

# SOHO

## Transparency bridges that gap



**P**EOPLE spend more of their lives at work than at play. Why then, can't the work-space be more fun? Those who agree and those who don't form the divide in office interiors. Around the world, the "yes" vote is increasing — rapidly. In India also, but very grudgingly. And it shows!

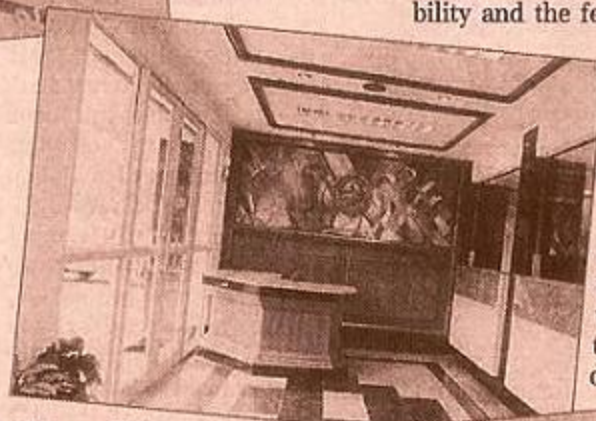
Our managers know all about TQM, BPR and USP. Throughout the day, they are trying to improve quality, cut costs and sell more. But when it comes to setting up a new office it's usually "the budget is x/sq.ft. A nice office for three senior officers, fifteen staff, five sub-staff and a conference room. And by the way, I don't like blue" — the apathy is amazing!

Fun may not be the operative word but what about ambience? An environment that is transparent, comfortable, convenient, cheerful — a work-place one looks forward to every morning.

mula that doesn't have to cost more. Indian offices find it hard to shed the class system. Pecking order determines the size and partition weight of the cabin. That such physical barriers lead to managerial barriers which in turn undermine the team-spirit is not often remembered. Modern management is all about dismantling barriers — seamless flows of information. Why then all the cabins? Transparency or openness is a state of the mind that is easier said than achieved. Few will

It's a win-win for- argue that it encourages accessibility and the feeling of working together. Dismantling the physical barriers would be a step in that direction.

By definition, an office must be functional. But a touch of style will do no



see. I saw an office the other day, recently done, that looked every bit like an accountant firm. The brass on the door said it was a well-known national player in heavy electrical equipment. In India, today, this trend is alarmingly on the rise — you walk into an office and can't tell what they deal in — steel, toothpaste or plastic. No identity. No personality. No ambience.

This is where Pal-Peugot's Calcutta office will, hopefully, stand out from the crowd. The identity is world-class car maker. The personality — stylish high tech-like a car. The ambience — universal — it could be

anywhere.

Their brief was not particularly helpful — (a) High-tech (b) three officers (c) standard budget and (d) company colours of grey, blue and yellow. The space designated for the office had but one feature — eight foot high glazing all along the south and much of the west offering a magnificent fifth-floor view of the Calcutta skyline. It was the company's intention to use networked IT for all its routine functions and work towards a paperless office.

The interior architecture began with two unusual features: (a) A tiled over wooden grid 4' high on the original floor to deliver electricity, voice and data anywhere within the office — a one-time investment that would

enable the office to reconfigure anytime, any way in the future. (b) To bring in the panoramic cityscape to the south — a large parabolic conference cum meeting

room — entirely transparent. The underfoot grid would ensure free seating. Floor to ceiling transparency to the south would eliminate the need of any lighting within, until after sundown.

Detailing led to building the visitors' room complete with fridge and bar, modular storage systems on castors. Each piece of furniture was individually designed — a curved sofa aligned with the curvature of the conference room, a round table in wrought iron and stained wood in the visitor's area and an unusual counter in the pantry.

The entire exercise was about creating a complete co-ordinated look that reflects the ethos and business of the client. Wavy perforated metal and black iron have a synergy with cars. See through walls are visually futuristic. Lots of sinuous curves everywhere — metal, wood, plastic mixed and matched all over. Even the waste baskets and lamps look fashioned out of car parts.

All offices don't have to look the same. The mantra is to custom design workplaces to client's needs and preferences yet create something that the users and visitors look forward to.

harm at all — be it a chair, lamp or the loo. Indeed, design may be used to improve the functioning of the workplace — yet better to use, a pleasure to

