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Insider knowledge

*Anne MacKay Reid,
workplace interior
design manager,
HBOS Group
Property, talks to
Sara Bean about the
challenge of office
design within such a
large, diverse business*



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Banking group HBOS' headquarters at the Mound, Edinburgh, has picked up numerous awards since its refurbishment in 2006, being recognised for both its green credentials and the sympathetic restoration of a landmark Grade A listed building. The British Council for Offices (BCO) regional award 2007 for a refurbished/recycled workplace justly singled out the huge contribution made by the design team. Judges praised the 'sensitive restoration coupled with bold intervention' and a 'restrained interior design' which enhances the building's internal sense of spaciousness.

What may come as a surprise is that the HBOS property portfolio is managed by a large in-house team, with HBOS workplace interior design manager Anne MacKay Reid playing a key role in the Mound's refurbishment, not least in selecting the finishes and furniture for the iconic building. She's worked on the bank's interior design practices for over 20 years.

'There are about 160 of us in total working within Group Property,' she explains, 'and we recently restructured our construction and development team so that the workplace design team is all-encompassing, with responsibility for looking after our major employment sites (MES) as well as the branch network.'

That's a lot of property, comprising roughly 1,100 branch network sites and approximately 150 MES, servicing around 72,000 people across the HBOS group. The design team is

involved in other HBOS-related operating sites in Europe and North America, and with many of the buildings within the group a combination of retail outlet and working space, it all adds up to fantastic variety.

'When I started out almost 30 years ago, interior designers were an integral part of architectural practices,' says MacKay Reid, 'but they moved away from that in the 80s to standalone design practices. Now, with much closer collaboration, it's almost gone full circle.'

MacKay Reid has a degree in interior design from Napier University, and on graduation she joined a large architectural practice, Robert Matthew Johnson Marshall and Partners, working on large hospital

projects, including the Royal Infirmary in Newcastle. She left to join leading Edinburgh design practices, MKW Design Partnership and Tayburn Designers, working on retail projects such as Ravel Shoes and exhibition and conference sites, including the David Livingstone Exhibition Centre.

As part of her work for MKW, she was involved in designing smaller retail branches for the Bank of Scotland, which was so impressed with her work she was hired to start up its interiors section, working alongside the project managers.

She explains: 'At that time the bank didn't have a universal look, so each project was tackled on its own merit. That became part of the design team's job – to formulate a standard design for the Bank of Scotland.'

Three main colour scheme standards were eventually agreed and a design manual drawn up for use in all projects. Following the merger between the Bank of Scotland and Halifax seven years ago to form HBOS Group, the design manual principle was adopted across the whole estate.

Today, alongside responsibility for all the interior design elements of the HBOS Group design manual, MacKay Reid collaborates with project managers on job-specific design briefs and the implementation of the designs in live projects. She also advises and liaises with internal and external design and architectural consultants.

An important part of the workplace design remit is establishing benchmarking and standards, which is communicated throughout the Group Property team. 'We're fortunate in that we have an in-house FM team as part of Group Property,' she says, 'and we've a separate estates team dealing with leases and acquisitions for the buildings. The FM team look after smaller design projects under £50K, and in workplace design we're always liaising with them to help ensure buildings are working properly.'

AWARD-WINNING WORK

Although she has worked on countless projects during her time at HBOS, the Mound restoration was a major milestone. The Grade A listed building was first completed in 1806 as the head office for the

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Bank of Scotland; in 2001 it became the HBOS HQ. Explains MacKay Reid: 'For years work had been undertaken in a piecemeal fashion, then it was decided in 2004 to close the building entirely and refurbish it completely, but with a contemporary look.'

'The Bryce Hall, which is the focal point of the building, had a mezzanine floor which had been added many years ago, and as part of the restoration we removed that floor and opened up this space, which is now around 16 metres cubed – a fantastic room.'

It was important to fill this vast space wisely and MacKay Reid's role was a vital one, to not only select the finishes and furniture for the building but commission and select contemporary Scottish artwork. She continues to help manage the art collection as part of a working party, which includes Sir Brian Ivory, director of the National Galleries of Scotland, and HBOS' archivist Helen Redmond Cooper.

