

Bargain Basement

Turner Castle turns a basement car park into an editing suite with an outdoor feel for London ad agency McCann Erickson.

Words Grant Gibson
Photos Keith Collie

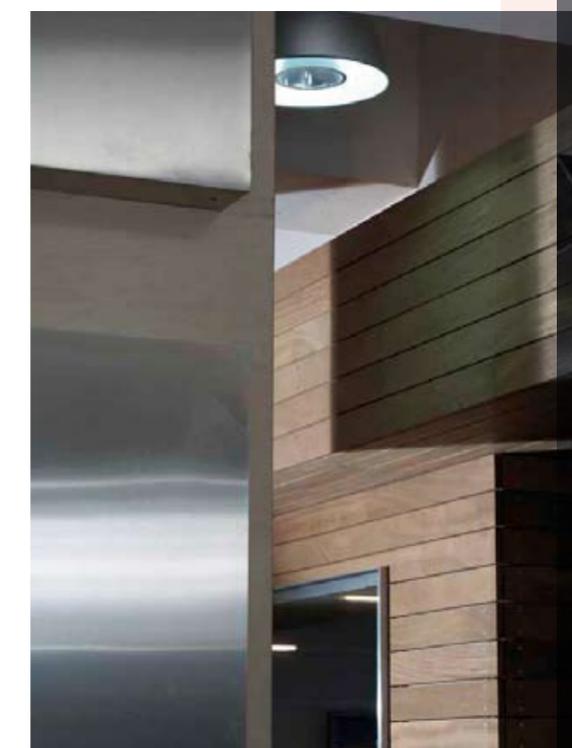
The outer wall of each suite is clad in 90-mm strips of iroko (African teak) and features large windows that reveal the activity within. The design is seen as a streetscape with shop windows. Rubber matting commonly used in stables enhances the outdoor atmosphere.

Closely related they may be, but a huge cultural chasm separates the design and advertising industries. As the editor of a magazine that regularly attempts to bridge the divide between the pair, *Creative Review's* Patrick Burgoyne was talking from experience when he recently wrote: 'Designers view their advertising cousins as barbarians who love cheap gags, flashy effects and ripping off ideas from wherever they stumble across them, all in the name of cynically stoking an already rampant consumer culture.' Certainly, when it comes to interiors, advertising agencies can generally be relied upon to push the boat out. Mother's London office, for example, is dominated by a huge concrete table that can seat the firm's 200-strong staff. Likewise, employees of Parisian agency Enjoy work at one huge wooden desk (which includes storage and shelving) with huge cacti marking each individual pod. As a rule of thumb, advertising is an industry that favours ostentatiously quirky offices designed to prove to clients how creative a firm is, how it defies convention and, therefore, how it can justify the enormous budgets (not to mention fees) it demands.

Looking into the suites is akin to peering through the net curtains of someone's semi

Seen against this backdrop of extravagance, the new interior for Chrome, the in-house digital editing suite for McCann Erickson, comes as a bit of a shock. Housed in the basement of the advertising giant's rather wonderful (if not necessarily sensitively restored) Art Deco-style, multistorey, former car park, it is neither wilfully over the top nor self-consciously eccentric. There are no lurid colours, outsized pieces of furniture or caravans that act as breakout spaces. Oh, and there isn't any actual chrome in sight. Instead, the young British architecture firm Turner Castle, which had already garnered a reputation in this area by redesigning Abbott Meade Vickers BBDO's London office in 2004, has taken a largely neglected space – think grey carpet tiles, shabby furnishings and a company postal area – and given it a rigorous, pared-down makeover that manages to still feel warm and contain a hint of genuine wit. 'The client quite liked the idea that it was a car park to start with, and there was a lot of talk of retrograde steps and taking it back,' explains the charmingly deadpan Carl Turner, adding that they decided to 'just twist it a little bit'.

Like many architects of their generation, Turner and his partner, Cassion Castle, are fascinated by notions of different landscapes and the bits in between buildings. Using such notions as a starting point, the pair decided to bring the street indoors. As you walk into the space, what you notice first are the materials. The floor in the communal areas is made from a rubber matting – acting as tarmac in this architectural metaphor – that is more commonly used in horse stables. Meanwhile, running along the right-hand wall are four separate, timber-clad, editing suites with windows either mounted on the inside or the outside to provide informal bench-



Material junction: panels of brushed stainless steel meet strips of iroko. Panels fixed with adhesive to the birch-plywood box are held short at the edges to reveal indented plywood corners. Iroko strips have been carefully dimensioned to the module of the board width to avoid cut or notched boards.

type seating. 'It creates the idea of socially interactive spaces,' Turner tells me. 'So you have the street with furniture.' The suites themselves look like a computer nerd's wet dream – all big screens, IKEA task lighting, black-stained coir flooring, huge desks and comfy sofas. Natural light, a precious commodity in any basement scheme, comes in through smoke vents near the ceiling. Frankly, all four suites look like very pleasant, restful and productive places to work. At the end of the row is a high-tech, antiseptic, laboratory-style machine room where all the 'kit' has very deliberately been left out on display. 'Previously, a lot of the equipment had been hidden in offices with little windows,' says Turner. 'And, obviously, people spend a lot of time down here, so we wanted to get as much light in as possible.'

