



A SUSTAINABLE BRIEF

by Melissa Merryweather

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The first design office in Asia to be granted a World Wildlife Fund Green Office Label, OUT-2 takes its sustainable goals seriously, embedding environmental first principles within their projects and employing ongoing R&D. This, along with their unusual approach to the design brief, has given them particular success in achieving sustainable interiors in a market that is only just beginning to take its first baby steps. Vietnam lags behind many other Asian countries in recognising and promoting sustainability in both the public and private sectors, so every step in achieving a sustainable project is fraught, from convincing the client that sustainability is achievable and affordable, to road-testing new products and services. Few Vietnamese vendors offer product data useful to sustainable ambitions. Because the market is at this stage, and many design firms seem unable or unwilling to convince clients initially uninterested in sustainability, it is telling when firms have a good track record and worthwhile to examine how they get there.

A key feature of each of the following interiors is a deliberate emphasis on the life cycle of the project. This is done by creating a very detailed brief, engaging all key stakeholders, and by designing for the long term to accommodate growth and flexibility. Life cycle design by its very nature requires clients to think long and hard about their company's requirements, offering a unique opportunity to reduce waste and inefficiency. Though time consuming, it may bring about highly sustainable impacts delivering over a long period of time. Refocusing the strategic view to the long term may also shift budgetary goals to include the occupancy stage and thus bring about a more open-minded dialogue about performance and deliverability of products and materials. Though none of the clients of the following projects had specifically required a sustainable environment, the life cycle approach took design naturally in that direction and reinforced the choice of environmental solutions.

UNILEVER HOMEBASE

The commission for Unilever's Homebase evolved out of such a briefing scope. Unilever wanted to move their rapidly expanding operations out of cramped quarters in an existing building into a purpose-made building and needed to know what kind of building they required. OUT-2 went on to form a strong partnership with PTW in realising the building itself as well as carrying out the interior design.

The programmatic requirements are complex, incorporating consumer testing areas as well as company workspace and meeting rooms. OUT-2's brief identified six key attributes for the space: it should be a unified workplace with minimum physical and psychological barriers; enhance connectivity; provide a distinctive identity for Unilever Vietnam; create interactivity with the consumer; be flexible for the needs of 10 to 20 years; and with zero tolerance for accidents. The testing areas would be distinctive, with separate zones to test products for low- and high-income consumers, including hair salons, 'shops' and test kitchens. The emphasis on the consumer was key since it was felt that there was a 'disconnect' with the consumer in the real marketplace.

OUT-2 started with flow diagrams, working out a ground floor interactive area with the consumer testing areas housed in a series of spaces laid out like non-linear Vietnamese streets. The verisimilitude extends to much of the detailing; the 'traditional market' zone includes mosaic-tiled tables with rounded forms, familiar to local wet markets, while the 'low-income kitchen' faithfully reproduces the L-shaped low tiled counter and layout found in virtually every

Unilever Homebase
1 Breakout space **2** Meeting rooms



Vietnamese home kitchen. Further areas allow for 'sensory research', focus group rooms, and interviews spaces. A large space in the middle acts as a 'town square' with seating.

The open office floors, on the two middle levels, contain multiple stairs for easy access and flow, including down to ground floor, with the top floor housing recreation and support areas, with space for future expansion. The open-plan office floors are organised around a central atrium, with a relatively small number of enclosed offices and meeting rooms. Breakout spaces dot both floors, each themed, as per the client's request, according to a different environment: beach, mountain, disco, river and spa. The desk spaces are backed by canary-yellow fabric dividers and with translucent graphics of natural scenes applied to perimeter walls, the feeling is bright, playful and relaxed.

Though environmentalism was not one of the brief's six key drivers (which were 'problem solving'), sustainability is a key determinant for design strategies and materials selection. This started with the building design itself, essentially a glazed box wrapped on all four sides with sunshading, horizontal on all sides, with some larger windows punched through and edged with deep, blade-like frames. The building, benchmarked to Australia's Green Star system, has on-site water treatment, solar hot water, recycling centres and waste segregation, and low-flow sanitary fixtures. A CO2 monitoring system is used, and the ceiling heights were kept high—3.2 metres—to improve daylight penetration. Transport access—always a fraught question in Ho Chi Minh—is optimised with a shuttle bus system linking to major transport hubs and bicycles are encouraged with showers and changing rooms.

