



By Judith Soskin

Bell Dewar: Artistic License



Sleek new offices for commercial lawyers Bell Dewar are surprisingly creative and colourful thanks to superb design and the firm's commitment to South African art.

Bell Dewar took occupation of its new offices in Sandton in June last year after many years in Houghton. The firm took the opportunity to redesign its corporate image, logo and branding all at the same time and the brief was simple: to keep the status of the company high, but not at the expense of the client. Balance was key, as was an image of a serious and sophisticated firm with an eye on the future and a commitment to South Africa.

Interior designers, Design Effects International, were brought on board to create the look of the offices and the new image; it opted for a look that is modern and contemporary without being cold or static.

For this installation, all the furniture is new and, due to obvious reasons, 95% of the offices are cellular with only 5% of the office space open plan. What is more surprising is the totally non-hierarchical corporate structure of the firm – from senior partners to candidate attorneys, all have been provided the exact same office space – a compact yet sufficient area that is enclosed by a door and large glazing panels, making it a totally transparent space.

The designers have been subtle in their approach – custom made desks in American Walnut are contemporary and functional. A

white and silver colour scheme in the offices is lifted by an accent of purple on one wall.

The three storey office is built around a central atrium/courtyard – the designers have opted to pull all offices away from the perimeter thus allowing for the most of the natural light from the courtyard to come in and be shared by all.

The office has been designed to accommodate 133 people. The ground floor is public space, although 20% of the area has been set aside for administrative purposes and the finance department. The rest of the ground floor is taken up by a generous reception area, meeting rooms which range in size from a 6-seater to a 12-seater, an economically sized boardroom and a state-of-the-art training room. Additionally, a staff canteen and client dining room is separated by a new coffee bar area for clients, which serves as an informal break-away area and provides a respite in between meetings.

The firm's amazing collection of South African art was a big factor in the colour choices of the design. Neutrals have been chosen in the main with accents of purple, chosen as the tonal complement of the new corporate colour of Bell Dewar, which is orange. Art is a big element in the ethos of Bell Dewar – it supports South African art generously and it is impressive to see such an extensive collection so lovingly admired by these corporate lawyers – the art is a hint at the creative side of this firm that has been a part of South African history for more than 100 years. *it*