

A MULTI-PURPOSE SPACE, Braxton Consulting, Stellenbosch, Tess Paterson for SA Interior Design (2000)

A compact, technology-wise work space fits comfortably into a 50 year old Stellenbosch building.

There's something very calming about simplistic, clutter-free working environments. Something restful in the way that every item has its own place. Braxton Consulting delivers a compact 120m² space that really works. From the start the firm knew exactly what they needed – a reception, private meeting room, boardroom, cellular office and open plan work stations with hot-desking as an option. Says interior designer Raymond Smith of 3D Design, “The only way to reduce space effectively is to design around the vital functions of the interior.”

Those particular functions were soon identified, starting with a private meeting room, placed conveniently behind the reception area. A multi-purpose space, the room serves as a venue for internal meetings, briefing sessions with client's, or hard copy exchange with outside consultants. The space is highly accessible yet sufficiently private, with its airy screen wall of opaque glass separating it from the main entrance. With gentle curves and pared down finishes, the reception enhances the natural flow of the rest of the interior. Smooth metal panelling with a cherry wood counter gives the desk a contemporary edge, and a simple shelving system containing work files in progress is centrally accessed here by all in the firm.

In a convenient walk-through area fronted by the meeting-room, maximum use is made of the available space. “When dealing with smaller, more compact office spaces, every single item must have its own place,” comments Raymond. Here, an orderly ceiling-height shelving system houses all files, with lower curved shelving providing ample space for storage of stationery. Ordinary necessities like the Photostat machine are stationed here – it's where all documents are laid out, compiled and bound.

Carry on walking and you'll reach the open-plan work stations. Characterised by wooden and metal screens that lend privacy, the ‘no-man’ stations, as Raymond describes the hot-desking facility, are functional and understated. The work stations are equipped with the same shelving system used in reception, and the screens have a metal façade, with an inner lining of fabric facing the occupant. This serves both as pinboard and to soundproof the space.

In a concession to complete privacy, and in order to fulfil a long term ideal, the director's cellular office features a wall to wall library – complete with mobile ladder. The modern seating, industrial light fittings and antique roll-top desk all serve to bring a sense of personality to the room. Here,

as in the main boardroom, black leather mixes easily with wood, lending an air of solidity and reliability.

While the palette is predominantly neutral – timber floors, charcoal carpets and the glossy sheen of dark granite – feature-walls of ochre, deep green and face brick introduce colour to the surroundings. A fine example of how to get a compact space to function at its best, the interior is an effective expression of the company's identity.