Internally OUT-2 used Verosol SilverScreen environmental blinds throughout. Currie performed a mock-up test comparing leading manufacturers, both global and local, and found that Silverscreen performed significantly better than others, living up to the manufacturer's claims of lowering temperature internally to

the shades by 5 degrees Celsius. Lighting is controlled both by motion and daylight-responsive sensors. Fully 100 percent of floors have daylight and views, the external sun louvres reducing glare as well as heat loading. Carpets are InterfaceFLOR, meeting CRI Green Label Plus standards; paints, adhesives and furniture are low-VOC, and internal partitioning is insulated gypsum and concrete block.

PROJECT DATA

Project Name
Unilever Homebase
Location
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
Completion Date
June 2009
Site Area
NA

Gross Floor Area
10,000 m²
Number of Rooms
NA

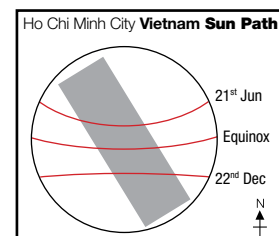
Building Height
4 storeys + 1 basement
Client/Owner
Unilever Vietnam

Architecture Firm
OUT-2 Design (base building briefing, workplace strategy & interior design)
Principal Architect
Andrew Currie

Architecture Team
Kate Anderson (Director); Vo Duc Hien; Hang Bui; Duong The Ngoc Chuc; Darren LeBeuf
Main Contractor
TTT

Mechanical & Electrical Engineer

Indochine Engineering
Civil & Structural Engineer
NA
Images/Photos
OUT-2 Design; Melissa Merryweather



Unilever Homebase
3 'Shop' 4 Lighting
5 Ground floor plan 6 Lift lobby

PROJECTS

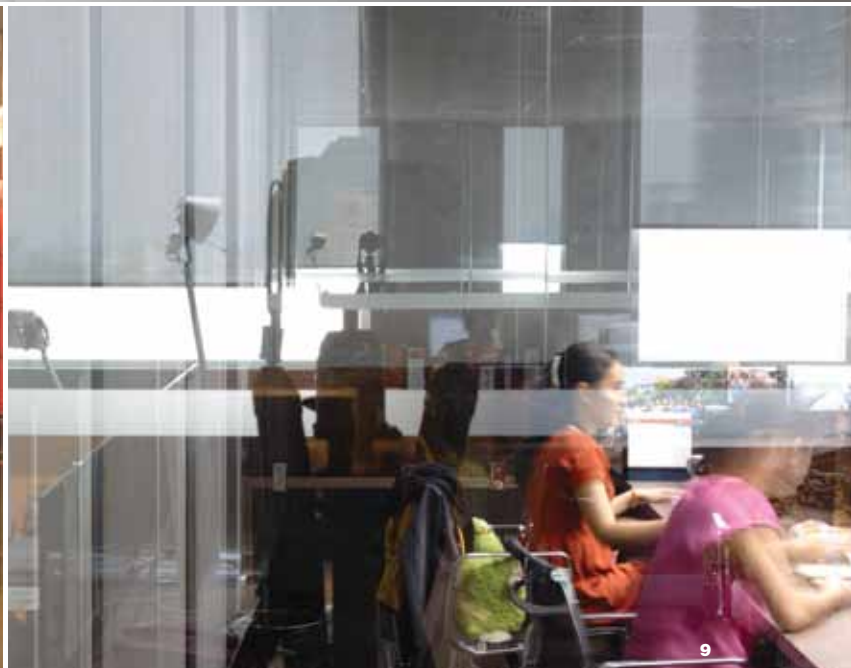




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OGILVY & MATHER VIETNAM

In the case of Ogilvy & Mather's office in Ho Chi Minh City, the start of the project was much more conventional. Ogilvy gave OUT-2 a brief with strong visual direction. Andrew Currie (OUT-2's director) admitted that it took away some of the team's understanding of "exactly why they're doing things", so given OUT-2's strong inclination to understand the client before arriving at the design solution, they sought out other avenues for collaboration, such as setting up workshops in the OUT-2 offices so that Ogilvy's team could explore materials and ideas in a hands-on way. The client's brief was nevertheless clear in many respects, with a firm intention to be different from other Ogilvy offices that have tended to showcase the firm's creativity. Instead they wanted the office to work more as a backdrop for their output. This intention is realised, the result elegant and restrained.

