

Greening your workplace

Prof Jason Pomeroy
Founding Principal, Pomeroy Studio

Friends tell me I never do things in half measures. They would be right. Sure, the Chinese year of the dragon provides a certain air of prosperity and invites the odd new beginning, but I did not expect to be embarking with 3— a new landmark green project that pushes the boundaries of zero carbon development, the publication of my second book, and the establishment of my own design firm – aptly called Pomeroy Studio. So when I was asked to share my thoughts on greening the workplace, I was happy to discuss.

To give some background, Pomeroy Studio is a thought leader in the field of sustainable design for the built environment. The Studio balances a creative vigour with an academic rigour by a process we call Evidence-Based Interdisciplinary Sustainable Design (E-BISD). This enables us to unlock the latent value of spaces in our urban habitat in order to create human centred *places*, from the micro scale of a dwelling to the macro scale of the city. When we consider these words in isolation, they similarly reflect the ethos of the studio:

- **‘evidence-based’**: pursuing design through objective fact and reason to deliver measurable design solutions that are practical, commercially viable and respectful to both people and place
- **‘interdisciplinary’**: capitalising on a broad breadth of design specialists who collaboratively design and transfer knowledge to turn spaces into *places*
- **‘sustainable’**: embracing our clients aspirations as well as those of the environment in order to create designs at the forefront of the green agenda
- **‘design’**: applying innovation through research and development to enhance design and deliver human centred environments that are relevant to communities today and tomorrow

From the Studio’s inception, I knew it would be imperative to not just research and design green cities, buildings and interiors for our clients, but to also have a green working culture. This was to not only minimize our waste and energy consumption for the betterment of the environment, but also for the betterment of our pocket which, as I’m sure one can imagine, is all too important in the ‘first trimester’ of a ‘baby’ office. It also provided a perfect platform to demonstrate to clients our sustainable working ethos, and the importance of how a sustainable working process within a green environment not only enhances productivity and minimizes waste, but also allows for the creation of more green (and commercially successful) building solutions.

The Studio believes that sustainability can be more holistically described and designed by considering 6 parameters, instead of the usual triple bottom line of the social, economic and environmental that has become commonplace in the common definition of sustainability. Spatial, cultural and technological sustainable parameters are arguably as pertinent to our natural and man made environment as the established triple bottom line— especially when we consider the depletion of social space through urban densification and population increase, the depletion of local culture through globalization, and the depletion of natural resources in order to satiate our consumerist ideals. It would seem fitting therefore that we consider the Studio in the context of these 6 parameters, and how ideas were implemented in the interests of creating an environment that is not only enjoyable to work in, but inspiring to be part of. Here are 6 prompts for thinking that have worked well for us:



Economic

The depletion of our natural resources has contributed to rising energy costs. Taking into consideration the window / wall to floor ratio can help reduce your reliance on artificial means and its associated costs, particularly as daylight and fresh air can potentially penetrate your workspace by 2-2.5 times the floor to ceiling height. Specifying low energy lighting and appliances, and setting office equipment to sleep mode further helps to reduce energy consumption and lowers your energy bill. These are pre-requisites for our office space, which thankfully is flooded with natural light and has a consequently low energy bill.

Environmental

Office interior materials, such as carpet tiles, can be potentially high in eco-toxicity, which is why we considered the Building Research Establishment's Greening guide to specification and environmental profile method to minimize the environmental impact when selecting our materials / internal finishes. We also have a 'limit paper policy', which effectively reduces wastage and optimizes available useable space. Half flush WC's and fixing aeration nozzles to water faucets and showerheads also reduces our water consumption by half and therefore reduces the water bill whilst preserving such a precious commodity.

Spatial

Inner city densification has made renting central office space a premium, necessitating space optimisation. Consider more rectangular floor plates, as they provide more easily utilised and flexible internal spaces whilst optimizing daylight penetration across the shorter face. We have done just this, and designed our office furniture as a flexible and adaptable kit of parts that can be moved to create multiple configurations and allow adaptation to different working practices. Our workspace is then enhanced with greenery for its socio-physiological benefits as well as to reduce temperature and remove noxious pollutants in the atmosphere.

Social

Research has demonstrated the importance of 'downtime' to enhance productivity in the workplace. Recreational amenities within the office environment can promote the health and well-being of the individual as well as enhance social capital and productivity in the workplace. When we picked our office space, we were conscious that the gymnasium, swimming pool and recreational decks would improve health and well being by offering occasional respite from the work activity and provide greater socio-physiological balance. It would further provide social networking opportunities to foster a greater sense of workplace community.

Technological

The shift in working culture from an industrial age to an information age has been facilitated by technological advancement. We can work where we want, when we want – unhindered by time zones or the spatial constraints of an office space. Wireless and cable free office space is increasingly explored and naturally provides working freedom as well as heightened capacity to deliver faster and more efficiently. Our office embraces this, as well newer technologies for the built environment industry (such as Building Information Modelling) to ensure that our building design output (product) is as integral as our means of communication (process) with our partners.

Cultural

Globalisation has made the World smaller, with a greater cross-fertilization of pop and local culture transference facilitated by technology. At the same time, culture has become a commodity that seemingly can be bought and sold and runs the risk of becoming diluted. The importance of embracing, retaining or reinterpreting cultural identity is therefore key in order to safeguard traditions and practices for future generations. In our Studio, we invite lecturers,



practitioners and students from around the world to participate in summer schools and courses to share ideas, experiences and traditions, thus allowing us to distil research, design for the present, and disseminate knowledge for the future - thus give back to society whilst enriching the culture of the workplace.

Biography

Prof. Jason Pomeroy is an award winning architect, masterplanner and academic at the forefront of the sustainable built environment agenda. He graduated with distinction from the Canterbury School of Architecture and Cambridge University. He is the founder and Principal of Pomeroy Studio. In addition to leading Pomeroy Studio, he lectures and publishes widely, and is the author of *Idea House: Future tropical living today* and *Skycourts and skygardens: greening the urban habitat*. He is an adjunct professor at the University of Nottingham, and Mapua Institute of Technology. He also sits on the editorial board of the Council for Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat.