



PICTURES BY TRACY TAN

The Googleplex in Sydney (pictured above) is a playground of colours, themed-rooms and a series of "living walls".

That's your office?

Traditional workspaces are a relic of the past. Aine Dowling discovers three companies with innovative offices that look more like playgrounds.

Fun and funky Googleplex, Sydney

Do you go to work dreaming of a company chef whipping up eggs Benedict in readiness for your arrival? Or maybe you'll start the day in a beach hut in the café with fresh juice, yoghurt and muesli from the breakfast menu.

For Google's Sydney staff this is no dream. Google's Pyrmont office was opened by the Governor-General, Quentin Bryce in June 2009. The company employs over 350 staff, who enjoy benefits such as a fully serviced beach themed café with a menu that

changes daily; a massage room, and games room complete with table tennis and pool tables and Wii – and fabulous harbour views.

And it doesn't stop there. Funky furniture and strong primary colours feature in Google's interior design, and squishy bean bags in sunny yellows and daring reds compete with sofas in bright blue and grass green. Blue-and-white-striped beach hammocks hover over a blue floor while a nearby art deco palm tree completes the illusion of your private lagoon.

Just too cool



Whichever way you look at it, the Googleplex is a cool place to be – at least Kate Conroy thinks so.

In her late 20s Kate is an AdWords product specialist who has worked at Google for four years. Kate helps the sales team understand and launch new ad-related products in Australia and New Zealand and is a huge

Macquarie Bank is designed around the concept of activity-based workspaces.

GOOGLE GOODNESS

- ▶ Six-star Green Star rating for building design
- ▶ Open plan design including senior management
- ▶ Games room with Wii and pool table
- ▶ Free breakfast, lunch and dinner
- ▶ Fabulous harbour views
- ▶ Quiet rooms encouraging creative thinking

fan of the low-level open plan design of the office which, she says, encourages interaction and communication between staff members.

A main feature of the office space are the “living walls” which are a framework covered in live plants and closely resembling a rainforest. Kate explains: “There are 2.4 plants per person and there are two living walls just behind my desk – they make the whole environment less sterile.”

Just past the jungle walls are the tents. Best described as single-person, khaki domes, the tents are placed in cosy corners and surrounded by more potted plants for privacy. “When you need to focus or are working late and need a power nap, the tents are great,” says Kate. “And they’re even better now they have bean bags in them, though I prefer the sun loungers as they have a great view of the harbour. I often sit on a lounge and find my thoughts are clearer and more creative.”

While Google expects its staff to put in the hard yards there is some compensation. “It’s the little things that make it. If you ride your bike to work, walk, or rollerblade, Google will donate \$5 for each day you do this to a charity of your choice, so even before you’ve got in the door your day feels better,” says Kate. “You can walk through the door in your sneakers and you’re more comfortable, then you get to start your day with a free breakfast overlooking the harbour. You haven’t even done any work yet, but you still feel positive about being here.”



Space station
Macquarie Bank, Sydney

Take a peek into One Shelley Street and catch a glimpse of the future in office workspace design.

When the new Macquarie Bank offices opened last year it heralded a new concept in the workplace. You only have to walk in there to realise that this is no ordinary office.

The 11-storey building facade is made of glass and steel poles. The internal design is two rectangular floor plates separated by a central void, with each workspace or office looking down, and sometimes jutting out into the open space. Even the lifts running up and down the full height of the building are glass. The building is flooded with natural light and the feel is open and spacious.

Colour your world

Take a walk along the floor plates and ‘bold’ springs to mind – no bland grey or beige furniture here. Colours are vibrant and exciting and include lime green, hot pink, lipstick red, royal blue, deep purple and burnt orange. It’s like working inside a rainbow.

Each floor incorporates a themed plaza. The idea is that each plaza is a destination, encouraging staff to move around their ‘neighbourhood’ and designed to foster collaboration, participation and productivity.

The library walls are papered to resemble filled bookshelves, while a coffee house includes café-style meeting booths. The garden plaza houses hundreds of live plants in huge pots creating garden islands around the meeting tables, and a playroom portrays a child’s playground with workstations designed to look like merry-go-rounds and meeting tables are see-saws.

Macquarie architects also went green. Chilled beams throughout the building use harbour water for cooling, while the lighting is zone controlled. A main staircase reduces elevator use by 50 per cent – saving on energy and keeping staff fit.