Dominating the centre of the floor plan is a satin-steel audio-editing pod which has been built off the ground, away from the walls, and is triple glazed to make it soundproof. Inside, the finishes have been left rough – you can see greying lamb's wool stuffed inside the industrial mesh that helps to deaden sound. 'We've >>



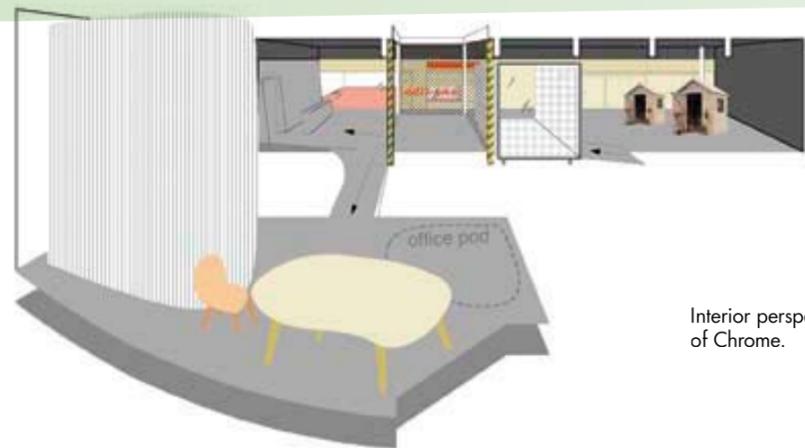
Conceived as a box within a box, the audio edit suite is clad in brushed stainless steel to achieve a high level of acoustic separation. Small slits reflect this functional requirement. On the right, 'shop windows' offering views of suite interiors feature seating on either the inside or outside of the space.

Floor plan of Chrome, the in-house digital editing suite of London ad agency McCann Erickson.

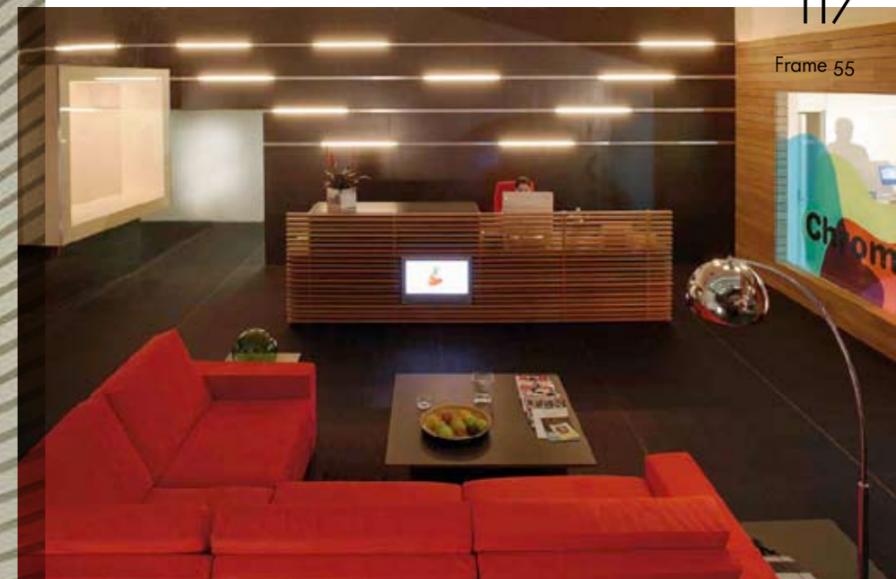
1. Presentation edit suite
2. Director's office
3. Reception
4. Machine room
5. Edit suite
6. Graphics room
7. Audio edit suite
8. Voice-over booth
9. Meeting space



Pictured is an edit desk in the presentation edit suite, which is used for client viewings and functions as a small cinema. A split-level floor enables the editor to view the same screen as the audience (over their heads). Ridged wall surfaces help break up sound reflections to produce a better quality of sound.



Interior perspective of Chrome.



tried to express the materials everywhere,' says Turner by way of explanation. Moving through, there's the reception, complete with a desk and modesty panel which echoes the material used for the editing suites. Up a short flight of stairs is the entrance to another pod – this time finished in polished steel – that acts as an office for the company's two creative directors and, finally, a main split-level presentation suite with walls covered in slatted wood to help, in Turner's words, 'disrupt the sound waves'.

The suites look like a computer nerd's wet dream: big screens, IKEA task lighting, huge desks, comfy sofas

'It's quite a rugged space,' says Turner, 'and yet there's an idea of shop fronts with shop windows.' But to my mind it's a little more voyeuristic than that. Looking into the suites is akin to peering through the net curtains of someone's semi. Yet it works. As Turner takes me around the space (which cost £170,000), we bump into Chrome's creative directors, Carl Scott and John Perez, who couldn't be more effusive. As we're chatting, Turner points out with no little pride that 'this has become a key area in the building from being just a leftover space. Now they have stuff like their office get-togethers down here.' Unlike a number of ad-agency interiors I've seen through the years, Chrome is refreshingly free of the sort of gimmicks that briefly amuse before wearing thin. And you fancy it's been created with the needs of the company's ten-strong staff in mind rather than as a three-dimensional tool for impressing gullible clients. Would I want to work there? Hell, yes.

The directors, who wanted to be at the heart of the operation, occupy a polished stainless-steel 'pod' that cantilevers into the reception area. Reception desk and rear wall are made of black MDF panels. Tube lighting on the wall continues the linear feeling set up by the timber cladding. Lamps, sofas and rugs were supplied by the client.