The first impression of the office from the lift lobby is the bold black Ogilvy signature, floating on the transparent sliding doors. The bold red wall directly facing the entrance, acting as backdrop, makes for a punchy entrance. A long timber table (recycled from an old traditional Vietnamese dining 'platform') where staff might have lunch or a short meeting, or glance through materials before a presentation, brings an unusual level of interaction into the lobby setting. From the reception, OUT-2 took advantage of the limitations of the building's layout to

create a separate wing of conference and meeting rooms, arranged against the floor to ceiling perimeter glazing. Main office spaces are reached by exiting the lobby through the opposite direction so there is a sense of distinction to these rooms

Material selection is deliberately neutral, but not boring or hackneyed. Unfinished cembboard (compressed cement board), carefully jointed with matt grey silicone, is deployed throughout as a wall lining, in corridors, for cupboards and other built-in furniture. Used ubiquitously, its subtle natural variations make it look like suede in some places and like fine-grained stone in others. A similarly ethereal note is played by the glass, used everywhere the cembboard is not. All three meeting rooms' internal walls are lined with milky laminated glass.

Environmental finishes are prevalent including Sadlerstone (locally manufactured concrete for flooring), rubber flooring, gypsum internal partitioning, recycled timber, and low-VOC paints and adhesives. Lighting is controlled by a motion-responsive system, and the blinds play a key role in modulating Ho Chi Minh City's typical glare.

In the main office space, clear glass separates corridors from office space, partitions individual offices from the open office space, and divides the perimeter

offices. Desks are finished with an oak-hued wood-impression laminate. Silver roller shades appear dark against the perimeter windows, and black rubber flooring with raised circular impressions rounds out the shadow-toned colour scheme. The impression is sophisticated, with the glazed partitions offering reflections of the deep, rich palette and simultaneously muting and amplifying the activity of the office staff. The muted palette also works to 'hide' storage units lining the hallway and to the backs of offices.

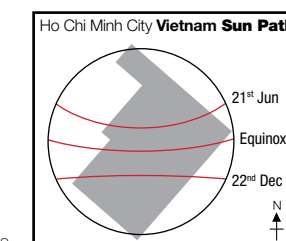
In the conference/meeting room area the impression is light, clutter-free and airy, in contrast to the more sombre main office space and reception area. The glass walls double as whiteboard and a single stainless steel shelf holds pens or supports presentations as needed. A great deal of study was given to hiding all required technology—with not altogether satisfying results according to Andrew. Being the first to employ a manufacturer's products has its drawbacks; a common problem for OUT-2 as they continue to search for the best solutions for their clients, despite it often meaning that there is a learning curve for local suppliers and installers.

Ogilvy & Mather Vietnam
7 Conference room **8** Entrance **9** Glass partition **10** Hallway
11 Reception **12** Floor plan

PROJECT DATA

Project Name
Ogilvy & Mather Vietnam
Location
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
Completion Date
March 2010
Site Area
NA
Gross Floor Area
900 m²
Number of Rooms
NA
Building Height
NA
Client/Owner
Ogilvy & Mather Vietnam
Architecture Firm
OUT-2 Design
Principal Architect
Andrew Currie
ID Team
Kate Anderson (Director); Hang Bui; Lucas Torresi; Vo Duc Hien

Main Contractor
Alliance
Mechanical & Electrical Engineer
NA
Civil & Structural Engineer
NA
Images/Photos
OUT-2 Design; Melissa Merryweather



OUT-2's Design Process



Andrew Currie, OUT-2's director, considers the brief to be the foundation of their work. Many of their projects start out as consultancy to develop just the project brief, but their system of detailed interviews and observations gives them intimate knowledge that has led to some highly creative and successful outcomes when the client does go on to commission them to answer those briefs. Currie maintains that it is important not to anticipate how one would answer the brief, and to retain objectivity. That objectivity can in turn be highly beneficial to the design process. For him the key question is: in a perfect world, what does an office need to do in order to allow its staff to do what they do—how does its environment provide the stimulus to do that?