EFFICIENT FEATURES

- ▶ Six-star Green Star rating for building design
- ▶ Laptop computers – saving 3,500 tonnes of carbon emissions per annum
- ▶ Paper usage lowered by 35 per cent
- ▶ Double-glazed reflective glass allows maximum natural light
- ▶ Harbour water for cooling saves 30,000 litres of water a day
- ▶ DALI lighting system saves 600 tonnes of carbon emissions per annum
- ▶ Consolidating office space saving \$110 million over 10 years



Associate director of public relations and communications Laura Bramwell, 29, deals with external and internal communications for the banking and financial services group. Laura has been with Macquarie for just over three years.

Flexible options

“The building is large and open plan and enables us to choose to work in an area that suits the task we’re doing at a particular time,” says Laura.

“If we need to have meetings or discussions we go to a collaboration desk, whereas if we’re reading or need some focus time we use a quiet room or library.”

The flexible workspace arrangement means staff can move around depending on their activity, and 55 per cent of the 3,000 employees housed in the building, regularly change their environment by changing their workstation.

“There are small conversation rooms where you can have quiet discussions or private phone calls, and larger breakout rooms for livelier discussions where we can share ideas. The design allows us to work more closely together and be more collaborative and productive.”

Laura continues: “We all have laptops which increases our mobility. Our ‘anchor point’ is our locker where we can keep personal items and each morning we just take out what we need for the day. Many staff have family photos on their laptop so they carry their personal ‘space’ with them.

“I would find it hard to go back to a traditional environment. I believe activity-based workspaces here foster collaboration and the sharing of knowledge and ideas. It’s a more efficient and productive way of working.”

Lean and green

ANZ Docklands, Melbourne

Water consumption, climate change and renewable energy are the buzz words of today's lifestyle. Waste reduction and recycling are in the forefront when it comes to our home and office, and most kitchens now contain food waste bins for garden compost, plus paper, glass and plastic recycling bins alongside the general rubbish.

ANZ Docklands opened in November 2009 and has taken conservation to new heights, with the award of a six-star Green Star Office Design V2 rating from the Green Building Council of Australia.

Housing around 6,500 ANZ employees, this global headquarters produces 70 per cent less greenhouse gas emissions; generates most of its own electricity through a tri-generation plant using solar and wind energy, and uses approximately 50 per cent less potable water than a standard Australian office.

But ANZ hasn't stopped there.

They are now working on achieving a five-star Green rating for its internal workspace and environment. The phrase 'the paperless office' is not just jargon here and even the humble waste paper basket has vanished from sight.

Driven by design

Despite their environmental and sustainable focus, it didn't stop ANZ from having a bit of fun with their interior design. The central spacious atrium allows natural light across all floors and creates a sense of openness and freedom. Floor coverings include huge pattern blocks and swirls of colour, while tables, chairs and fixed furnishings feature solid reds, oranges and pinks.

While you're waiting, cradle yourself in large comfy armchair shaped like a hand, or take your chances on the 'kissing' seat – a two-seater, bright red lip-shaped sofa. If you prefer to recline while

reading or researching on your laptop, put your feet up on a hot pink chaise longue, or simply be inspired by the stunning view of Docklands Marina.

The building also includes a crèche and gymnasium, a vibrant mix of boutique shops and restaurants, and parking for cars, scooters and bicycles.

Sustainable style



Self confessed eco-warrior Danielle Curry is head of ATM Banking. Now in her 30s, Danielle has worked for ANZ for seven years and currently looks after

the Australian ATM networks to deliver ATM services to customers.

"It's really important for me to work in an organisation focused on sustainability," says Danielle. "Moving towards a paperless environment was a totally different way of operating for most of us when we moved here, but I think the whole sustainable issue just contributes to the general wellbeing of the employees and that makes them much happier and more productive. Everyone came on board very quickly and we all love the whole environment.

"The way the building is designed encourages collaboration with colleagues as all areas are open plan. Out of 600 rooms only 80 are individual offices, and these are used for visitors and key staff. We have a mix of desktop and laptop computers and people are happy to hot desk and move around. I think it would be a real culture shock now for many of us to go back to working in a traditional office environment.

"Personally, the main attraction in working here is definitely the sustainability. I believe it is a significant factor in staff attraction at ANZ Docklands."

THE ANZ ENVIRONMENT

- ▶ River cooling – Yarra River water supplements air conditioning
- ▶ Green roof – planted with drought tolerant plants
- ▶ Solar power – 1,000 square metres of solar cells for renewable energy
- ▶ Wind turbines – roof mounted to supplement on-site electricity
- ▶ Black water recycling – for use in flushing toilets
- ▶ Storm water – rain water is collected and irrigates the roof, plants, terracing and gardens.

