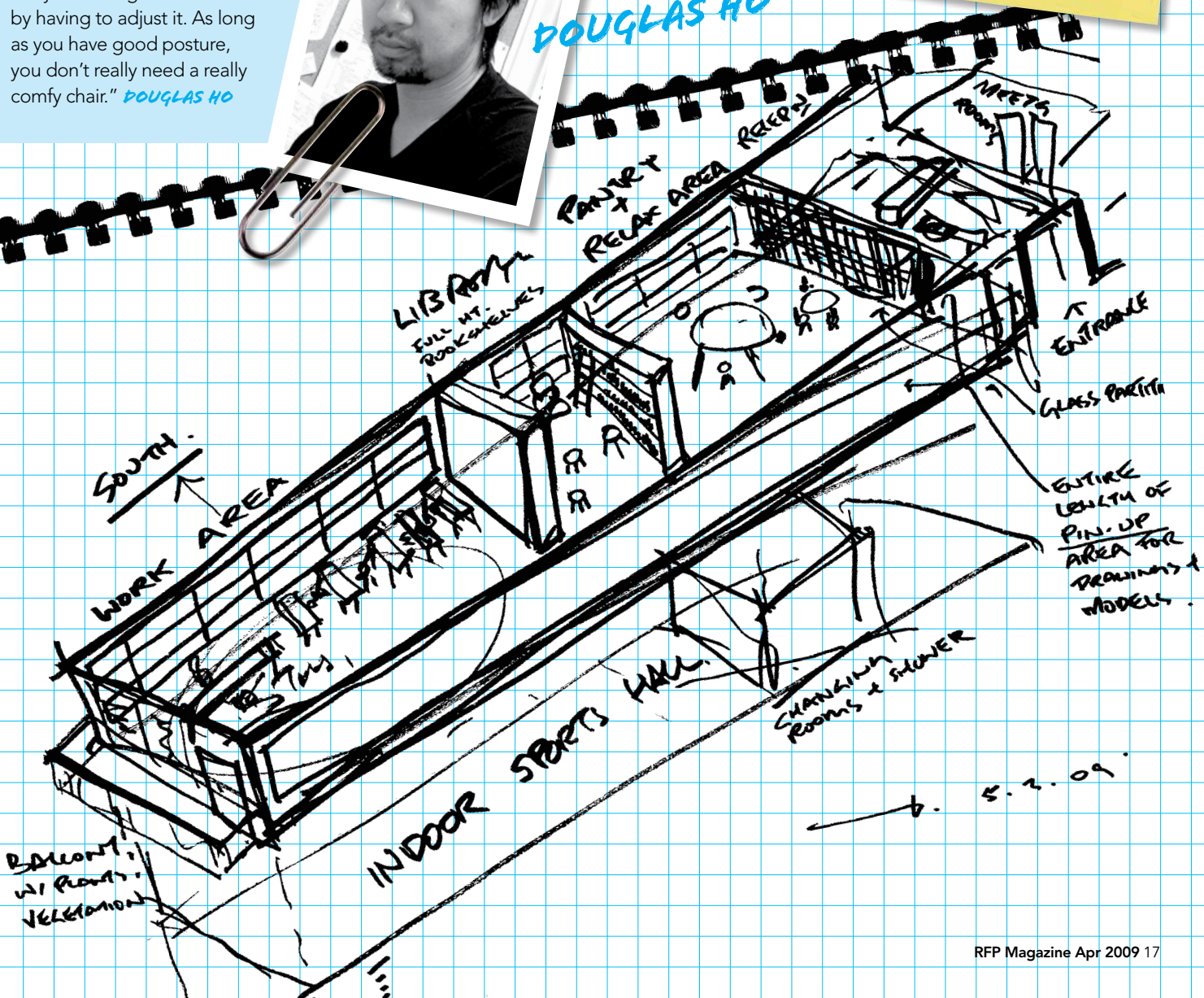
"In all of our projects, we custom make our furnishings. I'd do the same for our office and also use pieces collected over time." **COLIN SEAH**