OUT-2 typically demarcates a period of time for independently assessing a company's current office design and approach, including interviewing people from all areas of the company, anonymously and independently. The information is then analysed to see what are the strengths and weaknesses, locating missing potential. This approach aims to create clarity for the client as much as for the designer—it means that there is a collective understanding of what the firm's needs are, one that is much less likely to be dominated by one individual's strong opinions. Care is taken to feed back information—again anonymously—so that the management is aware of how staff perceives company direction and needs. Does the office environment need to be more invigorating? Or more serious? Is image most important or is it all about the chance to foster internal office collaboration? The results then are transformed into guiding principles for design of the new space or renovation, and become reference points for all subsequent discussion. Though there are always plenty of wild cards in the design process, from the client's taste and understanding of the materials selection to the vagaries of contractor performance, this grounding does seem to result in robust lines of communication and a stronger insight into the shared values of the client company, and there is perhaps for the client a stronger sense of participating in the journey.

RMIT AB-1 LIBRARY

The Ho Chi Minh City RMIT Campus' library renovation project developed out of OUT-2's scope to write a design brief for their proposed Academic Building #2. The study concluded that opinions of the existing library, situated in Academic Building #1, were fairly poor; its initial goal to be a 'book-free' library had failed to catch on properly; the finishes were light-absorbing and bland, and the overall design, work-a-day. The HCMC site had meanwhile grown from the status of a satellite to a major campus for RMIT, and the decision was taken to upgrade and create a 'state-of-the-art' library, matching the usability and technology of the library at their Melbourne campus. Additionally they created a new brief; the library would be an interactive space, with quiet study spaces but with emphasis placed on group study, student mentoring and thesis assistance, and a staff that would tour the library and actively assist students rather than remain behind the information counter.

Due to the functional requirements of the library, controlling daylight was a key consideration (balancing natural light with limiting direct sunlight penetration to the collections areas). 'People' spaces were located directly adjacent to the windows to allow maximum access to daylight and views. Daylight intensity is then controlled by Verosol SilverScreen environmental mesh blinds, which mitigate heat and glare while retaining a high degree of transparency in order to facilitate views to the outdoors. Library shelving has also been configured to maximise daylight penetration. Materials used inside the library are generally light in colour both to aid light reflection and to create a visually 'light' landscape. The black bookshelves will become white; lighting will be brought down between the shelving units; brown ceiling tiles are being re-coloured; with perforated vertical bamboo baffles being added to improve acoustics.

The use of natural and/or 'green' materials is a foundation for all of the firm's ID projects; the architects consider this to be even more important when working on educational projects. Materials used include:

- Linoleum flooring
- InterfaceFLOR i2 Carpet
- Gypsum partitioning
- Bamboo wall panelling
- T5 fluorescent lighting
- LED lighting

OUT-2 took the opportunity to expand and embolden the library entrance, giving it transparency and interest, and connect the entrance visually—and through materials—to the internal stair linking level 3 to level 4. They wrapped the stair and framed the entrance doors with a voronoi grid, a system used for geographic mapping. The grid is a visual representation of the availability of data for any subject—an apt metaphor for a library. Sliding glass doors set onto the wall of the voronoi grid part to allow access to a low-ceilinged vestibule lined in red linoleum. Set into the lino, embracing the space in an angular loop from floor to wall to ceiling and back again, is a glass strip that will act as an information ticker-tape displaying LED lit data.

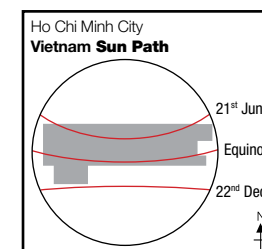
The campus is benchmarked against Australia's Green Star rating tool, so sustainability matched both OUT-2's own ambitions as well as those of RMIT.

