

# FURNISHING THE OFFICE

NEW AGE OFFICE FURNITURE IS ALL ABOUT BALANCING STYLE WITH ERGONOMICS AND ENSURING THAT FORM MEETS FUNCTIONALITY

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**N**ew age office furniture has the essence of ergonomic design to boost productivity and bring a sense of style to the workstation. It draws a connection between the workplace and the worker. Office furniture is designed for a specific use and, today, with home offices becoming the new norm, it is being used for the same purpose in homes too. In a report published by Technavio, the office furniture market is expected to grow by \$ 22.67 bn during 2020-2024, progressing at a CAGR of almost 6%.

## THE DIFFERENTIAL

Office furniture is more functional and has specific requirements as it needs to be more maintenance-free and easy to clean and sanitise. Office furniture must use minimum maintenance material, which can withstand high traffic like scratch-free laminates, stain-free fabrics and double-charged tiles. Sound echo is a major issue in spaces with high ceilings, thus appropriate use of sound-absorbing materials are required to tackle the issue. An office is a large space planned to accommodate several users; hence, many furniture pieces can be mass produced to a specific design.

In fact, Godrej Interio published a research paper on Reimagining Workspaces in wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. "We launched physical separators, changeable upholstery covers for chairs, and 12 other products. We realised that Indian homes being smaller, pieces of furniture need to blend with existing home furniture. We extended our Work from Home furniture portfolio," says Sameer Joshi, associate vice president, Marketing (B2B), Godrej Interio.

## CONTEMPORARY CUES

Office furniture trends are governed by working hours and the change in the type of work. As working hours become longer, furniture is also adapted to be functional while adding comfort for the user. Open desks, more personalised additions, customisation to fit in equipment and supplies relevant to the user, are being preferred. "New trends in office



furniture are versatile items which combine function, comfort and aesthetics. We see a lot of design requests to make an average cubicle more engaging with design elements that are easy to maintain yet stand out; for example, a filing cabinet can now hold your files as well as your potted plant and yet stand out as a design feature," says Pankaj Poddar, co-founder, Hipcouch.

Shabnam Alam, principal designer, Shabnam Alam Interiors, says, "Office furniture is a lot sleeker and organic



1. Hipcouch believes that combining material suitable for the task with little elements that make it stand out is the key to designing office furniture.

2. The use of glass panels in the conference room helps connect it to the other areas in this office by Shabnam Alam Interiors.

3. Hipcouch ensures customisation of furniture as relevant to the user.

4. Sameer Joshi, associate vice president, Marketing (B2B), Godrej Interio.

5. Pankaj Poddar, co-founder, Hipcouch.

6. Shabnam Alam, principal designer, Shabnam Alam Interiors.



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7. The Novo City office by Malcolm Daruwalla uses minimal furniture with subtle colours to match the interior.

8. Malcolm Daruwalla, principal architect, Seedle.

9. Rajit Mhetras, principal designer, Mhetras Design.

10. Kavitha Rao, country commercial manager, IKEA India.

11. Silver solid sheesham wood office desk from Saraf Furniture.

with biomorphic forms. Monotone colour theme, mainly in shades of greys with good use of prefabricated or natural wood, brings a more organic feel. Lime plasters on the wall, microcrete finishes on floors, prefabricated walls, are also in trend. Use of natural wood for walls, floors and countertops, gives warmth to the otherwise sterile décor. There is a rising demand for wellness-backed designs with the use of light-weight, multifunctional and moveable furniture."

#### BEING PRACTICAL

Office furniture needs to be functional as it is in use for most part of the day. Combining material suitable for the task with little elements to make it stand out is the key to designing office furniture. "Flexible furniture helps create an aesthetically appealing working environment while keeping the functionality in check. Office furniture must be space

sensitive – instead of having two tables of different heights, you can have one which is adjustable at the press of a button. It is also important to note that the furniture and design should not be too overpowering and visually overwhelming. This would turn the space into a distraction and draw attention away from the brand and work," says Malcolm Daruwalla, principal architect, Seedle. With the expectations of human-centric, collaborative and active office spaces, the office furniture segment is showing dynamic flexibility in terms of adaptation to changing functional requirements.

#### ERGONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

Furniture in an office context needs to be designed to ensure certain ergonomic factors. It must promote correct spine posture, be adjustable, reduce physical tension, encourage physical movement and be usable. "Pre-pandemic, office



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furniture witnessed a swift trend towards ergonomics like standing desks and ergonomic office chairs. Evidently, standing desks are the healthiest office furniture in present times. They get you on your feet, boost your productivity and help in combating many medical issues," says Raghunandan Saraf, CEO & founder, Saraf Furniture.

