



Keeping it simple

Understated and elegant, the interiors of Barclays' new regional headquarters make their mark in the detail

UK-headquartered, with an office in Dubai, Rareform Branding promises to create extraordinary expressions of visual and verbal language that stop people in their tracks. "For us, it's all about arresting attention and engaging people in the very idea of our clients' businesses," says the company's website.

Perhaps not the kind of creativity that one would associate with a bank, but when Barclays needed interiors for its new regional headquarters and retail banking branches in Emaar Square,

Downtown Dubai, it called on the services of Rareform's Dubai branch.

The initial brief was for 10,000m² of space extending across four floors of offices, as well as Premier and Barclays retail branches on the ground floor.

One challenge with a project of such scope and size was keeping up with the rapid growth of the business, which continued unabated as the project unfolded, noted Guy Willis, design director, Rareform Branding Dubai.

"A staff matrix was provided at an early stage but due to the expanding

nature of the business, over what was a significant development period, there was a certain amount of flex and variation in staff numbers over the course of the project," he noted.

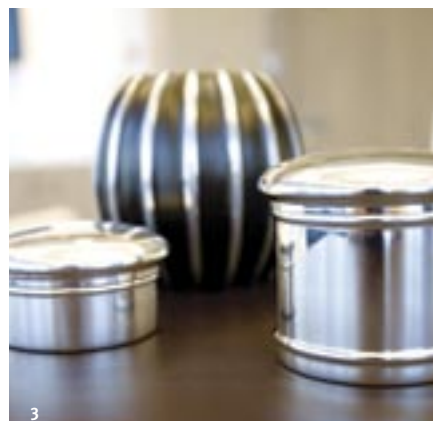
While the finished product is characterised by its simplicity, quality is a resounding theme that runs throughout. Understated, elegant, practical and affordable are the fundamental concepts that Willis worked around to create a space that sets itself apart by not trying too hard.

"A lot of projects are over detailed

1. The project also covered two Barclays retail branches.



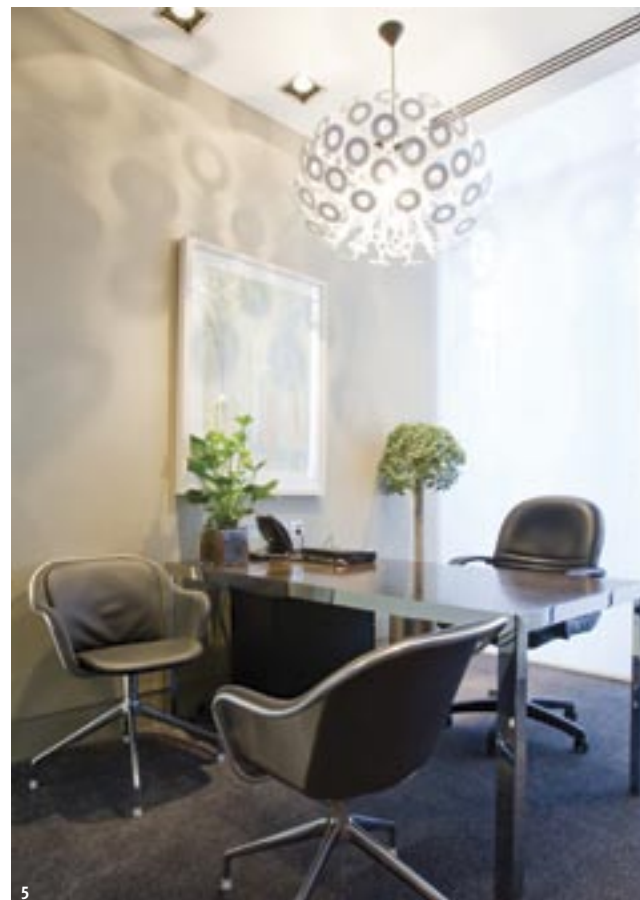
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for the sake of it, when keeping things simple has always been my motto. There are no superfluous or frivolous details within the project. All elements are there for a reason," he maintained.

"God is in the details, they say, and I'd like to think we provide clean, logical solutions to any client's brief. The quality is in the details. It doesn't need any big design statements – the wow factor comes from the juxtaposition of materials and considered detailing."

In keeping with the understated elegance of the project, Willis worked with a muted colour palette for fixed elements and injected splashes of colour and life into the mix with loose furnishings, fresh flower displays, accessories and unique artwork.

"We are still completing the process of selecting all the artwork but the Majlis Gallery has supplied over 150 pieces of original work by an English artist called Paul Wadsworth, whose work I have used on a series of projects.

"Wadsworth spends three months of every year over here painting abstract landscapes from all around the region.

He produces really evocative, colourful work, and is currently exhibiting at the Majlis Gallery," Willis enthused.

Furniture selection was the result of extensive research. Particular care was taken in exploring workstations and operator chair options, which represented the bulk of the furniture order. "We visited a series of suppliers in Europe and eventually went with Bene for the desking system and Herman Miller for the chairs. Both provided an excellent service, have the necessary quality, track record and after sales service, and from our point of view, provided the aesthetics we were looking for."

As to be expected, ergonomic considerations infiltrated every design decision, Willis explained. "Of course, ergonomics affect everything we do. The adjacencies of various zones and functions affected the early planning and every detail and piece of furniture was chosen or designed to enhance the working environment and afford maximum value and efficiency of purpose."

One notable characteristic of the new offices is the range of formal and

informal meeting points built into the design. This, Willis maintained, is reflective of a prevalent design trend making its mark across the globe. "I think, generally, businesses are more aware these days of the value of design, and of the fact that productivity and staff attraction and retention are greatly enhanced by the quality of the environment.

"Barclays recognised the need for formal and informal meeting and discussion areas, and employed a variety of environments within which to communicate with other team members, including breakout and quiet areas, together with more traditional meeting rooms. We tried to introduce these and other loose meeting points within the planning of the project from an early stage."

The highlights of the project include the reception and breakout areas, along with the senior managers' offices, Willis noted. "In addition, some of the atmosphere created within the retail spaces on the ground floor has been translated into the office spaces, which I think allows the whole job to hang together really well," he concluded. □

2. Artwork was sourced from the Majlis Gallery.

3&4. Close attention was paid to the details.

5. The colour scheme is understated.