



GENEVA CONNECTION

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Connectivity is the key for Mackay + Partners' interiors scheme, designed to bring warmth and colour to Merck Serono's translucent Geneva HQ in Switzerland, built on an industrial electricity generating site. Veronica Simpson takes a look.

When pharmaceuticals giant, Serono (now Merck Serono) decided to consolidate its five Geneva sites into one, they landed a plum piece of real estate to do it on: a disused industrial area flanked by mature parkland with views onto Lake Geneva and the nearby United Nations building.

This being Geneva (no air-con allowed), the building had to meet exacting eco-criteria as well as provide the company, a world leader in reproductive health, with a state-of-the-art space to help in recruiting and retaining the world's best bio-technicians. Chicago architecture practice, Murphy Jahn devised a campus-style scheme which incorporates three of the site's existing industrial buildings alongside three new buildings arranged on a street-like grid under a glazed canopy, to create a palatial 70,000m² science village which includes a 400-seater restaurant, library, café, crèche and auditorium alongside research labs, offices and IT centre for Merck Serono's 1,200 local and international staff.

London-based Mackay + Partners were brought in to harmonise and personalise the interiors and help create a sense of warmth for this newly united community. Australian-born partner, Gavin Harris says: "Serono wanted to humanise the space, as the architecture and materials are very formal. Connectivity was a key theme in this design: we needed to unite the interiors and architecture both through the quality of the design and finish and also the way the elements worked within the spaces."

Harris and his associate, Ken Mackay have successfully achieved this through the skilful application of scale, colour and texture. For example, in the public areas, individual facilities such as the reception desk, and a nearby café/library space, are designed as distinct architectural elements to reinforce their presence under the towering, six-storey glazed roof. Vast office floors are similarly broken up with freestanding six metre tall 'pod' rooms, bookable for meetings, as well as freestanding 'store walls' which house reference materials, photocopiers and also tea- and coffee-making facilities. These elements are all constructed of high quality materials such as glass, wood, steel and, in the café's case, Corian, which complement the high-tech look of the building.

Colour and materials subtly reinforce the presence of the recreational areas. Vivid blue glazing on the reception desk at the entrance to the public square or piazza links to a wide blue lightbox strip that runs the length of the restaurant ceiling, just off the central piazza. The same Oak flooring is used in the café, its adjacent library and the restaurant alike. Extensive planting reinforces the sense of 'outside inside' that the transparent shell creates – the low iron glass creates far greater transparency than standard glazing. And natural motifs have been used subtly but liberally in the restaurant, where a variety of seating arrangements include Corian table-tops embossed with a floating leaf motif, which is also repeated on a free-standing backlit Corian screen by the self-service area. A huge collage of magnified leaf and floral patterns,



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- 01 Concept render of the library and café, showing their integration into the historical building
- 02 Executive floor hallway and break-out space from dining and meetings rooms
- 03 Executive office
- 04 Write-up areas for laboratories overlooking the forum
- 05 Executive floor boardroom
- 06 Office with store wall

The building had to meet exacting eco-criteria as well as provide the company...with a state-of-the-art space



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screen-printed onto acrylic, runs the length of the restaurant exterior, backing onto (and visible from) a secondary entrance corridor.

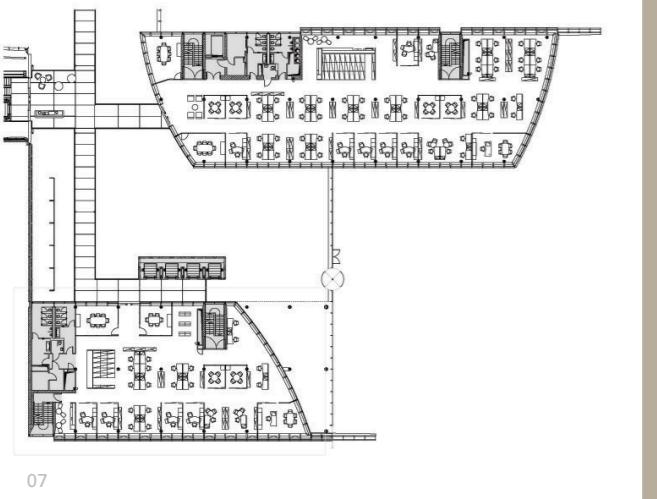
The atrium space is further animated by a huge 'wax wall' art installation. LEDs have been embedded into a wax panel, and are programmed to display a huge array of colours, images and even messages. This runs the length of the atrium (25 metres), extends over four stories and backs on to a massive water feature of artificial rain, which helps control the air quality and generates a calming acoustic backdrop.

Break-out spaces with stylish red seating are visible on every floor, linking the different divisions at the junctions between walkways and buildings. "These really are used" says Harris. "In fact, it's surpassed even the client's expectations."

