

When weird meets wonderful

IN A FANTASTIC
OFFICE DESIGN

Casumo's impressive office is the kind that appeals to every adult's inner child – it is vibrant, quirky and full of unexpected treasures. **Martina Said** meets Forward Architects Partner **Christopher Micallef** and Casumo's Interior Architect **Veronica Zammit** to find out what went into it.

Standing in front of the main wooden door to the entrance of Casumo's office in Swieqi, with its intricate carvings that I later learn tell the story of the rise and rise of this design-oriented brand, already offers a taster of this gaming company's distinctive way of doing things.

My journey starts at the office reception on level two, which is clearly designed to leave visitors with a very good first impression. The wall behind the reception desk is covered with the kind of leafy foliage you'd encounter in a jungle – which incidentally is the look they were going for – and contrasts spectacularly with the light blue 'jelly bean' reception desk, which creates an unmissable focal point in the space.

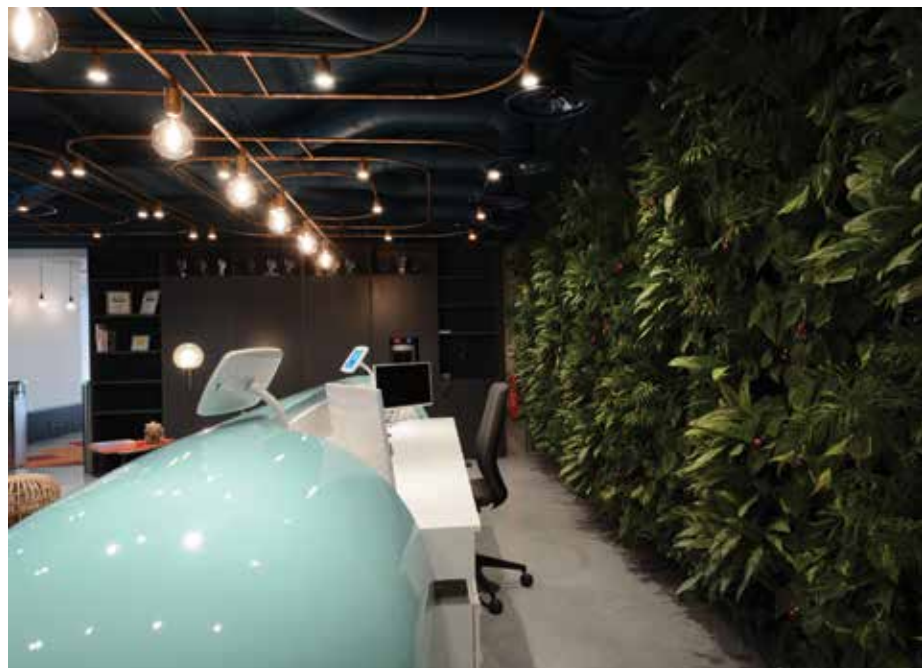
Veronica tells me that design and creativity are central to Casumo, and that's evident all around the office. "Casumo is a gaming company first and foremost, so it's got many elements one would expect of a gaming company. It was important for Casumo to create a space that is not just fun to work in, but really enables people to do their best and work quite freely."

The company has grown over the years. Casumo first approached Forward Architects to help them design their first premises in Ta' Xbiex. The design of that office helped them build on the understanding of Casumo's ethos, in particular to their approach on design. The company grew and, within two years, Casumo again approached Forward Architects to design their new premises in Tal-Ibragg.

"It started off with one floor and, over the years, Casumo took over five levels," Christopher explains, highlighting the architecture firm's ongoing relationship with the gaming company. "We worked hand-in-hand with the Casumo design team to shape the office. ➔

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◀ knowing that it had to allow for future flexibility. While Casumo's growth was clear, the operational side of the company was intentionally not penned in within our brief from the start. They were determined to remain a young and agile company, empowering teams to develop their projects and ideas. The organisation of the team structure and its potential evolution was where it all started in the design process."

We started off our meeting with a walk-around, beginning from the reception. "The jelly bean reception is a collection of many great ideas gathered from the staff's imaginations and Casumo's own story, and it is presented in a way that gives people a great first impression once they enter the castle doors - that it's weird and wonderful at Casumo," smiles Veronica.

