

**GRANT GIBSON ON**

## Joonyeon Cho's Motion Office

*A recent RCA graduate and designer has created a piece that encourages movement and wellness within the office – but will employees be willing to remove their shoes?*



So here I am in the London showroom of office furniture manufacturer KI, shoes and socks off, padding bare-foot on a mat made up of small, triangular resin, bronze, ceramic and timber tiles. I'm being watched intently by the product's young designer Joonyeon Cho, a recent graduate from the Royal College of Art, as well as a

member of the KI team and the company's PR. And I have to confess I'm feeling ever-so-slightly self-conscious. The piece is a runner up from this year's award scheme the company set up with the RCA three years ago – initially with the Design Engineering department but now also including Design Products – to 'improve the working or learning experience of the future'.

With its companion piece – a long, strangely narrow and height adjustable desk – Joonyeon's mat forms Motion Office. By encouraging movement, the idea is to prevent the user from becoming sedentary and, therefore, more liable to a litany of diseases. As such it's part of the wellbeing agenda that the workplace cognoscenti – the kind of office equivalent of the liberal, metropolitan elites that Brexiteers like to lampoon – is eager (quite rightly) to promote but which, much to my chagrin, never seems to have touched any of the offices I've worked in.

Joonyeon, who has a background in mechanical engineering, initially intended to design a chair before realising that, as he puts it a lit-



↑ Internal airbags encourage a gentle rocking movement

tle dramatically, "chairs are killing us". Instead he decided to create a piece that encourages a series of micro-movements. The desk's lack of depth, for instance, means users have to spread outwards and reach to get to their various tools. As one would expect it's height-adjustable, but once you've found the perfect position it has, what the designer describes as, "stealth height variation" – a continuous, but tiny, up-and-down motion which means you're always subconsciously moving (full disclosure: this function wasn't working when I visited).

However, the main talking point is found on the floor. The piece contains internal airbags that help provide the user with a gentle rock, while the tiles of different materials – which are contrasting heights and shapes – give a variety of sensations on the soul of the foot. Certain areas are heated which also delivers a pleasing, tingly sensation. Essentially you can't help but shuffle from foot to foot.

It's worth pointing out at this stage that Motion Office is very

much at the prototype stage. This is a student project, albeit one that KI appears to believe may have some mileage commercially. If it does make it on to the market it will have some hurdles to overcome, however. Firstly in the UK, there's the whole issue of asking employees to take their shoes and socks off. I've had the dubious pleasure of working alongside a colleague who routinely removed his trainers while sat at his desk (having cycled into the office) and it simply doesn't go down well with the rest of the workforce. In fact it's deeply anti-social. At a time when people are paranoid about hygiene, would employees be willing to share a mat? Joonyeon thinks that each piece will be for personal use but right now the product is too heavy to easily roll up and carry away.

Another issue that the designer will have to overcome is space. The desk that requires people to move from side to side is a perfectly decent notion but persuading facility managers to give staff that much room could prove tricky. Joonyeon will have to be a persuasive salesman. At the moment he thinks the mat would retail at around £1000 but reckons he could value-engineer it down to between £200-£500. Ultimately there's a reasonable idea nestled in here and I'm intrigued to see how the product could look when it's fully resolved and ready to be manufactured. ■

↓ An adjustable desk and mat form the Motion Office

