



German firm raumteam:92 is pioneering a new type of interior makeover for workplaces across Berlin, dubbed “OfficeLifting”

Operating under the moniker OfficeLifting, architects at Berlin-based practice raumteam:92 are responding to that infamous “efficient” German stereotype in kind.

Since the 1990s Germany’s capital city has undergone a structural renovation the likes of which no other European city has seen since the end of World War Two. Berlin’s buildings have received enviable architectural treatment at the hands of international talent (in 1999 Sir Norman Foster had converted the former Reichstag into the new German Parliament; its glass cupola has since been hailed the “hallmark” of the city) and via more indigenous means.

Stephan Braunfels, Axel Schultes and Charlotte Frank, Von Gerkan Marg and Partners, Hans Kollhoff, Josef Paul Kleihues and now raumteam:92 – the subject of this story – have each left a mark on the “new look” Berlin and, arguably, as inhabitants of the city these architects have proved best placed to reshape their home.

There is a reason for this: like Germans on the whole, Berliners are internationally renowned for their skills in engineering and design. But unlike their countrymen, Berlin’s avant-garde have had reason to safeguard their city’s identity more than most. In the wake of the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the city’s occupants began a salvage mission; they set about regaining a collective sense of identity. It’s had a profound affect on all Berliners’ ways of working, but raumteam:92 has perhaps epitomised the approach with its innovative form of interior architecture, OfficeLifting.

Angelika Zwingel, a project leader at raumteam:92, says the firm coined the phrase to describe its bit-part approach to interior architecture (“you could

call it interior design, but we think that’s too generic a term”), a self-styled “integrative design strategy which, with careful means, is aimed simultaneously at designing the spatial company identity and at structural improvements in the actual work environment”. The term was borrowed from the practice of plastic surgery, as recipients of such treatment receive a nip here and a tuck there – just enough to revive weary elements, but not a whole new face.

But OfficeLifting is about much more than just semantics. A fundamental aspect of the approach is the use of design to harmonise the formulation of external company branding with internal authenticity – bearing great resemblance to the citywide effort to secure a new identity for Berliners without losing any more of the old one.

“During my time in England and the States I encountered a much more developed awareness towards the intrinsic qualities of an intentionally formed space (as opposed to mere ‘hip design’),” says Zwingel, “and there was a greater openness there to provide a reasonable budget to achieve it. Berlin is a great place to watch all sorts of recycling, tuning and the recharging of spaces and objects on a highly individual level, but in the end it all comes down to money and Berlin, or perhaps Germany in general, has certainly not been a place where money was found on the streets and available to spend easily.”

Thankfully, expense isn’t an issue when it comes to OfficeLifting. All improvements are bespoke and tailored to budget, and despite the outlay being joyfully inexpensive, it’s clear from raumteam:92’s past projects that the results clients can expect are quite outstanding.

In the case of Schröder+Schömbbs, a public relations company based in Berlin Mitte, utilising 8



Above right Agency artwork is displayed throughout the newly designed space

Right Textile partitions offer spacial flexibility at Schröder+Schöms

“The architects hung flower boxes and stencilled plant-like visuals on the walls, which wove an energising green thread through the office”



Right Wall stencils are part of a green motif used to revamp the offices of Zucker PR

Below Plant boxes were implemented as part of the green theme to help revitalise staff

textile partitions enabled the firm flexibility in terms of spatial division. The makeshift walls play confidently with the building's depth and lighting conditions too, offering a sense of identity to a design that had previously been defined by clutter.

Likewise, at Zucker PR, also located in Berlin Mitte, working with a budget Zwingel describes as “minute” proved inspiration on the project rather than the hindrance it might typically have been. The team enjoyed much success through the simple and subtle implementation of plants; the architects hung flower boxes with the help of a carpenter, and stencilled plant-like visuals on the walls, which wove an energising green thread through the Zucker office to “revitalise” its staff.

“It is probably not surprising that the two OfficeLiftings we think have been most exceptional were designed for PR agencies,” says Zwingel. “The best clients we’ve worked with have understood the influence of a carefully conceived finish and did not hesitate to invest in thought rather than shiny surfaces. Working with people who are open to experimenting with their space in order to find a strong theme is fundamental in achieving more than a pretty arrangement of elements.”

It's not the first time during our interview that Zwingel has sworn by the benefits of client interaction. She is quick to stress the importance of input from employees too, even citing examples where OfficeLifting projects had failed due to a lack of input from those sources. “We have had projects that didn't work because we felt that we weren't able to really incorporate the ideas of the employees,” says Zwingel. “This was either because there weren't many or the client would tell us what he or she thought employees needed, but that doesn't work because the client has different needs to the employee. It can be hard work convincing the client that it's important for us to talk to their employees.” But judging by the results, this collaborative approach has proved invaluable. 5

raumteam:92 on the benefits of a quick nip/tuck

- 1 Complete refurbishments are often not necessary. Most workspaces lag behind their functional and spatial potentials. Often, they only need a careful restructuring and a few new ideas to fulfil their potential.
- 2 Sustainability plays a large part in OfficeLifting. We are essentially recycling an existing space.
- 3 Budget, budget, budget: if you don't have the money for a complete refurbishment, OfficeLifting is the route for your business.
- 4 You don't have to evacuate your building because we work around you, meaning business can carry on during the facelift (almost) as usual.
- 5 We lower the monetary threshold for clients to actually seek professional support when it comes to creating spatial environments with specific functions and qualities.