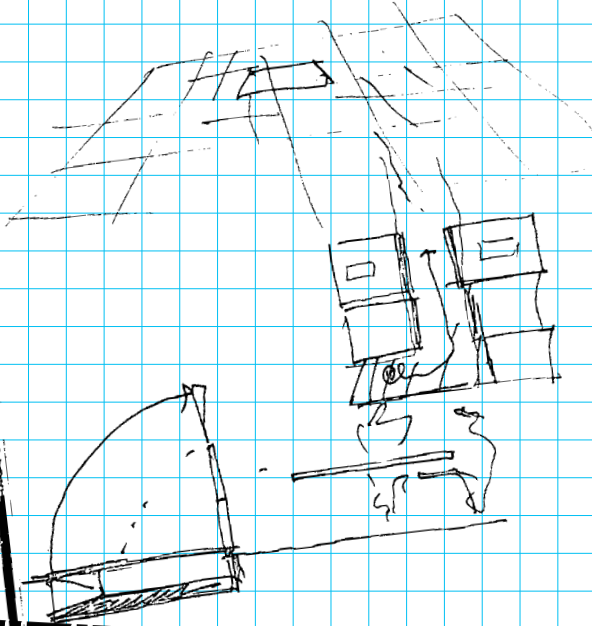
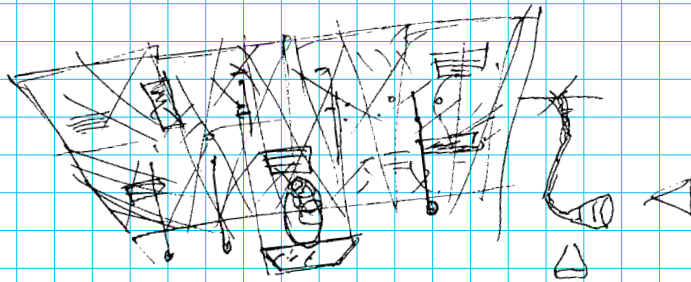
"The furniture could just be long tables so you could lay out large drawings, and have your workstation next to that. If I was going to have a lounge area then I'd pick a lot of Eames chairs because I like that mid-century look." **JEFF KAEONIL**

"I'd like to use recycled materials – these are very expensive because it's hard to make them beautiful and user-friendly." **BERNARD CHANG**

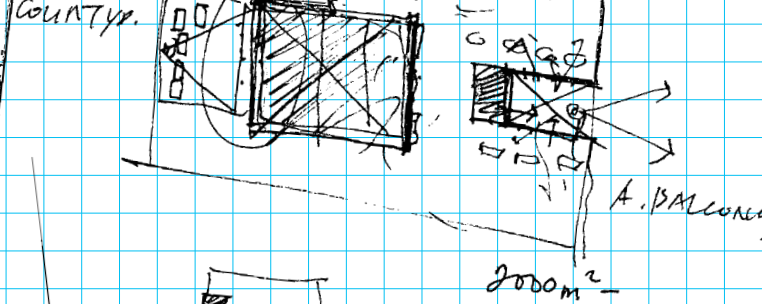
"I'd use a lot of natural materials. I like the texture of wood and metal. I like a lot of painted surfaces... maybe even for the floors." **WILLIAM LIM**

"I like having windows all the way around. The irony is that people sit and look at computers all day... and close the blinds." **MIKE ATKIN**

