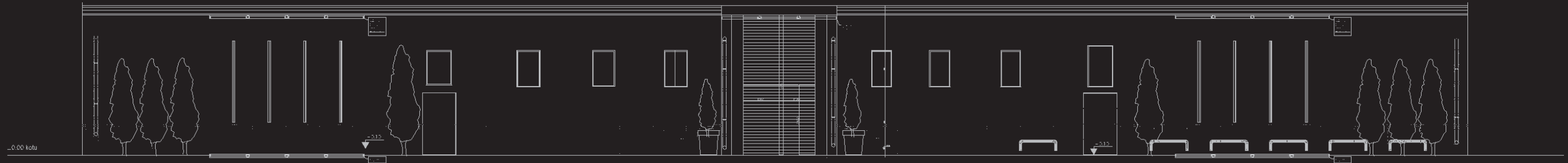


DDB^o Group

A space to free the mind.



Do creative spaces influence the creative process and product?

Following DDB&Co Istanbul's No. 3 ranking among all agencies at the 2009 Cannes Advertising Festival, a one-on-one interview with Jeffi Medina, President DDB Group Turkey and Hasan Çalışlar, Partner at the Architects Erginoğlu and Çalışlar.

Interviewed by Lawrence Du Pre

I dreamed of stone walls, a touch of history combined with modern spaces.

Jeffi Medina





Hasan Çalışlar

Partner at the Architects Erginoğlu and Çalışlar

Can you tell us about the particular challenges inherent in any agency design?

We've done TBWA, Sportsnet Sportive, Rafineri, Saatchi & Saatchi, Pars-McCann Erickson and OMD Zenith here. The basic necessities are the same, however each agency wants to accentuate a different aspect visually, be it youth, flexibility, open-mindedness or creativity. Some may be more feminine; others may want to look masculine, for example. We try to reflect these in our overall design, not just as features.

How much do you consider the existing company corporate culture? Does it influence how you treat the space, or is utility always foremost.

You have to consider the company's corporate culture and we had a headstart by knowing this agency and its people very well. Utility is of course important, but I stress that this is interior design, not decoration. We design spaces which will have a character starting from their exterior skin. We refrain from cosmetic touches.

Do you think the building's structure, materials, and working layout have the ability to shape agency culture? What way?



Jeffi Medina

President DDB Group Turkey

Can you tell us about the particular challenges of moving an agency?

Getting used to any new work environment is never easy. It takes time and if the chemistry is wrong it doesn't even work! I've seen cases of it going disastrously wrong. There are huge lists of questions to be answered, the most difficult one being, which part of town will suit employees without scaring-off clients. And in a city like Istanbul, you don't even have the luxury of wide choice.

How much do you think agency culture is influenced by a building? Did you have existing ideas about what would best suit the agency culture?

Absolutely. We're even influenced by a passing bee, as we say in Turkish! I have to confess that I had many aspects of this building in mind; I didn't want us on the 22nd floor of a tower in a concrete business park. I dreamed of stone walls, a touch of history combined with modern spaces, but for much of the time we were searching I dismissed those images as wishful thinking. Istanbul is being used up to its last stone! There's almost no way to find an old building of 3000m², able to accommodate 150 staff supported by the technical facilities an agency needs. When I think of it today, it almost sounds like a fantasy.

A workspace to inspire and trigger creativity.

Hasan Çalışlar



We wouldn't find the solution to our problem if we started our brief on the 23rd floor of a tower!

Jeffi Medina



We tried to create a space where the workspace would be inspiring and would trigger creativity, as well as efficiency. As for shaping the company culture, well, I can't really predict precisely what it will do just yet. But I think that being situated in such an alternative and socially mixed location, like Kasimpasa, will have a positive effect on DDB Istanbul, adding another dimension to the agency's perception of evolving culture.

Can you identify evidence in the building of an aspect of the agency's culture?

