

smooth sailing

Text: Brinda Gill | Photographs: Sebastian Zachariah, courtesy the architects

The simplistic design philosophy that Mumbai-based architect Kunal Khandelwal and his team at Design Inc. applied to the Sai Shipping Corporation's office makes for easy navigation.

The rectangular reception area centered perpendicular to the main space separates the executive area at the left from the secretarial staff area at the right

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right: A sense of openness is achieved through the use of glass walls between cabins, low walls along the corridor, white surfaces and functional recessed lighting

below: The juxtaposition of colours and textures in the flooring of the corridor and staff areas is accentuated by a strip of river pebbles filled into a channel running the length of the passage

opposite above: The open office area has semi-private spaces bordered by low walls of white edged and wrapped with wood. All the work areas have tube lights with reflectors, some placed in slots created by the beams. Public spaces like the reception and the corridors are lit by recessed downlighters

opposite below: The large desks and the spaces around them are designed for LCD monitors keeping the needs of the staff in mind



A FROSTED DOOR WITH A sand-blasted logo and a vertical band of clear glass defines the end of a passage flanked by offices. As the door discreetly conceals the space within, the clear band offers a glimpse of the company names set in the facing wall. Stepping inside, a smart low wall of wood, with a narrow vertical break, fronts the reception desk. A few chairs line the wall. Recessed downlighters shine on the reception backdrop – a band of steel, etched with the word 'shipping' in English, Hindi and Marathi that contrasts with the deep brown ceiling-to-floor mahogany wood panel it is set on.

"We may have arrived on different ships, but we are still in the same boat," reads a couplet on the wall opposite the reception which also bears steel logos of Sai Shipping Co (P) Ltd, and Sai Maritime & Management (P) Ltd. The line also hints at the company's philosophy of working as a team, with a friendly and open minded approach, we're told by architect Kunal Khandelwal, whose design team comprising architects Mayuri Nandu and Khushboo Sanghavi from Design Inc. designed this 1,350-square-foot space for the firm with an international clientele and



work methodology but an Indian mindset. The client's brief was clear – a corporate office for their senior executives and their assistants. The office had to project an international image with a clean and modern aesthetic, a noise and clutter-free ambience and a calm, comfortable work environment.

A graduate of Kamla Raheja Vidyaniidhi Institute for Architecture Et Environmental Studies, Mumbai, Kunal believes in translating the clients brief with his design methodology, a minimalist approach towards interiors, with functionality and pragmatics well taken care of. Kunal says he likes to see and feel space; that space is more than a physical experience and that it is important for him to know how his design affects a person's psyche. To this effect, Kunal knew he wanted to transform the site into a functional and neat office set in a harmonious

environment with plenty of natural light, a hint of nature and sweeping views of the Arabian Sea. The site was a long and narrow space – 78' long, 16' 9" wide and 9' high, with a small rectangular area centered perpendicular to the main space. Though the site had a heavy beam structure with 12-inch-deep beams spanning the ceiling every four feet, thankfully it was column-free. Further, it adjoined a terrace, with sea views along its length, and plenty of natural light streaming in through large rectangular windows on the terrace side.

The team kept the design strategy simple – an open office scheme with lots of natural light and foliage on the terrace just outside the windows. The long office area was divided into the executive area and the secretarial staff area by the central reception. To create a sense of openness and transparency and to minimize



left & below: In keeping with the corner office concept, the two main offices stand at either end of the long corridor. The Director's cabin, seen in these images, is a smart functional space that enjoys a sea view



visual barriers, Kunal employed the corner office idea, slotting the two main offices at either end of the long corridor. The Director's cabin with a small rest room to the extreme left and the Chartering Office at the extreme right were designed as individual spaces with large wooden work tables and storage units with display space. One side of the executive area is lined with glass cabins while the other has semi-open work spaces. Across the corridor from the reception area is a semi-private discussion area, next to which is the conference room. The utility room and the rest rooms adjoin the Chartering Office. Behind the reception, screened off by the wall of wood and a floor-to-ceiling wooden screen,

are machines, printers, pigeon holes for printouts and a shuttered cabinet for files.

With 23 personnel and a large international clientele, the team wanted to ensure the staff had maximum privacy and minimum disturbance from visitors while giving them easy access to visitors. So, the meeting room and the conference room were placed across the reception. As these two areas met the needs of coping with visitors, the remaining office areas were planned with the needs of the staff in mind. The open-office area has semi-private spaces edged by low walls of white with wooden ledges and wooden elements wrapped round

them forming the desk area. Large desks (and not discussion tables) were specially designed for LCD monitors. All the tables are glass-topped with straight lines and sans mouldings making them easy to maintain.

Glass and white surfaces across the office instantly create a sense of space, light and neatness. As the cabins to the right of the corridor are partitioned only by clear and frosted glass walls embedded in the floor without frames – there are blinds that can be rolled down during meetings for privacy. A sense of space and light permeates the row of cabins, the corridor and semi-open office space. A few minimal wooden highlights contrast with the glass and white walls. Like the walls, the flooring was also worked to provide functionality and interest. Italian grey marble in the corridors and off-white vitrified tiles in the staff areas make for a neat work space. This juxtaposition of colours and textures provides a break in the flooring that is accentuated by a strip of river pebbles in a channel running the length of the passage. Narrow strips of wood at a low level on the wall conceal accent lights along the floor.

The ceiling is treated primarily as two flat horizontal surfaces – one with flat panels and large reflective downlighters that hovers over the cabins, the other with square recessed downlighters that runs through the corridor, breaks suddenly at one end and curves upwards exposing the beam structure, which is washed by white light. This adds interesting texture to the otherwise sparse and bare ceiling. An air-conditioning duct is inconspicuously accommodated in the level difference between the ceilings along the length of the corridor.

The feeling of space is accentuated with soothing views of lush plants including bamboos and palms on the terrace visible through the large windows. Kunal believes



greenery is the perfect antidote for stress and views of plants and openness enhance productivity. The windows bring in much light, minimizing the need for artificial lighting during the day and each window is equipped with roller blinds to block out excessive glare. Artificial light takes the form of indirect lighting. Work areas have tube lights with reflectors that provide good general lighting without striking the eye even if one is looking up at the ceiling. In fact, tube lights have been placed in the slots wherever the ceiling has beams. Public spaces such as the reception and the corridors have direct lighting in the form of recessed downlighters.

With a white base, highlights of wood and river pebbles and light for texture, the minimalistic nature of this uncluttered, modern and harmonious workspace is pragmatic to the core. ●

The well-lit and neat conference room edged with transparent glass has blinds that can be pulled across when needed