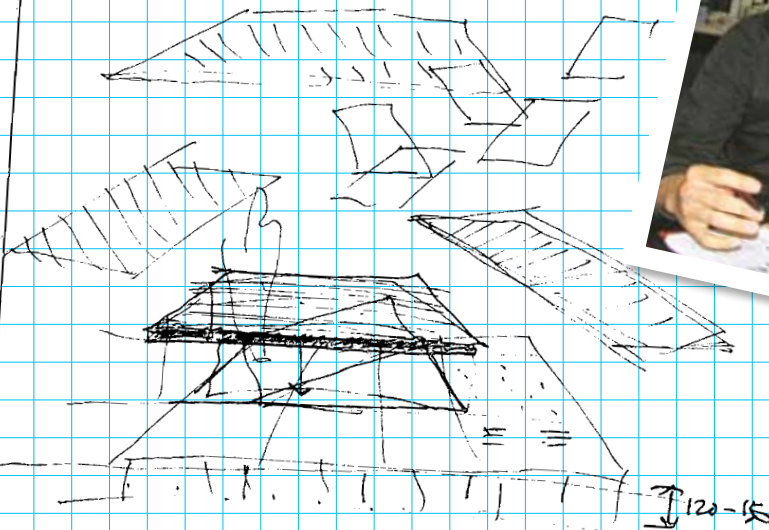




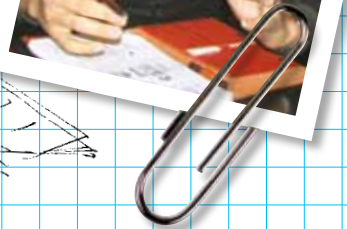
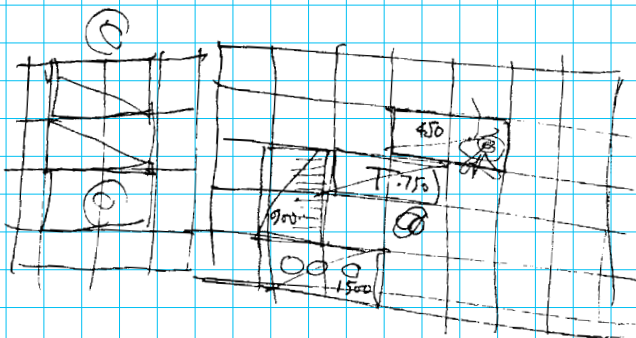
B
COURTYARD



FUTUREWORK



120-150



BERNARD CHANG

MUST-HAVES

"A nice wine cabinet would be essential, mainly for gifts... it's handy if I have a lunch or dinner to attend ... Shower facilities are a must. Why? Because if you go onsite, and walk around on a dusty site and walk up several flights of stairs, then it's good to wash up when you get back to the office." **BRYANT LU**

"I'd be looking for a nice table saw, planer, foam cutters... in terms of equipment. So that you could make things quickly or more refined pieces such as mock-ups. This would allow you to test out ideas in physical form. The problem these days is that kids coming out of school are so adept at using computers to design that they forget they still need to model ideas physically too." **JEFF KAEONIL**

"I don't really need a lot of equipment or things to be able to work. I usually just use a sketch book." **WILLIAM LIM**

THE DESK

"The ideal material [for a desktop] would be natural off-white linoleum. But it's very expensive and hard to find. Made of cork and oils, it's physically one of the cleanest materials out there. It's also softer than any laminate. They use linoleum on all the workbenches in watch factories and also in hospitals. If it's off-white it also keeps you awake." **MARK BRUHLHART**

"I would need a white top for my desktop. For me, a plastic laminate top is just fine."

WILLIAM LIM

"For my workspace I'd have a glass-top desk, the bigger the better. I get claustrophobic so I need to be able to spread out, especially if I'm working with tracing paper. For a chair, I'd choose an ergonomically designed Herman Miller chair. For the rest of the office, I'd opt for vintage furniture." **DAVID BUFFERY**

"The desks need to be solid with a curved edge at the front so you don't get lines on your arms when you're sitting there all day. You need to have a cable tray. What's the point in spending all this time on furniture and then having all these cables traipsing around on the floor?"

MIKE ATKIN

"I'm not a very organised person so I like a large, long table so I can just put everything on it. The one in my studio is one by four metres." **WILLIAM LIM**

"Basically I need a big desk. It should have plenty of space to do some hands-on work like making models, or to have material samples lying around. Ideally, I'd like a nine-by-four-foot desk." **DOUGLAS HO**

"Worktops should be bright white, partly to make better use of the light, and it's also more refreshing and easier to maintain since you know when it's dirty so you keep it clean. I like the idea of furniture that feels expansive." **GREG PEARCE**

"A double screen is a minimum requirement." **BRYANT LU**

I'D HAVE FEW THINGS BUT OF GOOD QUALITY AND CLASSIC, LASTING VALUE.



SHOWER FACILITIES ARE A MUST.