Eco-requirements brought their own design challenges. The buildings are all naturally ventilated, with glazed exterior panels designed to lift and close, in order to control air flow, operated by a centralised Building Management System. The structure, therefore, has to accommodate an alarming amount of movement through floating ceilings, and staircases cantilevered out from the few concrete walls. In addition, a pumping station was installed deep in Lake Geneva to pipe water into the building for the cooling/heating system that operates active slabs in metal ceiling panels. The corresponding problems for office acoustics are minimised by acoustic treatments to partitions and storage unit walls, the latter featuring punched metal screens with acoustic panels behind them to act as sound sinks.

In the public areas, says Mackay, "We provided a metal skin for the restaurant, to soften the space acoustically as well as provide a lighting platform." The building is also future-proofed, as much as possible, through flexibility in the fixtures – office furniture, for example, is all demountable.

But it is the level of detailing in this project that stands out. In the two-storey library, the ground floor area displays periodicals on bespoke Corian shelving, while the first floor reference library arrays its collection on elegant wooden 'nesting table' style shelves, arranged around bespoke seating 'carrels'. Mackay lavishes praise on the



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- 07 Typical floor layout for building B1 + B2
- 08 Restaurant, looking out to the forum and speakeasies
- 09 Library area



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Swiss-German joiners, Roethlisberger, for their team's "ethos, workmanship and attention to detail. It enabled us to achieve a really high-class result, on a fairly normal budget."

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the sixth floor executive suite, which has the best views: from the mezzanine executive lounge, you can recline on white leather B&B Italia sofas and watch the sun set over Lake Geneva, martini at the ready. Throughout this suite - boardroom, meeting rooms and executive office - beautifully stitched white leather appears in furniture, and in panel form on walls and partitions as well as, along one apparently seamless corridor, doors. Polished chrome end-pieces are used to slim down the super thick walls. Oak is used throughout, on furniture, floors and walls, with a battened wood panel indicating the upper margins of room partitions. A luminous aluminium honeycomb panel also appears in blade walls, punched into a delicate pattern and sandwiched between glass, adding a high-tech touch. Brass door handles and door frame edge inlays complete the picture. This is Harris's favourite area, "for its clean, crisp lines which reflect both the company's aspirations and its Swiss heritage" From a project point of view, Mackay is particularly happy about "how the public meeting spaces have integrated so well with the Serono company culture. The area around the café and library is always buzzing. I think it's worked even better than we or our client expected."

Furniture

In the office area, custom-designed office desking by Unifor, storage and custom-designed rolling racks from Ahrend International, MDL workstations and meeting tables by Unifor. Workstation seating by Wilkhahn. Lounge seating by B&B Italia, demountable partitions by Faram.

In the reception area, Fritz Hansen 'Oxford' chairs. Boardroom table and executive furniture by Roethlisberger. Custom-designed CEO furniture manufactured by Roethlisberger. Reception desk and Speakeasy tea points by Roethlisberger. In the executive area, boardroom table and meeting table manufactured by B&B Italia, 'FK' chairs are Walter Knoll, meeting and boardroom seating by Interstuhl.

In the executive suite, 'George' lounges, 'Mart' chairs, 'Dadone' lounges are all by B&B Italia. In the dining area the 'Vol Au Vent' chair, 'Harry Low Seat', 'Tonelli' table with glass top, 'Solo' tables, 'Domus' storage and 'Eileen' tables are all by B&B Italia Spa. In the restaurant, 'Dizzie' table, 'Catifa' chairs and 'Catifa' stool are by Arper. 'Cellbond' high and low tables and custom benching by Molteni. Library desks and custom shelving are by Molteni. In the Atrium, custom-designed timber seating is by Molteni. In the Speakeasies, seating is 'BPA Ziggy' by BPA International. Meeting pods and café by M3 Design Development.

Ahrend International, available in Australia from Arredorama (61 2) 9552 3022, arredorama.com.au

Arper, available in Australia from Stylecraft (61 2) 9355 0000, stylecraft.com.au

BPA International bpainternational.com

B&B Italia, available in Australia from Space furniture (61 2) 8339 7588, spacefurniture.com.au

Faram faram.com

Fritz Hansen, available in Australia from Corporate Culture (61 2) 9690 0077, corporateculture.com.au

Interstuhl, available in Australia from Marwood 1300 365 285, marwood.com.au and Emanate (61 2) 9698 5011, mn8design.com

M3 Design Development m3designinc.com

Molteni, available in Australia from Hub Furniture (61 2) 9217 0700, hubfurniture.com.au

Roethlisberger, available in Australia from Anibou (61 2) 9319 0655, anibou.com.au

Unifor (61 2) 9552 9552, unifor.com.au

Walter Knoll (61 8) 8182 3925, walterknoll.de

Wilkhahn Asia Pacific (61 2) 9310 3355, wilkhahn.com.au

Flooring

In the office areas, carpet, carpet tiles and carpet backing are by Milliken Carpets. In the executive area carpets are by Bentley Carpets.

