

Heart of Glass

Although we're very much an interiors title, we can often tell an awful lot about an end user by their building and their exterior environment. Here, in the heart of Surrey, we can, by the beautiful landscaped gardens and impressive office facility at its centre, assume that we're about to meet with an equally impressive, caring and successful company. Assume, we hope, does not always make an ass out of you and me.



Case Study

The new 36,000 sq ft facility of Belron International at Milton Park, Egham, really is an eye-catcher, and, as we enter the welcoming, open reception space, our expectations, if anything, rise even further. Belron, which might not be an instantly recognisable name to many of you, is the parent company of a number of automotive glass replacement brands worldwide,

including the certainly recognisable Autoglass in the UK.

The impressive reception space features a grand large-scale Belron graphic wall, subtle natural and sustainable finishes and leads through to an equally resplendent business lounge, where we find the Belron project team waiting patiently for us. 'We previously had two sites – one in Richmond which

was a beautiful Grade I listed building,' Jason Huggett, Facilities Manager for Belron International commences the story behind the project. 'When we first started there were only two staff members there, which quickly increased to about 70! It was one of those buildings that looked great but once you started using it as an office facility wasn't quite right. We had to adapt our





►►► furniture, fittings and everything else. Eventually we simply outgrew it.

‘Then, in massive contrast to that, we had a site near Heathrow which was serviced accommodation, so all the furniture was supplied to us, we had to use what they had and didn’t bring anything in.

‘What we really wanted to do was to bring those two sites together, into a really nice setting – 12 acres of land – with a new facility and a chance to put our own furniture in, our own AV equipment and to design it to our own specific requirements. We wanted everyone to come together in a building that was fit for purpose, and to bring our technology right up to date.

‘We own this outright – we purchased rather than leasing – which is another big change for us.

‘It was a shame for us to have to move in a way. The two people who started working there – our Chairman Ronnie Lubner and our CEO Gary Lubner fell in love with the building in Richmond and to move from there we had to find the right sort of building. We had quite a decent budget, so could source the right fixtures and fittings here.’

Jason tells us that the former Richmond home was originally an observatory and it was even written into the lease that every Wednesday the space had to be opened up to the public!

The Belron net was then cast and, eventually the site at Egham was discovered. ‘They had a number of very specific requirements,’ Ian Bragg, Director of Building Consultancy for project manager

GVA Grimley reveals. ‘There weren’t many buildings in the area which fitted their criteria. This was actually being built the first time we saw it – it was just the foundations. It was four-year search in total, but this absolutely came together at the right time. Again, it took some time to get the deal done here and the building was eventually bought to Cat A standard.’

Working closely with GVA Grimley, an internal project team, together with a team of leading industry consultants was brought together. These included Scott Brownrigg Interior Design, fit-out specialists Overbury and consultants Operandum to manage the specification and the procurement of the furniture and fittings. ‘The big thing Belron wanted to do was to involve all of the staff on site,’ Jason explains. ‘Rather than the main project team and one or two members of the company coming in and picking and choosing at certain aspects, what Belron wanted to do was to set up a number of groups – a design group, a facilities group, an HR group, an IT group – so we could all make the decisions on everything. This must have frustrated the hell out of a lot of the guys, but it was important to us that everyone helped and could adapt rather than sticking to one little area of expertise. Flexibility was absolutely key to every area.’

‘Everyone had really strong views, and came up with a number of really good proposals,’ adds Ian.

And this, possibly, is key to the success of the project; consultants, specialists, experts and key end user representatives coming together, cross-referencing and cross-

fertilising ideas. It is also clear that this became something of a labour of love for a lot of the people involved.

‘Belron is a lovely company – they’re lovely people,’ Scott Brownrigg Interior Design’s Pernille Stafford tells us. ‘We presented to them and the ethos for the whole design for us was, because it’s such a beautiful setting, to show an ‘inside/outside’ environment. I think that’s what helped us win the project.

‘Often with CAT A you get given a really grey, bland box, but this isn’t – it has well considered materials throughout and there are lots of really nicely designed details and we wanted to further incorporate that rather than fight against it.

‘The only element of the base build that didn’t work for us was the staircase right in reception – which was originally a white box as you came in through the front door. It was the first thing that you saw.

