

LEE PENSON

CEO, Penson Group, London

Q. WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORKING ON?

A. Projects including the masterplan of 'M26', an eco-warrior business park of 26 ha that will include Penson's Millipede Building, which is more than a mile long. The park includes a maze with the idea that during summer days one's office wall is in fact a hedge. The planning application will be made in early 2008 and every building has a new, refreshing design ethos and way of functioning. There's no point designing such a large project if it's going to be run-of-the-mill.

Q. WHAT'S THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE YOU FACE IN WORKPLACE DESIGN?

A. I am pushing very hard for something different. In our studio I have banned cedar planking, coloured feature walls, gimmicky graphics, curvy carpet sections and a number of other commonly used add-ons. We rarely use suspended ceilings or off-the-shelf light fittings, as we tend to design our own, project by project. I also ban labels, particularly the sustainability label. That means no wind turbines, PV cells, solar panels or any other sustainable 'strap-ons'. It's time to move on at a design level in the mainstream office sector. We're working with scientists to create a new foam core composite structure made from recycled plastics, and we're looking at how to use seawater, as it will be freely available into the future.

Q. HOW IS THE MARKET CHANGING?

A. We should use wireless to create more freedom at work. Our M26 business park has HQs where the cafes are at roof level, overlooking the great views of the Kent Downs. And on the ground floors office workers can pick up their laptop, walk a few yards and sit outside working on wireless. Having this choice lessens, for some, their anxiety about being chained to a desk. But I don't believe offices will ever disappear completely.

Q. WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT THE DESIGN OF YOUR OWN OFFICE?

A. Ironically, what I love the most is the fact that I sit right in the middle of things. There's no hierarchy here, just a bunch of people socialising at work over the projects they're entrusted with. The cooler the project, the greater the buzz.

Q. WHAT IS THE NEXT BIG REVOLUTION IN DESIGN?

A. One of the wonderful aspects of our industry is that we have a great canvas to explore. If we keep exploring at Penson, we may strike gold with an idea that simply everyone wants. Keep practising, and one day you'll discover something very cool, functional and marketable that everyone wants.

Q. WHAT WOULD YOUR ADVICE BE TO ARCHITECTS AND INTERIOR DESIGNERS?

A. As above. If you don't design, you won't discover it.



#2 Penson's refurb of the smartcard company Cubic Corp's Redhill offices

#2



“Why does an office have to look like an office? A cool idea would be to move to the point where office space makes life better for both those who hate work and those who are addicted to it”

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