We really knew the agency well and the statement this building makes had to reflect the depth of that culture. The existing building's skin was a strong architectural feature. What we proposed to put under this strong skin was something very different, but in combination it created the dignified atmosphere that we wanted. We did not want to design a space where creativity is frivolously reflected in obviously striking features, instead it is to be found in subtle details. Bill Bernbach would recognise the overall approach and I think it also fits a well known quote about being cautious about how you use other people's money!

Tell us something about the more challenging technical aspects of creating this building

Restoration is a grindingly difficult process - much tougher than a new build. There were lots of missing stones and with all the missing joints the building was simply crumbling. A great deal of chemical analyses had to be done to restore and integrate the stonework. The stones were rebuilt in accordance with their original condition. And we had the challenge of designing a new environment inside an existing super-structure, a system which had to work differently from the original building's storage-only purpose. Linking four silos for internal communication was tough and we were restricted by the original structure in positioning the 'bridges' that we wanted. Tight timing was a big obstacle too. Once the location was agreed we had two months for design and project planning, but only 5 months from starting construction till the moving-in date!

Do you think the building's structure, materials, and working layout have the ability to help shape the agency culture? What way?

By all means. First of all, by saving this building we've become part of an informal movement, an influential 'entourage' that stands for the "real Istanbul". This space isn't fake. It isn't copied from another source, it's the real thing. Advertisers shape culture, because culture is built by daily habits, ways of life, new ideas and beliefs gathered from all sources. Isn't it easier, and much better, for an agency to communicate to the country from a more realistic and rooted perspective?

Can you identify evidence in the building of an aspect of the agency's culture?

Respect for the "preciousness" of the old. There's often value in what has been created before us... but it tends to evaporate without trace unless you protect it. We haven't touched the old structure of the building, but simply built a new space within the old, in a way that maintains it, not destroys it. This is an aspect of culture. Not one stone has been displaced, but the result is still both 'new' and modern.

Tell us something about the more challenging technical aspects of creating this building Where do I begin?

Perhaps with nature. For a start Kasimpasa is an area slightly below sea level. We had to make sure we wouldn't be flooded by heavy rain, as we were in our first week! I could continue with 20 other challenges as fundamental as that, from the logistic to the legal. Transforming a Grade 1 listed building puts you through every hoop known to a bureaucracy that's the best-preserved Byzantine structure in the whole country. How to get 12 tonnes of generators and air conditioning units into a sealed rear space of a building that's 60 metres from the street, without being allowed to remove a stone? It took Turkey's largest crane and shutting down the main road at 3am. Cleaning 170 years of dirt off rough sandstone, without removing any? It needed pure experimentation and a chemical bath that kept the neighbourhood awake for a week!

The combination created the dignified atmosphere we wanted.

Hasan Çalışlar



Face to face interaction is the most important gift given to mankind.

Jeffi Medina



Hasan Çalışlar

Agencies are about Ideas. So what's the Idea of this building?

Not to disguise the multiple layers of history contained in this structure. This building was used as a gunpowder factory in Ottoman times and then as the state monopoly's tobacco depot in the 1950's. We wanted to add further layers that an attentive eye could enjoy 'reading', with the stone walls constituting just the first layer of that narrative.

Will this building stand the test of time?

These days architecture and interior design are virtually disposable. It's impossible for them to be 'timeless'. But if architecture can resist the first assaults of fashion it can first be seen as retro, then the best become elevated to survive as classics. My view is that a space is more permanent when it doesn't have cosmetic elements. This office space is quite neutral, but still has strong architectural expression that should help it endure for some time yet!

With so much virtual working where is the value of a building in the creative world?

As a physical base for mental freedom. Mobile for the rest of the day, people can get together here in a space which securely holds their common identity. Buildings are just gathering places, like any forum, but their 'permanence' gives them another quality as places to exchange ideas in.

Was DDB a 'good client'? If so, how?