On the same floor as the main entrance is the marketing and communications team, employee experience team and, further on, the ambassador's

team. The floor above it houses the product teams, as well as the finance team and the company directors. Another floor up is home to one of the most striking areas of the office: The Odditorium, which is the office's eatery and social hub, and as the beating heart of Casumo, occupies two floors singlehandedly. The bottom-most floor, which is the quietest in comparison to the rest, is occupied by legal, compliance and business development teams.

"Casumo began with a small amount of people which then evolved into teams as numbers grew," Veronica continues. "The team began working on projects, eventually resulting in too many teams. We now work in clusters and sit together in mission pods back-to-back, with easy access to whiteboards. This gives us the flexibility to meet and discuss without needing to formalise everything. Flexibility is crucial and employees are really trusted to make their own schedules here. Autonomy is a huge part of our culture." ▶



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- ◀ In line with this, Christopher adds that the office needed to reflect this sense of collaboration in every way possible, and also have spaces that mirror the organisation’s flexibility, which could transform as Casumo changes. “We used warm, natural and organic materials to make the space more human and homely. Colour is an integral ingredient in Casumo’s identity. The office colours were introduced through an interior and branding exercise led by the Casumo Design Team and StudioNoc.”

“The office is colourful, but it’s filled with furniture and furnishings that evoke a homely feeling, such as the sofa and chairs in the reception. However, The Odditorium,



with its buzzing atmosphere and playful design, is perhaps one of the best reflections of the Casumo brand, which is both colourful and playful,” Veronica says.

Numerous aspects of the office’s design were a must from the get-go – starting with the mission pods, which required the team to dig deep to answer crucial questions that would have a strong bearing on the design of the office. “How do we currently work? How would we like to work? Is a large open plan the best layout for us? How would we best be able to collaborate without too much distraction, noise and chaos? These are some of the questions the team needed to answer to achieve the best results,” says Veronica. →





◀ “A lot of attention was also given to detail, including the acoustic performance of the office – carpets, soffit absorption panels and cork dividers all helped in permitting an open plan layout that is equally buzzing and productive.” To achieve this, Forward Architects entrusted Dex Workspaces, part of Vivendo Group, to supply the carpet flooring and acoustic ceiling island, as well as a wide range of office furniture and furnishings, namely meeting tables, Vitra lounge chairs and the double glass partitions.

The use of plants throughout the office was another must in the design of Casumo, the sheer scale of which made it a separate project in its own right. “We worked with a supplier specialised in this area and it turned out to be a really interesting project,” says Veronica. “We used around six types of plants as we didn’t want uniformity, we actually wanted it to feel like a jungle, and chose plants that don’t need constant watering. On level two alone, 600 plants were used, and the plan is to install more in other parts of the office.”

The plants are installed in the partitions between the custom-built desks. All the partitions are lined with fibreglass to prevent soil and water from seeping down into the electrical wiring below, while the plants create aesthetically-pleasing dividers that help to bring the outside in.

“How people work together is always the most important starting point, but that is complemented by how we want the staff to feel at work. The plants provide a feeling of being outdoors and also bring a sense of calm to the office, while the bright colours are stimulating and help to achieve that childish, playful feeling,” Veronica says. ▶



“At the same time there is a natural calm inside the office and work spaces,” Forward Architect’s Christopher explains. “The organisation of the various break out spaces: sofas, booths, meeting areas coupled with the materials and natural daylight resonating through the office layout, all help to contribute to the overall magic at Casumo.”

The office’s design is a collaborative result between many great creatives. Casumo’s co-Founder, Kim Larsen, has a strong vision and the design process was adapted to a more inclusive one, thus allowing a spectrum of designers from different backgrounds to participate in the design development.

Asked to pick a part of the office which she considers to be the most outstanding, Veronica says The Odditorium takes the cake. “Without question, the space is aesthetically stunning. But there’s more to it than that – we use it on a daily basis to eat, hang out and chat, to hold events and conferences, to learn. We recently held a mini sports tournament there, and it’s also where we host our annual conference, monthly company breakfasts, and various tech talks. It’s most definitely the heart of the office – everyone goes there at some point in the day, and it’s a friendly environment that encourages people to mix and interact.”

Finally, Christopher highlights his own favourite – the long lounge breakout and workspace alongside the mission pods on level three. “The natural light, materials and choice of sofas evoke a sense of homely freedom within a modern office space,” he concludes. **igC**