Rajit Mhetras, principal designer, Mhetras Design, adds, "The designs ought to be efficient and appeal to the needs of the target audience. They must appeal to the various age groups who inhabit the space by blending into each other; at the same time, serving their purpose to be functional to each generation. Ensuring the usage of firmer sofas and the heights of the chairs pertaining to the respective tables is extremely important in the case of office furniture. Colours play a major role and it's suitable to have lighter table tops facing light-coloured walls, and uniform lighting to brighten up the office atmosphere."

#### HOME OFFICE

Work from home furniture has become an essential spend for many people. Customers have realised the importance of having functional, light weight and affordable furniture while working at home. Space is another constraint as most continue to work from home. "Our DIY desk solutions would be ideal for customers who are struggling with space at their homes. While the customers can build their own table, they also have the option to dismantle the table after work and utilise the space for other activities. Customers are spending a lot of time at their desk and are looking for various ways to declutter their workspace. There is a rise in purchase of storage/ drawer units for storing office-related items. We have a wide range of solutions at affordable prices



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to meet this need," opines Kavitha Rao, country commercial manager, IKEA India.

As we are going through a global pandemic, the whole office industry is being redefined from ground zero. "We are not only coming up with new furniture products but also new concepts of furniture alignment. At present, our primary focus is on making offices safe workplaces with our furniture, while giving equal attention to comfort," adds Ashish Aggarwal, CEO, Indo Innovations.

#### PURPOSEFUL SIMPLICITY

Concrete has emerged as a new concept for office furniture. "All the furniture is handmade, sustainable and customis-

12. Mhetras Design has made this conference desk that can be used as a tennis table in order to cope with the space constraint.

13. Hallan by IKEA is a cabinet that is done in white and works well as a storage unit in an office.



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14. Ergonomic chairs by Indo Innovations give users a comfortable and healthy experience.

15. Ashish Aggarwal, CEO, Indo Innovations.

16. Gurpreet Kaur Tuteja, founder, Eliteearth.

17. Snehal Suthar, co-founder and lead designer, The Grid Architects.

18. Concrete furniture for an advocate's office by Eliteearth.

able. The GFRC concrete furniture is lightweight and trendy as well. A lot of accessories are being used in the office set-up and people are looking for sustainable options. Concrete desktop accessories are in vogue and demand," says Gurpreet Kaur Tuteja, founder, Eliteearth.

Considering the possibility of remote working and to make the most out of expensive commercial spaces, a trend of domestication of workspaces is seen. So, modern functionality is blending with ethnic looks, and sustainable materials like cardboards, recycled items, etc., are being used for low carbon ratings.

"The industry should grow towards sustainability by exploring various materials and their amalgamation – con-

crete, stone, metal, wood, bamboo and the like," aver Snehal & Bhadri Suthar, co-founders and lead designers, The Grid Architects.

**CHALLENGE FACTOR**

The biggest challenge for furniture in the Indian context is user awareness as customers lack the knowledge of how to choose the right furniture. The choice of workspace and furniture has a direct impact on employee health and productivity. This connection is often missed. Suman Sharma, principal, head of business, Mangrove Collective, says, "The challenge has always been on how to create something that is aesthetically pleasing while keeping in mind the function-



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ality of the space it inhabits. Add to that the fact that it needs to be hardy enough to withstand heavy use." The office space has shrunk visibly in recent times and, at times, it is quite challenging to accommodate all requirements.

**DESIGN DETAIL**

The lines between plain functional forms, art work, sculptures, and material design, are slowly blurring, as is the fixed

definition of interior spaces. There is very little difference in the design language and scope for innovation in both office furniture and home furniture as singular units.

"A play of lines and texture, expressed through the pillows, prints, modern artwork, contemporary accessories and statement lighting, creates an indulgent workspace. Options with charging ports, hidden storage, and adaptable pieces that can be moved and repurposed are easy to handle in home office layouts. Creative storage as integrated low level and corner storages, which also double as seating or an artistic highlight, ensure fun and functional spaces," says Punam Kalra, creative director, I'm the Centre for Applied Arts.

At NSA Architects, the key factors in balancing form and functionality are assessing the cross functional needs and responding to the surrounding. "Use of geometric shapes, natural lighting and striking colours are other driving forces. These factors help in locating and highlighting functional needs, which – in turn – help in balancing form and function. Tailoring of these aspects with functional requirements is a creative process, which leads to functional and human-centric spaces," says Narendra Sardeshpande of NSA Architects.

Office furniture can be as stylish as it can be practical, so whether you are working from home or office, this is where form meets functionality. 20



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19. Conference table available at I'm the Centre for Applied Arts by Punam Kalra.

20. The Eunoia desk from The Grid Architects.

21. Mangrove Collective designs furniture that makes offices functional and aesthetic.

22. Bhadri Suthar, co-founder and lead designer, The Grid Architects.

23. Suman Sharma, principal, head of business, Mangrove Collective.

24. Punam Kalra, creative director, I'm the Centre for Applied Arts.

25. Narendra Sardeshpande of NSA Architects.