

## Honor Award

### MACQUARIE GROUP HEADQUARTERS

**Client** Macquarie Group Ltd.

**Location** Sydney, Australia

**Architecture** Clive Wilkinson Architects (interior), Fitzpatrick & Partners (exterior)

**Environmental Graphic Design**  
EGG Office

**Design Team** Christian Daniels (principal), Jonathan Mark (design director), Jane Bogart (copywriter), Kate Tews (project manager and copywriter)

**Fabrication** Wizardry Imaging & Signs (primary fabricator), Cunneen Signs (exterior digital totem signs)

**Photos** Christian Daniels/EGG Office, Shannon McGrath

This page: EGG Office's environmental graphics for the Macquarie Group Ltd.—Australia's largest investment banking company—include a custom crosshatch font inspired by the diagrid framework over the building's glass facade.

LED totems at the entrance to the building point visitors toward the second-level lobby and introduce the crosshatch pattern.

# Clear Connections

A Sydney bank uses architecture and wayfinding to support a radical new work model. BY JENNIFER VOLLAND

**TRANSPARENCY** is a big buzzword these days. Politicians and corporations, psychologists and members of the media all strive for it or, at the very least, toss around the word as some sort of ideal practice. But what does it really mean? And more importantly, what does it look like? Ironically, an example may be found in the type of place that prompted the large-scale application of this word in the first place: a financial institution.

Macquarie Group Limited has always been a forward-thinking company. In creating its new Sydney headquarters, the bank sought to showcase its brand attributes—an open business model, a global outlook, and collaborative work behavior—within the physical setting. So the interior expanses of the 10-story, 330,000-sq-ft. headquarters designed by Clive Wilkinson Architects (Los Angeles) look more like an advertising agency than the base for Australia's largest investment bank.



This page: To emphasize Macquarie's core values of transparency and connectedness, Clive Wilkinson Architects created a vertical village of conference rooms and lounges that rises through the atrium and spreads out amongst the floors. Superscaled vinyl numbers make them easy to find.

**Jury comments**

*"Wonderful application of the 'transparency' concept. Excellent balance of color, graphics, and materials application."*



You won't find hierarchy of space, private offices, or even very many solid or opaque walls. Instead, the bank's employees—among them, private investors, attorneys, financial planners, sales associates, and support staff—conduct business in mobile work environments and, when meeting with each other or clients, congregate in a vertical village of conference rooms and lounges that rises through the atrium and spreads out amongst the floors.

Helping to visually clarify the new workspace, and providing wayfinding cues in

this unconventional corporate environment, was the job of EGG Office (Los Angeles).

**Transforming the workplace**

In planning for the new building, the Macquarie team knew they wanted a creative banking space. They visited the head office of the Tilburg, Netherlands-based insurance company Interpolis, and it completely opened their eyes. Interpolis is known for its activity-based working (ABW) model, an alternative work style developed by Veldhoen + Company. Based on the

philosophy that working in different places can increase productivity, ABW allows employees to take technology with them and select the locations that suit the task at hand.

"We were doing a fit-out project and then it really became a business transformation," explains Anthony Henry, Macquarie's director of design. "We used this model as our goal and broadened our vision to include a change-management component. We looked seriously at technology, reducing paper, and opening

the lines of communication. The whole program fit well within a broader work culture that empowered the employee."

To facilitate this new way of working, Clive Wilkinson Architects divided each floor into five neighborhoods of approximately 100 people. Within the office floors, themed plazas were designed based on familiar collaboration typologies: the dining table, the library, the garden, the tree house, the playroom, and the coffee house.

Below: In the reception area, Macquarie's logo is rendered in black 3M vinyl wrapped around steel cylindrical tubes.

Below and opposite: Universally recognized icons are rendered heroically throughout the space.



### Graphic transparency

Without typical wayfinding cues, the workplace required a strong navigation system to orient and facilitate the movement of approximately 2,800 employees. While the architects fostered connectivity with a generous use of glass and clear sight lines, the EGG Office team, led by principal Christian Daniels, supplemented the interior design with graphics designed to help visually clarify the transformation of Macquarie's business model and its workspace.

"The biggest challenge was developing a graphic language that emphasized the brand attributes and site-specific location and, at the same time, tied in all the different types of spaces," explains Daniels. His team chose to integrate the vernacular of the building's

exterior, a steel diagonal pattern over a glass façade, to create an identity that unifies the outside and inside.

This diagrid pattern became the inspiration for the custom font and pictograms that appear throughout the space. EGG Office first reintroduced it in the entry plaza, where tall, slim totems with animated LED screens greet visitors and guide them to the second-floor lobby.

In the lobby, the overarching graphic language is fully revealed. Glass-walled meeting pods, inspired by shipping containers from neighboring Sydney harbor, cantilever dramatically over the atrium. They appear at varying levels, seemingly random in placement, like branches of a tree. Locating one might prove disorienting if not for the large-scale vinyl numbers in a

crosshatch pattern suggestive of the exterior diagrid. But these supergraphics do much more than address wayfinding. Each room's activities are either partially or fully revealed through the open patterns, reinforcing the concept of transparency so intrinsic to the company philosophy.