'We look at work by mainly Scottish artists as I firmly believe that you can mix contemporary with historic,' MacKay Reid says. 'We still meet on a six-weekly basis to discuss commissions and repositioning of our collection within the building. It has been so rewarding encouraging young talented artists to come and work with us.'

On a wider scale, an important element of her job is keeping up with office interior trends, so visits to the main interiors exhibitions, such as Design Prima and Orgatec, help ensure she's kept informed of the latest styles. Nowadays, though, her knowledge base is so well respected that designers now come to her for advice.

'I'm fortunate,' she says, 'as suppliers and manufacturers often come to me and say they'd like to have my views on their products, so I suppose I'm a bit of a guru in some respects.'

So what are the current trends in office design? 'On the furniture side it's agile or flexible working and trying to bring a domestic feel into the workplace, because people are spending more time there and it's nice to have familiar things about them. I'm also seeing more domestic types of lighting used in break-out areas to make it feel more homely.'

'We use Milliken carpets extensively, and

I've noticed stripes are in vogue. Whereas previously it's been neutral colours, all of a sudden very bold stripes are coming into flooring and offices are crossing over to the boutique hotel look.'

It's not just the look of the workspace that interests MacKay Reid but how it is used within the financial sector, she says; it's very important that the surroundings help attract and retain both staff and customers. 'Our benchmark is to give everyone an area of workspace that suits their job function and is comfortable to work in. High on our agenda is what we are offering our colleagues to make things as interesting as possible, with open-plan workspaces and agile working.'

For that reason, she says, there's a lot of bench-type desking, which works very well for flexible or hot-desk working, where, for example, you may supply benching that seats six people, but on a day-to-day basis only about four will actually be there at any one time. 'There is no way that we would try and squeeze in as many people as possible – they should have space and are not crammed in like battery hens.'

'What we're doing is giving the staff more options for working, and encouraging agile working. In fact we in Group Property are quite nomadic – for instance, I've worked from various HBOS locations recently just by setting up my laptop at a hot-desk and working from wherever for the afternoon or the day.'

Although a flexible style of working is encouraged where possible, she does advise that offices strike the right balance between agile and office-based working. 'You do need that social interaction; it's much healthier if people can be encouraged to work from home when necessary, but come into the office to interact with colleagues.'

WOMEN IN PROPERTY

As a highly successful woman working within the male-dominated construction sector, a key interest for MacKay Reid is to encourage more young women to enter the construction industry. A member of networking and mentoring organisation the Association of Women in Property (WiP) since 2003, and currently vice chair of its central Scottish branch, she says WiP is 'quite passionate' in

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trying to encourage young women to join and indeed be more aware of all the professions that encompass the construction industry.

'A lot of them don't realise the variety of career opportunities available within construction, from property lawyers to building surveyors. Many young women think it's all architecture and design.

'I was at the WiP central Scotland national awards ceremony the other week,' she continues, 'and the student we'd chosen was a building surveyor, while the student who won last year, on the property strategy side of things, has just been taken on by Knight Frank. She gave a speech saying that being part of Women in Property has given her such confidence, and she hadn't known any of this existed until we approached her college.'

Women in Property conducts regular school visits and publishes a newsletter to present to schools, to encourage young girls and to show them these are the opportunities available to them. Says MacKay Reid: 'I just don't think

universities and schools have been good at promoting the construction industry as a whole, as they just don't see the opportunities there are for women.'

In terms of her day job, MacKay Reid's next major project at HBOS looks likely to be working on a proposed new office campus for the group based in Edinburgh. This, she predicts, will again benefit from the construction group's joint expertise.

'We have a good mix of internal designers and external consultants,' she says. 'The in-house team knows exactly what we want and need, and while the external designers can bring in fresh ideas, we'll research the marketplace to keep abreast of what's going on, so we always know what's relevant and of benefit to the group' **fmX**

Further information

www.hbosplc.com

www.wipnet.org