

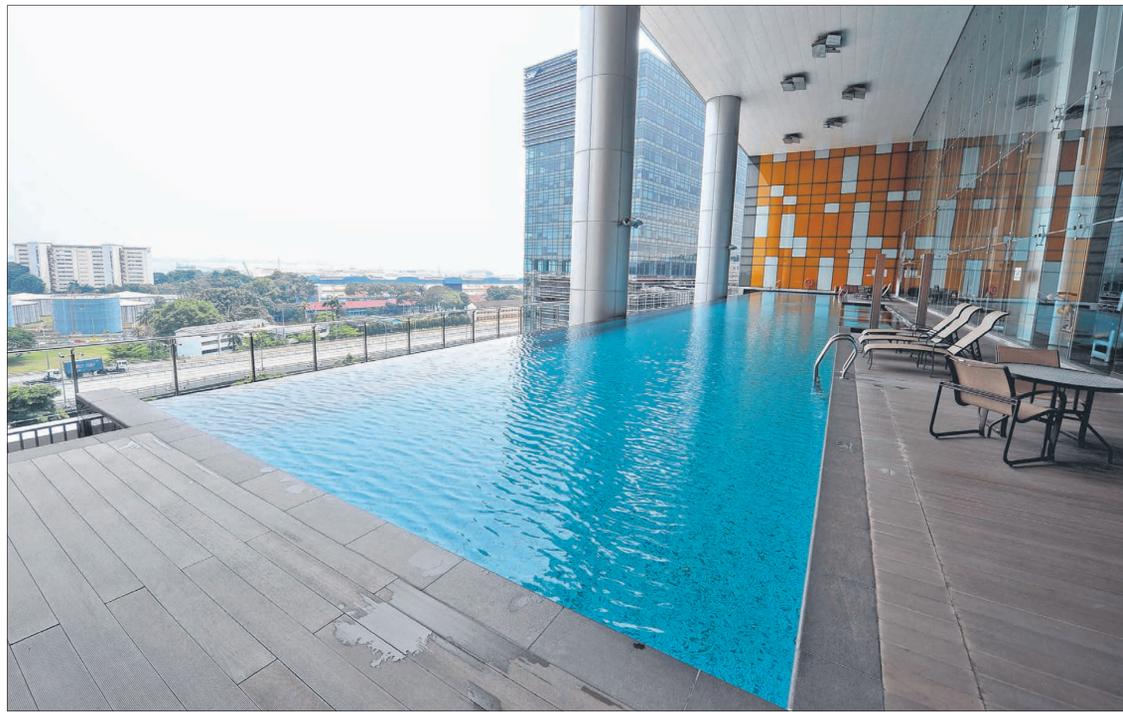
HAVE A SPLASH AT WORK

A hair salon, a daybed and funky spaces are some fun things you can now find in offices

Natasha Ann Zachariah

High-walled cubicles, muted colours and a lone water dispenser used to be the default decor in offices here. But many companies are now adding fun and colourful elements to their working spaces to keep employees happy. For instance, Facebook's office in Cecil Street takes a leaf out of its social

networking website and has an actual wall for employees to scribble on. Internet giant Google's Singapore headquarters at Marina View has a laid-back vibe – it is kitted out with a karaoke lounge and hammocks. And more firms, not just those in the creative or tech industry, are doing away with regular workstations. At consumer goods company Unilever Asia's Singapore office in Pasir Panjang, its brightly coloured premises houses, among others, a hair salon and grocery store (see other story). Its human resource director Trisha Duran, 42, says: "It's really like running a hotel here. People like it so much that they actually want to work here all the time." Life! checks it out as well as two other offices – an energy recruitment agency and a co-working space – that will give anyone office envy. natashaz@sph.com.sg



The pool (left) outside the Fitness First gym is open to Unilever Asia's employees, who also get to enjoy Ben & Jerry's ice cream and milkshakes at a Lipton cafe (above) on their company premises. A vertical garden (right) brings the outdoors into its fifth-floor office. ST PHOTOS: EDWARD TEO



Get your hair cut in the office

Staff at Unilever Asia's headquarters here never have to worry about a bad hair day. If they need a new coiffure, they can just pop into the hair salon in their office. The 145,000 sq ft space, spread over six stories in Mapletree Business City in Pasir Panjang, feels like a one-stop shop for employees. Aside from the hair salon, there is a grocery store where they can pick up products from the company's food labels and a spa for facials. Staff can use the services for a nominal fee. Their in-office store buys are also at discounted rates. There is also a kitchen, which has been decked out like a hotel kitchen, for the company's resident chief chef Yen Koh to test food products. Staff can also head to the 44m-long infinity pool belonging to Fitness First for a dip. It is outside the gym, where Unilever employees get free membership. The office, which opened about 18

months ago, was designed by SCA Design, part of architectural practice Ong&Ong. Previously, the company had about 400 staff spread across four offices here. It has since expanded and now houses 975 employees under one roof. The hallmark of its new headquarters is the zig-zag staircase, which links all six levels – something Unilever asked the developer for permission to build. Human resource director Trisha Duran, 42, says: "This is really the heart of the office, where people meet and connect through the day. It also saves electricity because people are taking the stairs instead of the lift now." In keeping with the company's eco-friendly drive, there are recycling bins for employees to sort their trash. There is also a Park level, on the third floor, which resembles an indoor garden, with trees in custom-designed planters. In a sign of changing working styles, the office caters to people who have flexible work hours. Instead of being desk-bound, these employees can work in "breakout areas" or communal spaces, such as sofas and counters in the pantry areas, which have powerpoints they can easily plug their laptops into. Ms Duran says the company is not worried about creating an office with a vibe that is too chilled-out, resulting in all play and no work. "We're not clock-watchers, so it's up to them to deliver their work," she says.



