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- ← DOUGLAS CARDINAL'S MUSEUM OF CIVILIZATION OPENS
- ← CCA, EH
- ← STARCK'S JUICY SALIF
- ← SEABIRD ISLAND SCHOOL BY PATKAU ARCHITECTS
- ← PREMIER ISSUE OF RAYGUN
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- ← CHIAT/DAY GOES ALT.OFFICE
- ← AERON CHAIR LAUNCHED
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- ← KARIM RASHID'S GARBO
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FIFTEEN YEARS OF AZURE



CANADA POST
REGISTRATION # 4877

SIZZLING SOUTH AMERICAN ARCHITECTURE 2 NEW WAVE OFFICES
BY 3RD UNCLE EAST MEETS WEST COAST CONDO INTERIOR DESIGN
SHOWSTOPPERS MORPHOSIS SIGNS ON

At Crush, 3rd Uncle used a variety of translucent materials to define the space, while allowing natural light to pass from one area of the office to another. A sliding panel in textured glass separates the client lounge from the boardroom. The arced acrylic wall to the left screens views into the adjacent meeting area.





MEDIA SAVVY

By John Ota Photos by Peter A. Sellar

'Renovated warehouse' and 'new media office' are quickly becoming synonymous in North American cities. In Toronto, 3rd Uncle has been busy developing ultra-flexible offices to help their clients accommodate the rapid growth and constant change that are facts of life in the information economy.

Walking the high wire requires daring, skill and a delicate sense of balance. In designing a series of new workplaces, Arviz Hassam, John Tong and Paul Syme of 3rd Uncle Design have proven that they're not afraid to venture out on the tightrope. The collaborative designs of this Toronto-based firm are unique acts of balancing the creative versus corporate, private versus public and real versus unreal. A willingness to address innovation in the workplace has put 3rd Uncle in high demand with up-and-coming new media firms. "In our recent workplace designs, we embrace change," says Hassam. "The firms that we're doing work for are companies that are inventing themselves."

Third Uncle's flexible, open-plan interiors make it relatively easy for companies to reconfigure their spaces in response to their own evolving operational needs. But everything from the choice of materials to the framing of views is designed to make the most of other types of change: these are workplaces that are animated by people in motion and the constantly changing patterns of light.

One recent project by 3rd Uncle involved the transformation of an industrial warehouse space into the

offices of Crush, a design firm that creates graphics for film, video and television commercials. The designers installed a streamlined assembly of translucent screens, wood frames and patterned glass into a 465-square-metre historic warehouse space with wood columns, industrial windows and exposed brick.

"We wanted an open space where both our technical and creative people could meet, mix and exchange ideas," says Gary Thomas, president of Crush. "We found that offices that don't mix and mingle well also don't gel. We're very happy with the social and creative look of this office."

The designers responded to the company's desire for a communicative atmosphere by creating a large central space for employees and clients to gather and socialize. On each side of the central space are semi-private offices and editing suites clad with partitions made of patterned glass and textured acrylic that softly break up light and create an ethereal atmosphere. An arced wall along one side of the office leads the eye to the open meeting area at the rear, which is the focal point of the office. A backdrop of windows reveals a spectacular view of the city's waterfront and creates the impression of endless space.

"We've tried to convey the real qualities of the materials in the design," says partner Paul Syme. "The computer world is full of unreal virtual images. They're images on the screen that can disappear immediately. The integrity of the architectural materials balances the virtuality of their work."

The design for the new media firm Flux is another progressive statement by 3rd Uncle. The program called for the creation of a 280-square-metre open space that would balance corporate requirements with the needs of the creative team. To allow for expansion and flexibility, the designers rejected the concept of fixed walls, opting instead to define the open areas with dropped ceilings, pivoting doors and partition openings. Custom-designed work tables help to organize the space while giving a clean, precise look to the office.