‘Another of the design ethos’ here was transparency – with the outside and the inside reflecting one another. So we took that out and put in the glass and steel staircase that now leads you up to the office space.

‘A big part of the project was obviously getting two offices into one open floorplate and making everyone communicate – hence the stair was really important for visual impact and opening the space up as much as we could.

‘We did numerous staff presentations and they invested a lot of time and energy showing the staff how it would be and how it would work. They are a company that ►►►►►►

Case Study



▶▶▶ invest a great deal in their people – they’re very proud of their people.

‘What this new centre does is excellence in everything: excellence in management, excellence in HR, excellence in IT...which they then filter out to their thousands of employees. They didn’t want this to be opulent, but they did want a ‘wow factor’. We were quite careful but we spent on the things that would communicate values and communicate the right ethos. It was quite a fine line.’

Operandum’s John James takes over. ‘GVA recommended using Operandum to provide fee-based consultancy and procurement on this project for several reasons: firstly, the size of the spend meant that transparency and accountability were key to delivering value and savings to the client; secondly, there was a need to consult and liaise with a wide user group, and a varied team of specialists; and thirdly it was vital that the selection process was independent and thorough. This is why a fee-based furniture consultancy was the chosen route, as through Operandum they were able to call on a dedicated resource, and a level of expertise suited to a project of this complexity.’

Within the flexible design, staff and visitors are offered a variety of settings in which to work within the office environment, whilst – weather permitting – people are also encouraged to meet within the beautifully landscaped grounds. We can honestly say we’ve never seen such a fine array of ‘garden furniture’.

In fact, the quality of furniture, fixtures and fittings continues throughout. The 12 acre grounds of Milton Park have been reflected into the internal landscape utilising a palette of fresh green, white and natural timbers. The team ensured that the design enabled the stunning vistas to be appreciated at all points in the building. To this end the ground floor reception was completely opened up to the business lounge to allow visitor access through the space to the striking walled garden beyond.

The smart, fresh business lounge leads to a series of meeting rooms and a stunning boardroom, which again features great natural finishes and brilliant oversized lighting pendants.

The ‘Glasshouse Restaurant’ is in fact much more than a basic staff cafeteria, offering employees a variety of settings, views over the terrace and gardens and even

freshly baked bread and a brilliant selection of high quality foods and drinks.

Moving back through the open reception and up the glass and steel stairs we get a first glimpse at the bright, open and modern working hub of the space. Again, a variety of work settings are available, with Bene’s Parc system providing cool breakout space with full plug and play facilities, whilst the large floorplate is broken up with a series of dramatic floor-to-ceiling coloured shards of ‘glass’ – very much in keeping with the nature of Belron’s business. Further facilities away from the desk are provided by a more collaborative tea/coffee/breakout point at the core of the floor.

We should also mention that the exhaustive furniture programme we chatted about a little earlier is evident everywhere you look – from the farthest nooks of the cafeteria, through to the exterior decking, working floor and business suite. This really is a Who’s Who of contemporary workplace products – ranging from B&B Italia, Walter Knoll, Lamphults and Vitra through to Arpa, Bene, Knoll and Herman Miller.

For once, we were clearly right to assume ●

essential ingredients |

Client • **Belron** | Interior Design • **Scott Brownrigg Interior Design** 020 7240 7766

Fit-Out Contractor • **Overbury** | Project Manager • **GVA Grimley** | Furniture Consultant • **Operandum** 020 7492 1850

Systems Furniture • **Vitra** 020 7608 6200

Task Seating • **Herman Miller** 0845 226 7202

Storage • **Maine** 01908 271688

Breakout Areas • **Bene** 020 7689 1234

Business Lounge & Reception • **B&B Italia** 020 7591 8111

Internal Meeting Rooms • **JCL** 020 7492 1890 / **Vitra** 020 7608 6200

Terrace • **Vitra** 020 7608 6200 / **Gaudio Blasco** +34 902 530 302

Restaurant • **Arper** +39 0422 7918 / **Girsberger** 020 7490 3223

Flooring • Various inc. **Milliken** 01942 612777

Bonar Floors 0800 0935 258 / **InterfaceFLOR** 08705 304030