A zig-zag staircase links all six floors of the company and helps it save electricity as its staff no longer need to take lifts to reach the different floors.



Set up like a professional kitchen, this area lets staff conduct demonstrations. Adjoining it is the Western Kitchen, which can accommodate more than 20 people in a class.



Opened last week, the Singapore office of British energy recruitment agency Spencer Ogden has a Union Jack couch (above). The open-concept office also features astro-turf (right), or fake grass. ST PHOTOS: KUA CHEE SIONG



Watch out for the astro-turf

On the 23rd floor of The Central building in Eu Tong Sen Street, employees sit around huge tables, chatting away on wireless headsets amid bonsai plants. Astro-turf, or fake grass, "grows" underfoot. Off to one side of the room, The Diner – styled after a 1950s American diner, complete with a chilli-red Smeg refrigerator – beckons. On the other end, a spruce-green Club Room, with a Chesterfield sofa, framed coats of arms on the wall and a horse-mounted Mongolian warrior statue, is used for meetings. Elsewhere, a Union Jack couch sits under a portrait of a Queen Elizabeth II-lookalike in sunglasses. Welcome to energy recruitment agency Spencer Ogden's Singapore office. The firm, which is about three years old and has its headquarters in London, matches energy professionals with employers in

sectors such as oil and gas and nuclear markets. Since opening last week, its Singapore office – its eighth in the world and also the Asia-Pacific headquarters – has had people in the industry talking. And the boss' wife is behind those eclectic interiors. Mrs Bonita Spencer-Perceval is married to the firm's co-founder and chief executive officer David Spencer-Perceval, 42. A former dancer who trained in the Royal Ballet in London, she later became an image consultant and costume designer, working with the likes of English music group Take That. Now design director at Spencer Ogden, there are plans to open outposts in New York, Brazil, Germany and South Africa this year. Mrs Spencer-Perceval, 62, says: "We moved a lot and I've designed all our houses. I've had no training



as an interior designer, but I've always had an eye for it. So David asked me to come in and do the offices." She worked with Space Matrix, a design consultancy here, to create the look of the Singapore office. Last November, she flew here from her home in Chelsea to source for items and take photos, before flying back to mull over her choices. She returned about six weeks ago and began unearthing finds in shops such as Chinese antique store Just Anthony in Upper Paya Lebar Road and home decor shop Taylor B in Keppel Road. The couple also shipped some of their own furnishings – the Mongolian warrior on a horse in the Club Room and an opium daybed in the boardroom, which is called the "Not So Bored" Room.



An opium daybed (above), part of the furniture collection of the company founder, takes pride of place in the boardroom. Employees get to announce their closing of deals by hitting the office gong (above left). The pantry (below), named the Diner, is styled after a 1950s American diner.

Mrs Spencer-Perceval says: "We collect these items on our trips. There's something in all the offices from our homes and it feels like there's a little part of us there." On the open-concept office, she says: "There are people in charge, but David doesn't want anyone to feel like the underdog. "Everyone is equal at that table and works just as hard," she adds, of the knights of the round table-like seating arrangement. She is not worried about the office coming across as kitschy. While declining to reveal the budget, she says: "It's a gamble, but we have been proven right thus far. Every person who has walked through the door has loved it. I'm fearless about attempting to create something out of the ordinary."



Named Break, this communal pantry at Makespace comes with a concrete I-beam tabletop.

Zoned out office

Surrounded by greasy car workshops, hardware stores and other small manufacturers in the Lavender industrial area is a 151 sq m office shared by seven businesses and individuals. Called the Makespace Co-Working Office, in King George's Building, the office spot caters to modest businesses and start-ups that do not need a physical office all the time. It costs between \$30, to use it for a day, and \$375 to rent for a month. Of the office's unusual location, owner Kevin Lim, 37, says: "I liked that the area has a lot of local heritage in terms of the architecture, as well as the trades that are still going on around it."

Inside Makespace, it is a different story from the grimy surrounds. The year-old office is configured into six colour zones, each with a cool name. These include the green zone named Storm, where workers can sprawl on tatami-like loungers as they brainstorm with one another. The blue Seriously area is where companies, who are staying for a longer period, can set up their own desktops and plug into work on a regular basis. Mr Lim, who trained at London's Architectural Association and designs for his own architectural design agency Studio Skim, says: "Offices are a major part of people's lives because they spend most of their time here. It's important that through the design, they feel a bit more comfortable here."

The space is co-shared with a variety of businesses, such as technology start-ups and multimedia companies. Users hail from different countries such as France, Japan and the United States. It took about five months to design and build Makespace. While declining to reveal the budget, Mr Lim kept the carbon footprint and costs down by buying materials from nearby stores. Some of the areas have also been deliberately kept bare or have portable items such as movable whiteboards. "You have to adapt your design to the needs of the people who are using it," says Mr Lim. "Some spaces look very good but they are not very usable.



The black wet zone offers vertical bicycle racks, individual lockers and shower facilities for those who cycle to work. PHOTOS: JEREMY SAN



The U meeting room (above) has PVC curtains for privacy while the B2B and Storm zones (top) mix work and play.

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