Bentley Carpets bentleyprincesstreet.com

Milliken Carpets millikencarpeteurope.com

Lighting

In the executive suite, dining room and bathroom, down lighting is Duell, custom-coloured by Modular. In the executive bathroom, 'Dolma' wall fittings are Kreon. Skirting light is 'Baseline' by Modular. In the restaurant, the pendant lights are 'Caboché' by Foscarini. Library Pendant lights are 'Nur 1618' by Artemide.

Artemide (61 3) 9349 3310, artemide.com.au

Foscarini, available in Australia from ECC Lighting and Living (61 2) 9460 6600, ecc.com.au

Kreon, available in Australia from dedece (61 2) 9360 2722, dedece.com

Modular, available in Australia from JSB Lighting (61 2) 9571 8800, jsblighting.com.au

Finishes

Office area fabric is by KnollTextiles. In reception area, custom-coloured upholstery by Kvadrat Maraham. Storage is by Ahrend International. Architectural joinery, partition and doors are by Roethlisberger and Molteni. Planters are by Molteni, accessories by B&B Italia, signage is client supply. Glass by Permasteelisa. Window frames and wall systems by Faram. Paint by Dulux and laminate by Formica.

Ahrend International, available in Australia from Arredorama (61 2) 9552 3022, arredorama.com.au

B&B Italia, available in Australia from Space Furniture (61 2) 8339 7588, spacefurniture.com.au

Dulux 132 525, dulux.com

Faram faram.com

Formica, available in Australia from The Laminex Group 132 136, thelaminexgroup.com.au

KnollTextiles, available in Australia from Woven Image (61 2) 9326 0433, wovenimage.com.au

Kvadrat Maraham (61 2) 9212 4277, kvadratmaharam.com

Molteni, available in Australia from Hub Furniture (61 2) 9217 0700, hubfurniture.com.au

Permasteelisa (61 2) 9755 1788, permasteelisa.com.au

Roethlisberger, available in Australia from Anibou (61 2) 9319 0655, anibou.com.au

Fixtures

Executive suite door hardware is 'White Collection' by Gavin Harris, manufactured by Allgood. In the executive bathroom, tapware and fittings are Dornbracht, MEM. Toilet is 'Stark 1' wall mounted by Duravit.

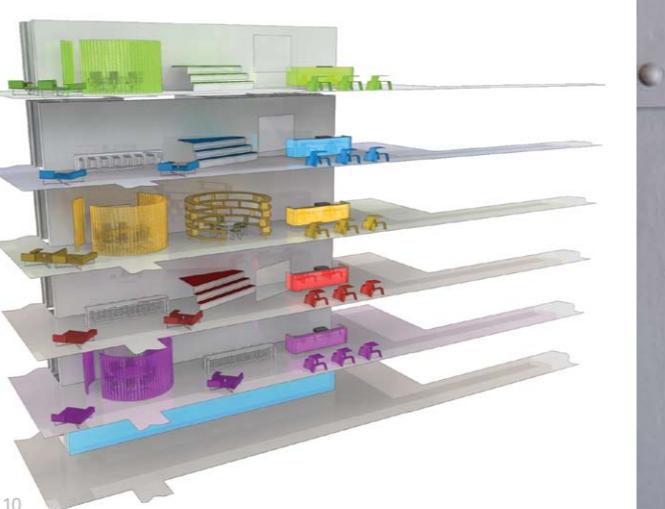
Allgood Hardware allgood.co.uk

Dornbracht dornbracht.com

Duravit, available in Australia from Meco (61 2) 9618 6999, meco.com.au

Client Merck Serono
Architect Murphy Jahn
Interior Designer Mackay + Partners
Project Team Ken Mackay, Gavin Harris, Jacqui Kirby, Brooke Radtke, Kyle Holton, Danyel Pfingsten, Eva Sieber, Eva Tuerk, Julianne Wolf, Katrina Thomas
Structural Engineer EGS
Mechanical Engineer EGS
Electrical Engineer EGS
General Contractor Steiner
Lighting Designer L-Plan
Acoustician AAB – J.Stryjenski & H. Monti
Furniture Specification Mackay + Partners
Joiner Roethlisberger
Landscape Architect Olaxis Architects Paysagistes
Total Floor Area 75,000m²
No. of Floors New buildings: 6; Existing: 3
Average Floor Size 640m²
Total Staff Size 1,200
Completion Date December 2006

Mackay + Partners
(44) (0) 20 7608 1177, mackayandpartners.co.uk



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10 Concept render of speakeasy area on a section of laboratory building, with colour coding for different uses

11 Café with library break-out or meeting area above

Break-out spaces... are visible on every floor, linking the different divisions