Pretty good! They kept to the right process discipline. Everyone was involved, without everyone trying to make the decisions. In the design process, we met and listened to every single group inside DDB. Everyone had dreams they didn't want to see compromised, but at a certain stage it's crucial to work with a single person. In the construction process there was only one decision-maker and without Jeffi in that role we couldn't have finished the project in so short a time.

Jeffi Medina

Agencies are about Ideas. So what's the Idea of this building?

The real idea is that a building could also say something about an agency's way of thinking. As in communication, the impact of any solution and the role we define for ourselves depends on how narrowly we define the brief. We simply said we wouldn't find the solution to our problem if we started our brief on the 23rd floor of a tower! If we plan to show how we can totally re-shape a client's business, then showing what we can build out of these ruined foundations isn't a bad clue.

How do you see the creative agency building 50 years from now?

I try not to think about it because there won't be one! Home studios and offices are promoted for their 'practicality' and lower cost. I see it as a huge danger, a real disaster in the making! Face to face interaction is the most precious gift given to mankind. It's also the basis of any creative business. Nobody can convince me that the same kind of human contact, or the sensation of working in an old stone building, is going to work via a screen, even if it's a big, HD and holographic one.

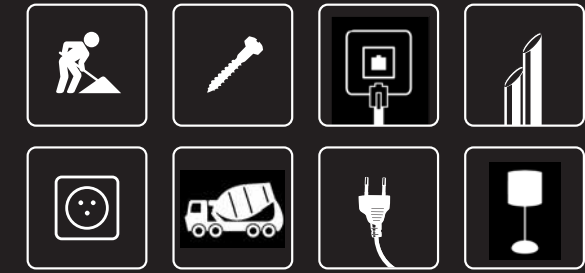
Were you a 'good client'? What would your architects say?

Agencies and fashion companies are usually the worst clients for architects! It's because they're creative themselves and want to reflect their creative skills and identity in every aspect of their identity, including their buildings and therefore interfere in every aspect of the conception and execution. For us it was a bit different because I fully trust Hasan and we respected his taste, knowledge and architectural ability.



Keyfacts:

The new DDB Istanbul building is located in the Kasımpaşa district of Istanbul and faces the Golden Horn and the historic centre of the old city. Restored in 5 months, the work required 90,000 kilo of construction steel, 22,000 bags of cement, 13 km of telephone cabling, 25 of electric cabling and 1,345,748 screws to hold it all together. As a listed building planning permission required that no original stones could be removed or displaced in the construction process.



DDB Group:

Founded in 1993 Medina Turgul DDB is today a Group of companies offering a complete range of communication services including interactive communications, through-the-line advertising, production, packaging, brand identity and communication consultancy services. Top three in terms of revenue, Medina Turgul DDB and DDB&Co are the winners of the most Effies in the Turkish market and Medina Turgul DDB was individually the most awarded agency in 2009. DDB&Co Istanbul ranked no. 3 at the 2009 Cannes Advertising Festival in the Agency of the Year rankings. Winner of Turkey's first Cannes Lion, DDB is consistently the top-performing Turkish agency in international competition with 2008 EPICA, Eurobest and New York Festivals awards. Ranking both number 1 and 3 in 2008's local advertising awards, Medina Turgul DDB and DDB&Co have individually or collectively ranked in the top 3 for the past 6 years.

Erginoğlu and Çalışlar:

Erginoğlu & Çalışlar is an independent firm of architects founded in 1993 by Hasan Calislar and Kerim Erginoglu. Currently staffed by a team of 14 architects, the firm has experience across a wide range of international projects. The practice has produced work in America, Europe, the Far East, Middle East and South Asia, in line with their philosophy that great architecture has a global language, which can minimize differences of taste resulting from local cultural factors. Winner of the 'AMV Young Architects Award' in 2004 and featured by Wallpaper as one of the '101 Architects to be followed in the World', examples of the Partnerships' work can be found on: <http://www.ecarch.com/>