How to design an office.

*By
Ramzi
Makram-Ebeid*

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Functionality

This is the one word you should focus on in the beginning phase of your office design. Designers are not here just to make offices or spaces look good, we are here (especially in commercial settings) to create a functional space for you. Once you have created a functional space for your essential requirements, you can then look into the style and look of your office.

First you should ask yourself what your organizational needs are and the setups that make your team most productive. For example, "I have a team of 6 and 1 accountant that needs a private office with a door for security" or "my team works best on communal tables in a kitchen". If you are designing for an existing company, you have the awesome opportunity of seeing what works best with your team, and of course, what doesn't work. With that in mind, there are still some tips that work across the board.

Have A Concept

Defining what a concept is, usually doesn't work. So, here is an example of a concept for an office I designed: "server room in the middle of the Nile Delta". This means they wanted a feel of the delta mixed with technology. To create a "tech" feel, I designed modern metal/wood furniture and combined it with sleek minimal lighting. For the Nile Delta, I used custom photos for the walls and used natural materials like mosaic flooring.

Be Prepared

The more organized you are before you start, the better the end result. The "we'll figure it out when we get there" approach is not going to save you money or give you an end result worthy of the time you invested on your brand identity. By being prepared, you decrease the number of problems that will arise and you can actually have a much more realistic cost estimate.

Invest in Seating

This is not a luxury. Studies have proven that your seating makes a difference. Yes, quality task chairs in Egypt are expensive but you can save money on other items to counter the surge in costs. My top three task chair suppliers in Egypt are: Williams, Mobica and Style Design (Herman Miller).
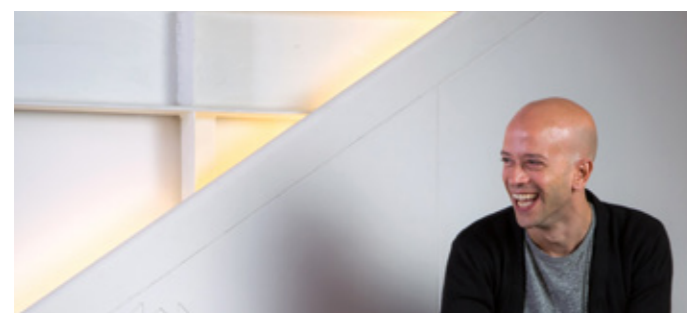
With a BA in International Business from GWU and a Professional Interior Design Certification from UCLA, Ramzi established the boutique interior, furniture and product design firm, Human Nature in 2007. Since then, Human Nature has been the designer behind a variety of commercial and residential projects, as well as several bespoke furniture pieces.

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Zone It & Give Space

Same as seating. Don't just think of the spaces where people sit down, also think about:

Guests who visit them - Make standing or sitting space near desks for visitors.

Walking areas - Not only are large walking areas conducive to circulation, but they also divide the space into zones.

Zone it – This can be done with partitions and/or layout. There are many ways of zoning: by team, by sound, by privacy, by tasks, etc… In all the offices I've done, there are always spaces for informal meetings, formal meetings, eating and working. For tighter spaces, make it dual-functional, i.e. a large communal worktable that can turn into a meeting table.

Concentrate on Lighting

Step one, make sure you maximize on all the natural light coming in (natural light is best for productivity) and add enough appropriate lighting for tasks and walkways. Then move on to lighting selection. There are a lot more options now, from style to types of light, so try to unify the lighting as much as possible while having a mixture of direct and indirect lights. Warm white seems to be the most popular style here as it's not too harsh for people, while not too warm and cozy for efficiency.

Do Subtle Branding

It's safe to say that if you're already in an office, you know where you are. Over branding is not only a visual eye sore, it also doesn't really help in reminding employees or visitors of your brand in a positive way. Just like the shoe stores of downtown, if there's too much going on, you won't remember anything in particular. For branding, I like making a statement in the entrance (for people coming and leaving) with the logo and then subtly using either elements of the logo or the colors from the brand.

Get Plants

Especially if you're office is in Alexandria or Cairo, plants are a great way to connect to nature, clean the air and add authentic décor to a space. Fake plants are a big no. If you lack a green finger, purchase your plant from a nearby nursery and ask them to send you someone once/twice a week to care for the plants.

Create Writing Surfaces

Employees love these. This can be anything from blackboard walls (you can DIY with any color you want – as long as it is dark enough, and using a brand color is a great idea), frosted glass (this gives a super clean finish and is used like a typical whiteboard) or the awesome options from Idea Paint Egypt.

Incorporate the Surrounding Architecture

There should always be a tie in with the interior space and/either the building the office is in and the area you are in. For example, if you are in an Art Deco styled building, try to incorporate an element into your office either by styles, lines, scale or materials used. And if you are not feeling any of those, use something that is inspired from our local culture, nature or materials.

Edit Your Ideas

You will get a million ideas when designing your space; many of them could be great. However, that does not mean that you have to use every single one. So, ask yourself:

Does this work with the concept?
How will this affect functionality?
How will this affect branding?
Does this look good in this location?

Again, you don't want to be a downtown Cairo shoe store.

Invest

9 out of 10 times, clients who opted to save money by outsourcing particular items to a cheaper supplier had problems arise. Unless you have someone with great quality, timing and pricing, invest a little extra and you'll get a much better end result (one bad item will affect the look of an entire space), saving yourself both time and money. **TU**