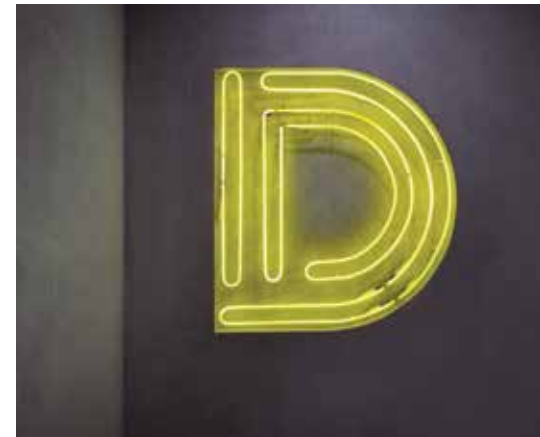


# GOING BEYOND bricks AND concrete

Having taken online casino Dunder's offices from design phase to completion, there's plenty for **Christopher Micallef**, Partner at Forward Architects, to reflect on about this stylish space. The results are fresh, elegant, practical and inspiring, as **Sarah Micallef** finds out.



When it comes to a company's offices, not all are created equal. Tasked with housing a unique team of individuals in a way that reflects the business' approach, it stands to reason that a workspace will have its own personality, and the recently-completed offices of online casino Dunder project an upmarket, sophisticated vibe within a space for the young company can grow and flourish. →



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◀ “This particular workspace showcases the execution of the design philosophy we approach such briefs with – that workspaces need to be adaptable for different workforces, activities and trends, while embodying the particular brand’s promise, language and mission,” says Christopher Micallef, Partner at Forward Architects, the local architecture firm entrusted with the design of Dunder’s offices in Swieqi.

What this meant, he attests, was that the office needed to respond to the needs of the company now, whilst ensuring longevity for the team to grow within. “Absorbing the brand’s values, priorities and mission allows us to inform our design decisions, creating spaces that adapt to the nature of the particular company. With Dunder, the priority was to provide an executive space that balances the quiet working open-plan area, the closed meeting rooms and the leisurely breakout space.” →







◀ Speaking of the initial brief, Christopher maintains that it called for the architects to make bold decisions that respected brand guidelines whilst allowing a fresh, motivational environment in which employees could prosper. “We enjoy working with brands that prioritise their employees’ satisfaction in the workplace, understanding that the majority of their day is spent here and therefore their output is directly affected by the context in which they are asked to be productive,” he maintains, adding that for this reason, the workspace needed to feel smart and spacious, and the lighting and materials needed to feel as natural as possible.

And, as is ever the case within a working environment, the issue of balancing aesthetic appeal and practical usage of space was not lost on the architects. “Workspaces need to prioritise the ease of their use for staff,” says Christopher, affirming that practicality and functionality are key ingredients within the design process to ensure that the space and its design can be adapted throughout the lifetime of the workspace.

In order to achieve this, the architect divulges that the design concept was closely developed with Group CEO Thomas Rosander from the outset, who remained involved throughout the entire process. “Rather than opting for a playful environment, the brand was after a more executive, smooth aesthetic - one which projects an image of a serious, efficient company with attention to detail. This is reflected in the choice of natural materials and the neon logo visible as soon as you set foot into the offices,” he maintains.

Looking back on the start of the project, Christopher reveals that the team took the building on when it was still in shell form, “literally just bricks and concrete”, which enabled them to design it from scratch. “From the air ventilation and lighting partitions to ensuring acoustic isolation between meeting rooms, to the flooring system,” he attests, adding that they opted for a raised floor, which gave them the flexibility of passing all services underneath.

Speaking of the process, and what it took to bring the project to fruition, the architect maintains that the first step was creating the concept design, which included initial sketches to get a feel for the place whilst also enabling the team at →



◀ Forward Architects to build a relationship with the client. “This first stage is crucial to align the design with what the client wants the final project to look and feel like,” says Christopher, adding that once this was done, they could move on to the detailing phase, which took about two months, to ensure that every little detail was mapped out with precision. Meanwhile, the final stage of the project involved moving onto the site, “and all the coordination with suppliers and final snags!” Looking back on the challenges the team faced, he adds, “one main challenge was ensuring a high level of quality delivered from all the suppliers. We also needed to ensure that the works happened in a smooth sequence within the agreed deadlines.”

Turning his attention to the choice of materials and finishes, Christopher explains that the team introduced a darker bold palette with a mix of concrete finishes, warm woods and leather. “They contrast with the harder, bolder finishes, borrowing from a contemporary architectural style,” he says.

Speaking of style, I ask, how would the architect describe the design style achieved? “We like to think of it as a timeless workspace that will allow for adapting trends in the workforce to evolve and transform the space,” Christopher maintains, adding that the finishes borrow from the contemporary aesthetic whilst empowering the brand language, which is unique. “The visible branding cues of the Dunder sign contribute to the iconic quality of the space.”

And iconic it certainly is. **igC**



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