

The Focal Connection

Consolidating four offices into one was a great opportunity for National Australia Bank subsidiary MLC to take over a multi-floor space and share it with all, regardless of rank. M Moser Associates created MLC's focal point of communication by linking three storeys with an atrium and a full length audio-visual screen.





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Consolidating four different offices into one created something of a quandary for National Australia Bank's insurance subsidiary MLC when they decided to move all their Hong Kong operations into a single location. Although they were moving into a slightly larger space, MLC was seeking to find a way to bring their 220 office staff and 800 agents closer together, to create a communal bond. This challenging yet intoxicating brief resulted in *a truly unique and functional office space* as the process from concept to entity evolved into a study in cooperation and corporate transparency.

When M Moser Associates was hired to design the new MLC offices, they embarked on an exhaustive strategic planning process

the backbone of which was a series of staff surveys and feedback to discover what they wanted and needed in a new office. MLC had the opportunity to take over a sprawling space and mold it into something special, something enduring and something that is uniquely proprietary; *it would belong to one and all* regardless of rank.

Over a four month period of *surveys and creative strategic planning sessions* that sought to *engage all staff members*, a consensus emerged. This process came to be known as "Project Fusion" and what emerged was that staff wanted a modern office, one that was open, transparent and flexible as well as a comfortable working space in which they could take pride in their

With the three storey atrium, M Moser Associates built a focal connection, which features a full length AV screen.

Staff wanted a modern office, one that was open, transparent and flexible.



Opposite: The Focal Point - a three storey atrium was created, connecting staff and departments.

Top-Left: The Board Room - a transparent connection.

Top-Right: The Zoomy-Room - an extension to the board room, open to staff and VIP Guests.

Bottom: The Customer Service Area - curves represent the waves of water and the flow of energy.





environment and where team based activities could easily be accommodated and encouraged.

From a management perspective, MLC wished to reinforce themselves as an employer of choice and a service provider and business partner who was acutely aware of client and employee needs. *"It is important that when we move we are ready to face not just a new and open environment but a new and open way of working together,"* said MLC Managing Director and CEO Bob Bettridge.

A six storey facility in Times Square in the heart of Causeway Bay was selected. M Moser envisaged that the *focal point* and area of *most concentrated staff movement* would be a three storey area that sought to seamlessly link staff internally.

The space on the 35th to 37th floor also afforded employees a *360 degree panorama* of Hong Kong's mountainous skyline and stunning harbor and a series of color-coded themes helped to instill the proper mood. The lowest of the three connected floors would be "time" and use green - reflecting serenity and timelessness. The middle floor, and the hub of activity, was "water" and a blue hue - movement and an underwater space where lives are first nurtured. The top floor was orange, presenting "light" - a light which would penetrate and enhance the water below.

In order to accommodate and honor the communal ethos, *a virtual connection* was built using a three storey staircase in an open atrium which featured an *AV screen stretching the length of the atrium*. It was a vertical, high

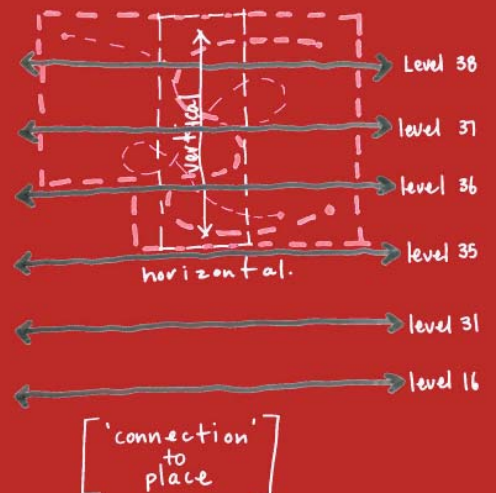
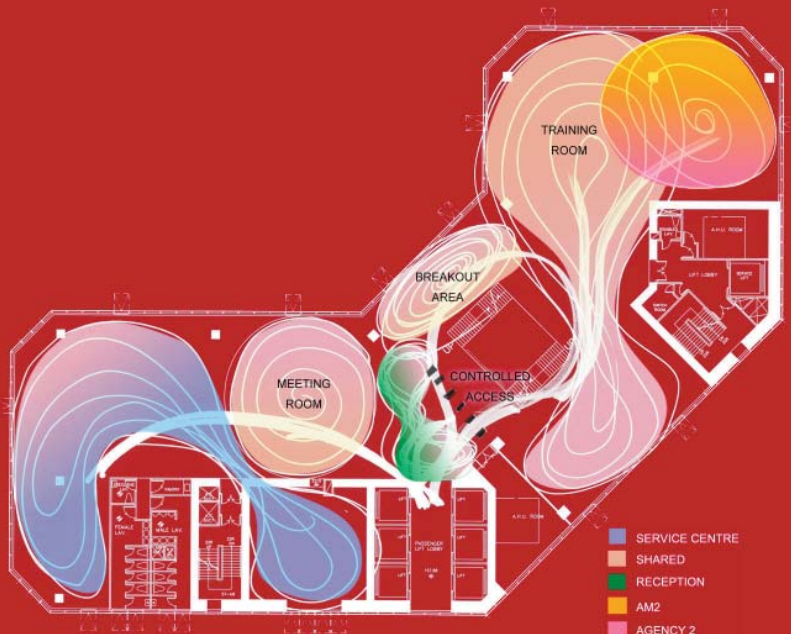
A pantry isn't just a pantry — it's a lunch space, a meeting area, a place for communicating ideas.



Opposite: Pantries on each floor right next to the atrium create a seamless link between staff and a communication hot-spot for meetings and informal gatherings.

Top: The three floors illustrated in 3D, using modern Design Tools.

Bottom: The Planning was based upon the envisaged flow and movement of staff.





tech access path linking employees and also offering a space that could accommodate large scale meetings or intimate gatherings.

A number of *lounges* were built *around the atrium that would serve as communal meeting places and encourage ad hoc gatherings*. Bowing to the random whims of inspiration, structural columns were designed as white boards ensuring that virtually every part of the office was a conduit for proposing and sharing ideas.

The security of having one controlled entrance on the 36th floor meant that not only would the focal connection be the atrium but that proper flow and movement would be seamless. *Hot zones of movement* remained relatively uncluttered as a *systematic and free movement flow* was established.

With *no closed offices* abutting the floor to ceiling windows on any of the floors, very few segments of the windows were obstructed leaving the stunning views open to one and all. *Transparency and community* were also inherent as seating cushions were placed on top of low filing cabinets bordering windows.

And so it was that in the heart of Causeway Bay, in one of the world's most dense neighborhoods, in one of the world's most dense cities, space, sanctuary was created. But regardless of how abstract design theories and needs become, the simple ethos of togetherness and communal feeling was what created this space. No matter *how unique and complex* the project may have seemed, *at its core it stayed simple*. ■

The office is much more than the sum of its parts; it has become a tool for increased productivity, high morale and excellent client service.



Opposite-Top: Ad-hoc meeting places with pull-down screens to separate areas if necessary.

Opposite-Bottom: One of the numerous breakout areas - an intersection dedicated to spontaneous meetings and brainstorming sessions.

Top: The seating Area in the Zoomy-Room; equipped with TV, DVD, sound system, refrigerator and more.

Bottom: Seating cushions were placed on top of low filing cabinets bordering windows to evolve the principles of transparency and community.



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