"I'd like to have fountain pens to sign things. I also like to have lots of books around me. A fast internet connection! And a good looking computer. Apple all the way! It looks good, it functions well, it's unobtrusive and it's a pleasure to hold!" **ARIANE STEINBECK**

"For my desk, I need a below-desk keyboard, on a tray. Because I have a bad lower back. You feel all the stress go out of your neck and shoulders." **MIKE ATKIN**

"I like a really big screen – the joke is that you can see it from the other side of the room." **GREG PEARCE**

"Humanscale makes quite an interesting arrangement of pieces – a monitor arm, an adjustable keyboard tray, a chair and a CPU holder – all of which are designed to make effective use of your landscape." **GREG PEARCE**

INDULGENCES

"A private lift from the general office to your personal parking space, for executives." **BRYANT LU**

"I'd like a private bathroom." **DAVID BUFFERY**

"Ideally, I'd like a one-lane swimming pool on our balcony. No larger than what we have now, which is about 1.5 metres wide and spans the length of our office." **MIKE ATKIN**

"I'd have a 'wii' room for people to expend their energy." **COLIN SEAH**

"Gym facilities with a boxing ring – because I box!" **BRYANT LU**

"A TV for me to watch movies and things. I find movies a good source of inspiration." **WILLIAM LIM**

"We work long hours. In this kind of field you actually need to exercise a lot... to take off the pressure and to relax. If we had the floor below us as well, I'd make that into an indoor sports hall with changing facilities. I'm not into the kind of gym with machines. I'd much more prefer an indoor basketball court of flexible auditorium." **DOUGLAS HO**

"My dream office would be an old palazzo in Milan with 18th century architectural envelope and the furniture that I currently have... and lots of art!" **ARIANE STEINBECK**

"I do a lot of work outside of the office and I think that'll continue to happen. Ideally I could be sitting on a lovely, tropical island beach or in a rainforest. I guess I've just smashed the possibilities of having to be confined to a box." **SANDY EDGE**

MY DREAM OFFICE IS AN OLD PALAZZO IN THE 17TH CENTURY ARCHITECTURE WITH A LOT OF CHARACTER AND THE FLOOR IS MADE OF WOOD. I CURRENTLY HAVE A LOT OF IDEAS FOR IT.

A DREAM [OFFICE] WOULD BE TO HAVE A GREAT COLLECTION OF PEOPLE AROUND ME.

PSYCH 101

"The dream office is the dream people you work with. It has more to do with who you work with than the furniture. It has to do with working well and sharing good and bad moments. This is much more important than the physical decoration of an office." **MARC BRUILHART**

"A dream [office] would be to have a great collection of people around me." **SANDY EDGE**

"I'd prefer that everyone working in that environment felt that they could get dirty and really roll up their sleeves and do the work, and not be so worried that things have to be perfect or being too delicate. You just want to get in there and get the ideas out... and then you can refine them later. Design's really this process where you've got to make a mess first. Design looks pretty ugly - the first idea you have." **JEFF KAEONIL**

"Most importantly, my ideal office is to have nice people around me. I couldn't do without fantastic team members." **ARIANE STEINBECK**



WILLIAM LIM

ARIANE STEINBECK



THE GREAT OUTDOORS

"I'd like to be some place close to nature. I don't really need to be in a city or somewhere congested. I'd rather open and scenic. I think it's more inspirational." **WILLIAM LIM**

"It would be lovely if a lot of offices had balconies or just places to sit outside... have lunch in the sun. That's what excites me about life. I love nature. That's why I'm talking about not being in a box, but being able to drop down into a green space. Hong Kong's CBD areas are in desperate need of a park. New York and Sydney have one." **SANDY EDGE**

"You also need an outside space. It's a breathing space. We all work under a bit of pressure so you can go out there and take the occasional phone call or go out there and scream... or smoke. Do your thing for five minutes, come back in and you're ready for action." **MIKE ATKIN**

"An outdoor courtyard space for social activities such as outdoor lunches... I'd also have a driving range simulation area here." **BRYANT LU**

"I'd like an outdoor space with a barbecue and comfortable lounge furniture... 1000 sqf would be great!" **ARIANE STEINBECK**

"I propose having indentations or cutouts within this footplate. This cutout is a courtyard, covered and semi-open. It could be transformed into indoor or an open-air space. So if you smoke or want to have small group discussions you could come out here. Using transparent or translucent surfaces, this could be a source of natural light." **BERNARD CHANG RFP**



JEFF KAEONIL

WE ALL WORK UNDER A BIT OF PRESSURE SO YOU CAN GO OUT THERE AND TAKE THE OCCASIONAL PHONE CALL OR GO OUT THERE AND SCREAM... OR SMOKE.