PROJECT DATA

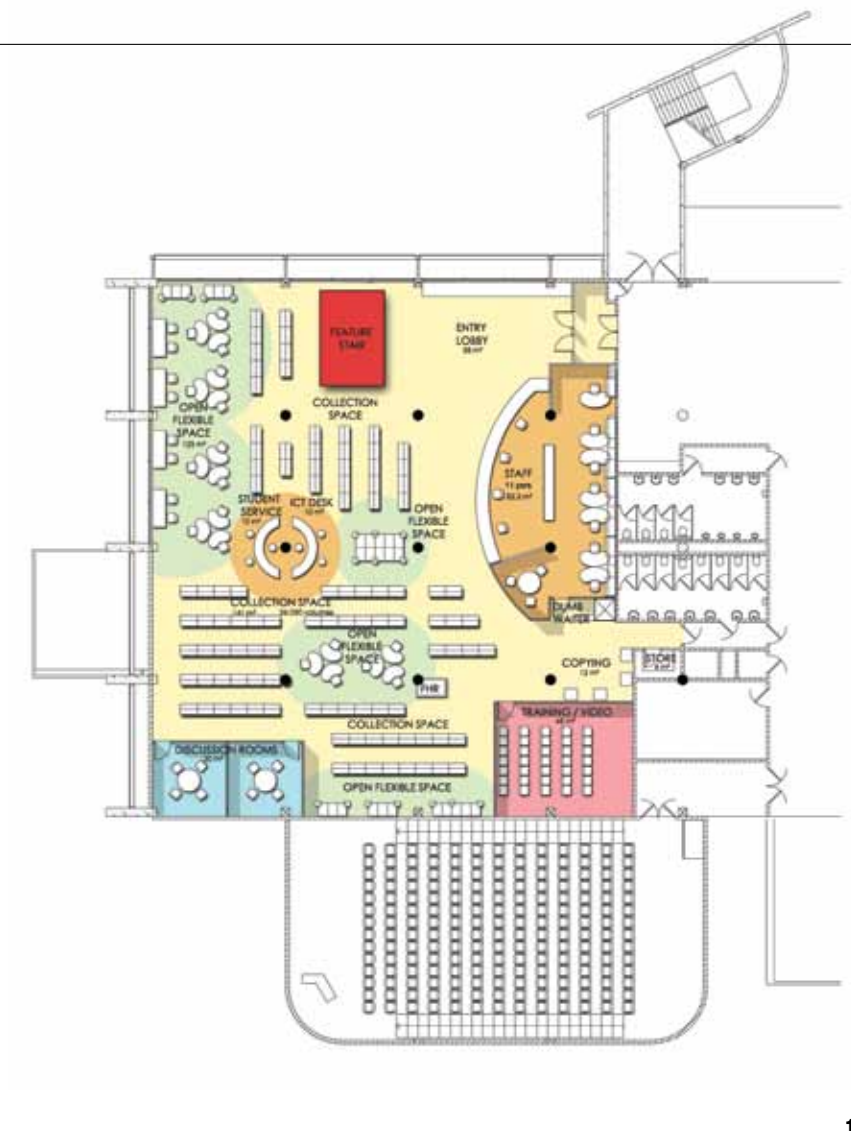
Project Name
RMIT AB-1 Library
Location
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
Status
Construction
Expected Completion
August 2011
Site Area
NA
Gross Floor Area
1,700 m² (Net Internal Area)
Number of Rooms
NA
Building Height
NA
Client/Owner
RMIT International University
Architecture Firm
OUT-2 Design (briefing & interior design)

Principal Architect
Andrew Currie
ID Team
Lucas Torresi; Chan Cao; Nguyen Thanh Anh Tu; Duong The Ngoc Chuc
Main Contractor
GBA
Mechanical & Electrical Engineer
Indochine Engineering

Civil & Structural Engineer
HBP Engineering
Images/Photos
OUT-2 Design



RMIT Ab-1 Library
13 Level 3 floor plan
14 Level 4 floor plan
15 Entrance rendering
16 3D perspective of stairwell
17 Counter sketches



