







but we're not easily pigeonholed. We are predominantly a shell and core architect, but we've done a fair amount of interiors and fit-out projects. Our most recent completed projects are the St. Paul's Place Hotel in Sheffield and City Inn Hotel in Manchester. We are now working on a Holiday Inn Express in Manchester too. We focus on functional, modern, aspirational work, with a reference to context and history – the Sheffield project is a good example of that.

'I'm from the States and worked in San Francisco, New York and Chicago before coming to London 21 years ago. I originally came here to help set up Skidmore, Owings and Merrill's UK operation with a particular focus on the Broadgate Development. In the mid '80's I helped SOM in London grow their practice from 25 to 300 staff and then back down to 100 all in just a few short years; so I have an appreciation of the vagaries of this business. After that I went into partnership with some ex-SOM colleagues who were based in Chicago. We had our office in Fitzrovia

and briefly in Old Street. When that partnership split up in 2001, I moved the practice to my home for a brief period not far from here in Hammersmith. From this experience I realised I could better manage my work/life balance if I worked near home and so a number of years later, when I was ready to step things up a few notches, I focused on searching for a new space near where we had been in Hammersmith for the past several years. When I found this office directly opposite the Lyric Theatre, I knew it was perfect for us.

'Its previous life had been home to a call centre selling Mediterranean time-share properties. It was dowdy, full of brown partitions with the staff housed like battery hens. But I loved the size of the windows and the ceiling height so much that I took a new lease at the top of the market – which in hindsight wasn't maybe so clever!

'At that time, one of our clients, Commercial Estates Group, had just completed their new offices, where they had used Sagal's Lista Office system, and I knew it was just right for us – so much so

that I designed the office around their ranges. Everything here is set out, dimensioned and built around the Sagal range. We currently employ nine staff but, as we all know, workload goes up and down and so we've planned the office for a capacity of 24 – it's truly a flexible space. At the same time, it's a truly intensive use of the space available.

'The predominant colour is white, with an occasional yellow accent. I gave that accent colour a lot of thought for a long time. I got cold feet over the use of colour not least because I knew the scheme had to be neutral enough that if, God forbid, I had to cut and run, then subletting would not be hindered by the colour. It so happens that I am rather partial to the particular shade of my yellow Ducati superbike, and one day as I was riding on one of the new DDA compliant buses which are fitted out with grab bars and seats in the same shade of yellow, it just clicked in my head that it would work. The colour was a custom, but Lista was happy to produce it for us on their MotionXXL and Qub ranges at no



►►► additional charge, and this allowed us to use it as an accent in a fun and dynamic way.

‘The whole project was managed on a tight schedule and a tight budget – there’s very little waste. We put in Interface carpet, cleaned up the existing light fittings, and salvaged the sliding glass doors from the former tenant’s office system. Having negotiated a far from perfect rent-free period, time was of the essence – and we just made it in on time. The reception desk is a good example of what we did on the project – we were looking to maximise multi-purpose use of an awkward little space. It stretches functionality to the max because, beyond the unit’s role as a reception desk, it also provides a significant amount of storage as well as display space. It was all about intelligently working with Sagal’s ranges, pushing them to the limit. The same applies to the boardroom table. It’s not a Lista Office standard, or rather it wasn’t before we started on it, but Sagal were happy to work on adaptations until it was what we needed dimensionally and functionally – and as a result it shapes the use of the room.

‘We’ve done this throughout the space. The Qub storage in the meeting room and the private office are adapted and stretched to provide total functionality and maximise the use of space, with the rooms dimensioned around the furniture. Likewise,

the use of Lista Office’s long MotionXXL bench desk is precisely planned to provide workspace that can grow or contract as our needs dictate, to double up when needed to allow room for plans or models to be viewed, all backed up with highly functional storage and display elements. We’ve only been in for a year but we and have already adapted some elements of the furniture for a number of different configurations. We expected and planned to do so. What we’ve done is maximise space and functionality, but with built in flexibility for future change.

We move through to an all-important facility in any studio. ‘I saw the kitchen as an exercise in squeezing space,’ Mark continues. ‘It’s tall and narrow, a very difficult room indeed. I looked all over for a budget kitchen supplier who could produce a bespoke solution. In the end, we found Imperial Designs who produced everything like a millwork job, everything was bespoke down to the interesting low iron yellow glass we had produced to match the rest of the job. We also worked with Desalto to produce customised shelving units based on their Armida system – a difficult solution that could take a deep printer and tricky A3 storage.

‘It’s the same theme throughout – a customised, bespoke solution working with and adapting a standard kit of parts – it

takes a lot of time to get this level of quality, the devil is in the detail. From the concept to assessing technical achievability, plenty of hands-on work on site and obsession with very precise dimensions; that’s how we’ve achieved this. I’ve had no choice: we wanted high quality on a reasonable budget in a building that’s full of angles and odd nooks. And it works – we have a lot of professional visitors coming to the studio. What we’ve done is clearly good for business.’ ●

## essential ingredients

Client:	• MWA+D
Architecture & Design:	• MWA+D 020 8735 6555
Systems Furniture & Storage:	• Sagal www.sagalgroup.co.uk
Carpets:	• InterfaceFLOR 01274 690690
Seating:	• Sagal www.sagalgroup.co.uk
Specialist Storage:	• Desalto www.desalto.it
Kitchen Design & Production:	• Imperial Designs 020 7224 3144