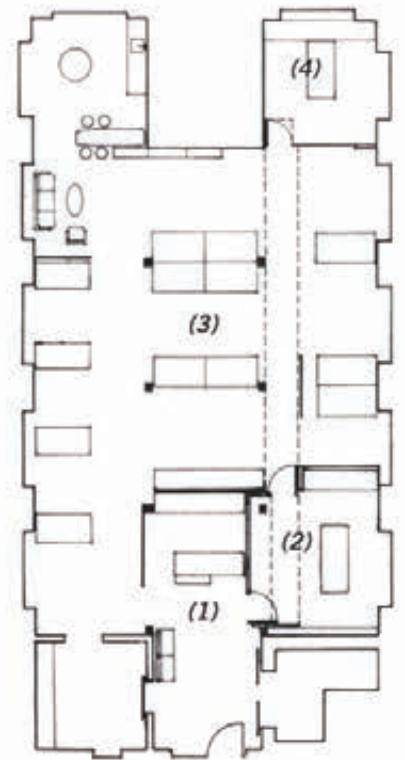
But even cutting-edge offices need functional spaces such as boardrooms and reception areas. Preventing outsiders from seeing what was on the company's computer screens was an important concern at Flux. In the reception area, translucent screens and coloured panels shield views of the computer screens while allowing glimpses into the office through

slotted windows.

"The metaphor for these offices is the website," says Tong. "The computer screen has a visual lightness with the ability to change and transform. In traditional offices, the solid wall evokes inflexibility. These new offices are about the changing image."

And while working with basic materials can stimulate a designer's creative juices, one might worry that bare wood and acrylic sheets compromise the client's corporate image. But for these firms, lightweight, unconventional materials convey the corporate image. When clients visit Crush, Thomas's top priority is to express his company's ability to deliver a unique and creative product. The unconventional look of the office is an important part of his sell.

For 3rd Uncle, the attraction of these projects is the novelty and the opportunities for exploration that each job offers. "These companies are unprecedented and they're figuring things out on the fly," says Hassam. "A lot of their social and technological issues are constantly changing. We have to anticipate their growth and allow for the transformation of their space. It's a challenge, but these projects help keep us fresh." ■



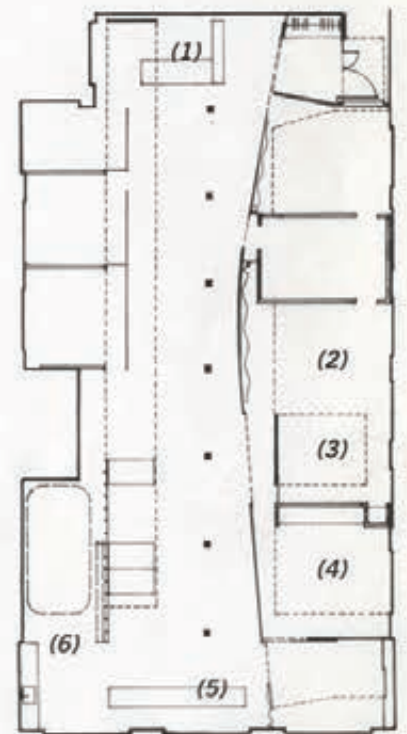
FLUX MEDIA

- (1) RECEPTION
- (2) BOARDROOM
- (3) STUDIO
- (4) OFFICE OF THE PRINCIPAL

(Top) Flux's reception area is defined by translucent acrylic panels that screen views into the open studio area. *(Centre)* A slotted window in the boardroom allows for visual contact with the receptionist. *(Bottom)* A view from Flux's boardroom through the open studio to the office of the principal. The dropped ceiling links the boardroom to the office and doubles as a wire management system.



INTERIOR DESIGN



CRUSH

- (1) RECEPTION
- (2) ONLINE SUITE
- (3) CLIENT AREA
- (4) BOARDROOM
- (5) MEETING AREA
- (6) STORAGE

(Top left) The storage area at Crush is screened from the workstations with reinforced nylon. *(Top right)* A client area adjoins one of Crush's online suites to facilitate collaboration. *(Centre)* The focal point of the multipurpose meeting area is the 5.5-metre-long table. The boardroom – with its translucent sliding doors – is visible in the background. *(Bottom left)* Crush's boardroom. *(Bottom right)* The reception area features Eames airport seating and a custom-designed coffee table.