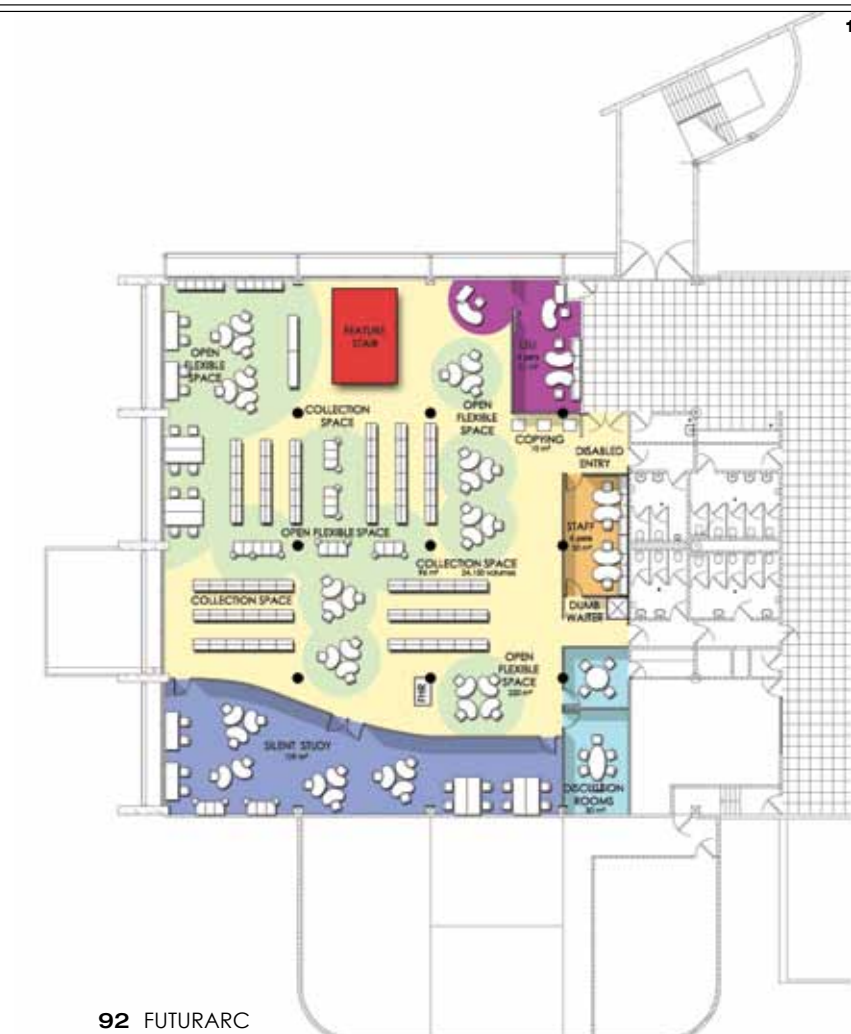
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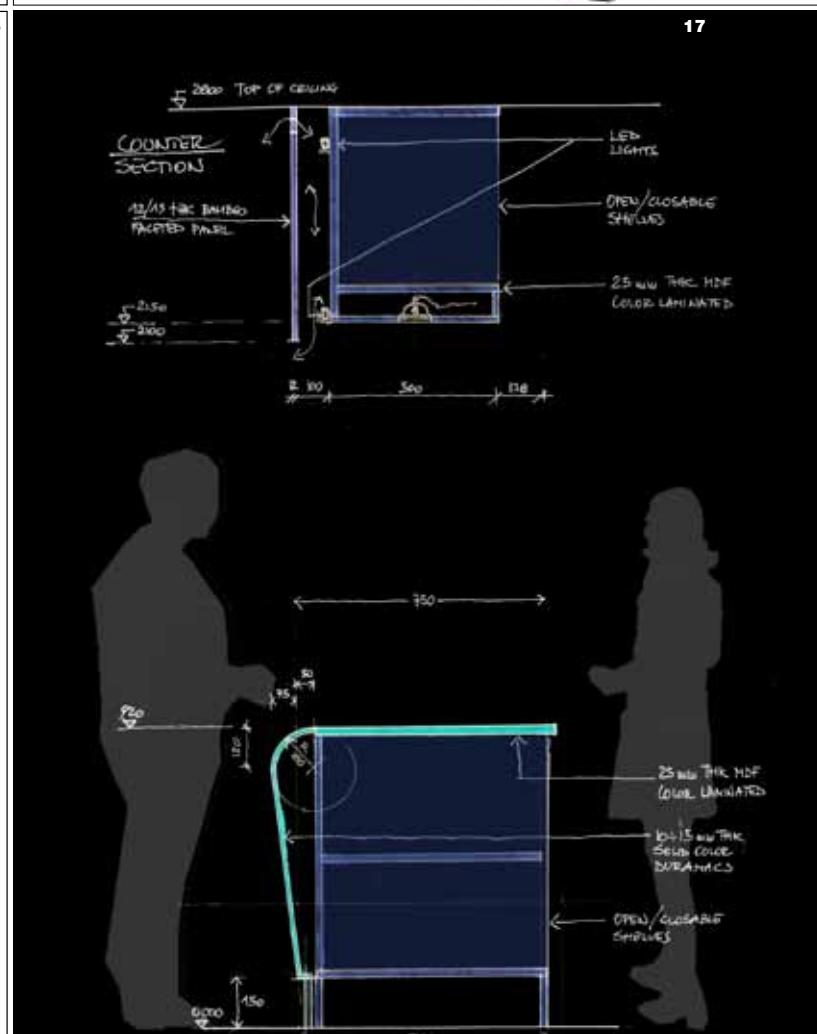
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