

Cupboard

The growth of agile working has brought a new wave of flexible and attractive storage options into the office

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love



The rise of flexible working is not only changing where we work and how we work, it's also changing the objects we use at work and where we keep them. In one working day these factors can change for agile staff who move around different workstations, or between different workplaces altogether.

Fixed desk space in the office is no longer a given. Storing away personal items allows staff to move around and collaborate: it's the anchoring of personal items to one workstation and the sense of "nesting" that often ties employees down to one desk. Without access to personal items and areas, however, there's the risk of making staff feel detached from a space.

One of the first brands to address the untapped potential of personal storage was Hotbox by interior



Fraser'shot

"We may welcome the ability to work anywhere, but we still need a place to go and a place to keep things"



↑ Hotbox's HB-shuttle organises life for agile workers who commute

← The Hotbox HB-2 is a flexible portable storage system



← KI Europe 800 Series lockers aided Philips' transition to agile work

designer Rachel Forster and product designer Jamie Rothwell. "The idea for the original Hotbox occurred to me around 2001 when companies started to introduce desk-sharing in call centres. You simply couldn't fit two or three pedestals under each desk to accommodate individual private personal storage for each worker," Rothwell explains.

His original mobile storage boxes really set the standard for secure, portable and flexible personal storage and the Hotbox was updated in 2014 and again last year. The most recent HB-3, HB-shuttle and HB-go feature softer, lighter fabrics and are aimed at "commuting agile workers", the growing number of people who travel between different sites and work from home more often.

"Personal storage is very important, but what we store is changing," says Rothwell. "The cloud is widely accessible and secure so we are happy to store any documents or data in it... Therefore we don't need to store and transport vast amounts of paperwork around with us. We do however need to store and transport our daily work tools around with us so we can work efficiently and comfortably when we find somewhere we would like to work."

We have all heard about the collaborative benefits of the agile/flexible workplace "but it can be daunting, unfamiliar and sterile to the worker," Rothwell says. "It's just human nature to want to make your space your own, so you feel comfortable and connected, not distracted and frustrated."

Storage expert Bisley has explored the difference between storage and stowage and believes that a variety of options are required in the modern office. The two can be helpfully explained using neuroscience, the difference between the left and right side of the brain. "Storage is the equivalent of the left hemisphere... It is the things we file away and archive so we know how to find them at some possibly undetermined point in the future," says Helen Owen, director of business development at Bisley. "Stowage, on the other hand, is all about the now. It is about the things we need today or tomorrow... It may not even be information, but the personal

items and paraphernalia we need, or which make our working day better and more productive.”

She explains: “The distinction is important in the contemporary workplace because we are seeing a profound shift away from storage to stowage. Storage is increasingly available to us in digital form, but stowage incorporates by definition the physical items we need to work. This trend from one form to the other will continue as work becomes more agile in response to profound technological and cultural change. We may welcome the ability to work anywhere, but we still need a place to go and a place to keep things.”

While new solutions are on the rise, the design of more traditional storage solutions, like office lockers, is still tackling space efficiency and flexibility. In a recent project, manufacturer KI Europe brought these solutions to the fore as it helped technology firm Philips relocate its UK headquarters to Guildford, going from 4,650sq m to about 3,250sq m of space with no reduction in staff. Fostering an agile working culture was necessary for the office to work, so the space was arranged into neighbourhoods of unassigned desks for staff, with the exception



↑ Warner Music’s wheeled units resemble instrument cases



↑ A wall in Warner’s office mixes concealed and display storage

of a few select roles. Philips put in place a clean-desk policy and pedestals were replaced with individual personal lockers.

According to KI Europe, new lockers have enabled staff to successfully transition to their new agile working environment, a culmination of many months of research and preparation. Its 800 Series lockers were selected for the job. The finishing

touch was spraying the doors in a variety of colours to complement the overall design of the office.

Bean Buro’s headquarters for Warner Music in Hong Kong is another office design that features both practical and aesthetically strong storage solutions. Full of bespoke elements and references to the influential music brand’s history, the project includes a mixture of fixed, open, concealed and movable storage, with a full-height timber wall that wraps around the central core of the space.

The wall incorporates open display shelves and efficient concealed storage with bespoke leather handles. As Bean Buro director Lorène Faure explains, it connects all of the different departments, and “allows Warner Music to display their company culture through records, musical instruments and photographs”.

Wheeled storage units were also created for each desk cluster in the office. “Reminiscent of travelling

instrument cases, these units are crafted from hairline copper and timber, with large wheels allowing for a degree of flexibility,” says Bean Buro director Kenny Kinugasa-Tsui. “Planters are incorporated into these units, bringing a natural aesthetic to the office and also creating an additional layer of privacy between desk clusters.”

Elsbeth Lee, the practice’s senior architectural designer, reflects on the bespoke additions: “Designing custom storage details allows the design to reflect the needs of the individual client. [It allowed] Warner Music to conceal what is needed but not necessarily beautiful, and to display feature items.”

Jestico + Whiles also displays just how adaptable storage can be in two of its recent office fit outs. For its Prague offices for Czech property developer IBS Rokal, the storage solution is designed to enclose shared workspace facilities such as the kitchen and toilets. ☺

→ Custom joinery in the IBS Rokal HQ hides storage and facilities

"The brief required a series of different spaces to be created, with some allowing for transparency and some not," explains Alex Gordon, associate director with the practice. "The more private areas of the kitchen, washrooms, and the all-important storage areas are concealed behind bespoke designed rich timber, curved forms, inspired by the nearby forests. These solid elements provide the focus of the design, and importantly provide ample space for storage areas out of view."

The practice's design for the University of Westminster's architectural studios also used custom mobile cupboard and display units. "The department were keen to ensure that storage space was maximised throughout, while also providing a highly flexible series of crit/display spaces," says Gordon. "Accordingly, we developed a design for the storage units made up of standard-sized timber sheets, allowing these joinery items to be simply constructed and finished as dictated by the very tight construction programme."

Here multi-use and function really was key: "We designed a series of 2.4m long mobile cupboard and display units with hinged doors on the storage side and flush display space on the display side, to act as pin-up space. As well as providing much-needed storage space to conceal student materials, these mobile units can also be used to divide large

rooms into smaller, more intimately scaled, working spaces."

Similarly, when BDG architecture + design moved to its new studio at Sea Containers in central London, a statement storage piece from USM was selected to perform a number of functions. The solution includes lockers for the employ-



Ales Jungmann

Joanne O'Brien

ees on one side and shelving on the other – used for samples and research publications. The counter top also provides a "bar" for serving guests at presentations and events.

With space efficiency and agile working at the fore, designers

are really thinking about storage, and this unsung office hero is no longer an afterthought. These are just a few recent examples of how office storage is effectively given a secondary function: incorporating plants or displays, dividing open floorplates, improving acoustics or adding to the space's narrative or branding.

As for what will come next, Rothwell believes that workplace storage, whether personal or shared, will become even smarter and safer as the workplace becomes even more agile: "To facilitate [these trends] the workplace locker needs to be more flexible to allow for single user or multi-user (day locker) modes more quickly and easily. Electronic keyless locking systems are becoming more affordable and reliable and this makes the workplace locker a much smarter tool." ■

"Mobile units can be used to divide large rooms into smaller, more intimate spaces"

↑ The University of Westminster's units act as space dividers

← BDG's wall of USM storage is both practical and decorative



Christophe Glaudiel