

ON THE TABLE

WORDS BY Charlotte Taylor

Flexible, domestic
and connected – as
work styles continue
to evolve, so do
the factors that
employees require
from their desking



→ Bestuhl's Albion in a Chiswick Park marketing firm



→ Interaction's ping-pong tables in the FluidOne offices



Rebecca Faith

Visit any contract furniture trade show and you'll spot the surface and material changes being made across the industry. The domestication of the office aesthetic is seeing more designers opt for warm, natural materials and the desk is no exception, with brands introducing a variety of wood and wooden effect designs.

Bestuhl was recently selected by Tribe Furniture and ThirdWay Interiors to provide the desking for a marketing office at Chiswick Park in London. The project had a mid-century-influenced aesthetic and was full of raw industrial features such as timber and untreated metals; a highlight piece is the Albion collaborative desking, a six-person workstation with a shared oak-stave top.

Beyond domestic materials, there are some great examples of designers creating smaller, quirkier

work tables. Flexibility and homely appeal are promised by Jennifer Newman Studio's Triangle range of tables and stools. Designed for inside and outside use, in domestic and work environments, the products add splashes of colour to a workspace and can also be tessellated, providing hackable work or breakout zones for employees.

As staff are required to work more flexibly, clever workstation design can help. Iondesign's Individual Desk, for example, can be

used as both a desk and conference table. The steel table is individually customised, a function influenced by the studio's experience of clients requesting more flexible desking. "With rising real estate costs, floorplans will have to become more flexible," says Christoph Fleckenstein, of Iondesign Berlin.

As with Newman's tables, colour plays an important part. "As brands focus more and more on identifiable interior designs in their offices, the complete freedom in colour choice

→ londesign's desks can be combined as a conference table

offers individual desks which match any commercial interior," says londesign's Anja Götz.

Choice of workstation is essential to the increase of flexible and activity-based workplaces and this was the basis of the desking solutions for Interaction's design for IT company FluidOne's London office. Within the main workspace Interaction created an overflow hot-desking area to suit flexible working styles and maximise physical well-being: movement is encouraged by the ad-hoc meeting/collaborative areas in between the desking.

A multi-functional ping-pong table serves as a breakout or dining table and additional meeting, hotdesking and collaborative space (thanks to power supply and video conferencing screens on the wall). Employees also have a choice of high and low tables which can be used as dining tables at lunch as well as providing alternative working space.

"Our solution for this project was to create a hub with pockets of agile spaces, including the diverse ping-pong table, used for dining, focus working, meeting or collaborating," says Nathan Harris, a designer at Interaction. "We are seeing the demand for these flexible hubs grow in office design – similar to that coffee-shop vibe – as it is a great way to get the most out of your space. Singular desks or tables do not need to have one static purpose any more. The possibilities are countless."

Technology is one of the most important drivers for change in desk design. Scott Lesizza, a founding principal of Workwell Partners – a provider of workspace furnishing solutions based in New York – suggests that "secure wireless connections, not being tethered to a computer, and longer lasting laptop batteries" are some of the key factors enabling workplace designers to create flexible desks and workstations.

Lesizza explains that current trends are very much industry dependent. For fintech companies "the trend is to offer sit-to-stand desks, and densify the space as much as possible. Most of these



Tobias Witte



employees are at their desks for the vast majority of the workday, resulting in less emphasis on collaborative areas and more on a desking solution that is a quality height-adjustable desk that can accommodate the technology required."

As for other office types, collaborative zones and desking are the focus: "The majority of a company's furniture budget is now being put into open areas where people can grab their laptop and work, such as a cafe, lounge, small ☺

↑ Lauckgroup used retractable power cords for Atlassian

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Carlo David

“Desks are being simplified for maximum mobility and soft seating is reconfigured to include connections to power/data”

↑ New-York based Workwell's design for a financial institution

→ Jennifer Newman Studio's flexible Triangle series



conference/meeting room or outdoor patio setting. In contrast, individual workstations or desks are remaining more plain and relatively inexpensive.” In these cases it is important for designers and managers to remember that staff will still want to personalise their desks, even if they don't have ownership.

Raul Baeza, associate and senior designer at Texas-based interior architecture firm Lauckgroup, agrees that “square footage that once was allocated for personal workspace is now being recaptured for more hospitality-style settings”.

He adds: “As employees adapt to working extended times in living room-like seating, equal focus is now being placed on ergonomics, connectivity and functionality of those settings. Desks are being

simplified for maximum mobility, and soft seating is being reconfigured to include connections to power/data and a structure that supports a working posture.” He highlights the role of data over paper storage, as wireless technology and devices become “smaller, more powerful, faster and untethered”.

For software company Atlassian, Lauckgroup created a flexible ceiling grid of retractable power cords to meet open-plan needs and to keep the floor clear for ultimate desk mobility. When working with Dropbox, it adapted the company's trellis power system so mobile workstations would have constant access to power and data within a 2m radius throughout their open spaces.

Baeza believes that the next step in desking is to move beyond clever connectivity and to create “workstations that have integrated power packs, completely disconnecting the workstation and eliminating the need for close proximity to power receptacles”. ■