The building's occupants navigate this unconventional space by following its distinct visual language. "Traditionally, it's about a room number and a letter. Here, when you get to a floor it's about finding a zone but no specific desk," explains Daniels. "Once you get the strategy, it's almost easier to execute because it is not about being redundant and repetition. In the planning phase, we calculated the design very specifically, but in practice, it is experienced very organically."

A common visual language reinforces intuitive wayfinding. On individual floors, locker storage banks with corresponding numbers and letters in the familiar crosshatch pattern provide anchor points. The pattern also appears in universal icons: the shape of a paperclip to signify a supply room or the shape of a body to denote a bathroom area.

EGG Office also supplemented the interior architectural scheme with unique graphic elements and corresponding color palettes that provide workspaces with their own unique identities. An interlocking structure of birch plywood and wall coverings of abstracted bark and leaf patterns define the tree house. A table-height ribbon of glossy white Corian, punctuated by

Right: Superscaled neighborhood identifiers—cut vinyl on the side surfaces of a bank of employee lockers—delineate the level and neighborhood location. Lockers help employees move freely among the workspaces.

Bottom: EGG Office rendered floor directories in vinyl directly on the glass elevator banks. Rather than providing an exhaustive list of rooms, the simplified maps use colors and shapes to denote room functions.

#### Jury comments

*“These designers have helped to create a work environment that appears to be an enjoyable place filled with unexpected, light-hearted surprises. This shows that even the typically mundane restroom or office supply closet can be an individual expression and an extension of an architectural palette.”*



passages decaled with oversized candelabra and silverware, snakes through the dining area. Workstations wrapped with images of book spines and magazine stacks populate the library. And expanses of bright-colored flooring and circular meeting areas draped in diaphanous panels of orange, purple, and gold delineate the playroom.

#### Making the cuts

As simple as they look in situ, the crosshatch patterns were not so simple to execute. Kelly Wallace, project manager at Wizardry Imaging and Signs (Sydney), coordinated the fabrication of the computer cut, digitally printed vinyl.

“When you computer cut something, it is like a regular sticker,” Wallace explains. “You have to pull off the backing

and, because we had to cut out by hand all the little squares between the crisscross pattern, it was time consuming. If the vinyl flipped over during application and stuck together, we had to do it all again. It was quite intense.”

And that’s just the beginning. The tricky placement of the pods presented further obstacles. EGG Office’s design specified that the vinyl numbers go on the outside of the glass versus the inside, where they would be susceptible to reflection and lack of definition. Because the pods essentially hang in the atrium space, there is no easy access. To apply the graphics, the fabricators ended up using the same rail tracking system and ropes used by window washers.



Below: Liberated from their cubicles, Macquarie employees can choose their work locations to suit the task at hand. Clive Wilkinson Architects divided each floor into five neighborhoods and designed themed plazas based on familiar

collaboration typologies: the dining table, the library, the garden, the tree house, the playroom, and the coffee house. EGG Design added unique graphic elements and corresponding color palettes.

Bottom: To reinforce the theme on the treehouse floor, EGG Office designed cut-vinyl wall graphics that abstractly suggest bark and leaves.



### Success story

A successful wayfinding and environmental graphics system meant conventional signage could be reduced. EGG Office minimized directional signs. Simplified maps for each floor appear as vinyl graphics on the elevator bank, where again, glass is used to reinforce transparency. The team reduced the map details to major areas: pods appear as chartreuse cubes; blue denotes the anchor

zones; white represents the bookable meeting areas. This handy reference tool, however, often plays second fiddle to chance encounters. Many employees opt to travel up and down the monumental staircase and actively engage themselves in the building's dynamic environment.

When a company takes a leap of faith and says goodbye to the cubicle, the role of environmental graphic

design becomes all the more relevant. "The environmental graphics created a much richer landscape," says Henry. "It was important that wayfinding was clear because this was such a new way of working for us." And more than just orienting people in the new space, environmental graphics became a tool for communicating a singular vision, creating a meaningful workplace, and cultivating an atmosphere

where collaboration can occur.

Of course, with transparency, proof of success ultimately lies within practice. All the innovations don't mean a thing unless there has been a fundamental shift in the work environment. Henry assuredly rattles off a number of impressive statistics that put to rest any remaining doubts: 97% of employees didn't want to go back to the old building; 93% of employees didn't want

Below: Pop-art inspired garden graphics enliven other public spaces.



Below: Throughout the space, colorful graphics surprise and delight, reinforcing the themes of collaborative workspaces. A table-height ribbon of glossy white Corian, punctuated by passages decaled with oversized candelabras and silverware, snakes through the dining area.



to go back to the old way of working; and 70% of employees brought their families into the new workspace in the first three months after it opened. In short, the Macquarie headquarters is not a place where employees have to be, but rather where employees want to be.

“We see the building as an extension of who we are as an organization,” says Henry. “One of our core values is integrity.

This design puts us on show. We don’t hide behind barriers.” The result is a virtual theater, where employees and clients alike partake in intersecting narratives and animate the workplace. <sup>10</sup>

Jennifer M. Volland is a freelance writer and curator based in Long Beach, Calif. She co-authored the book *Long Beach Architecture: The Unexpected Metropolis*.