
The ultimate guide to planning an office fit out in Hong Kong

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Introduction

A good quality working environment is now recognized as a key to retaining and attracting talented staff / managers. People who work in well-designed workplaces generally feel as more valued members of the team and tend to be more productive / settled. Poor designed offices can lead to a demoralized workforce and can have knock on effects with staff retention/ recruitment.

If planned, budgeted and managed correctly, a good fit out can significantly improve operational efficiency, enhance corporate image and increase your client base. Like any major project, the success is in the planning and you will need to be prepared for contingencies and you will need this guide!

Welcome to our “Ultimate Guide to Office Design and Fit-Out”

From the outset always appoint an in-house project organiser

Typically this role is given to your Facilities Manager or Office Manager or to an appropriately skilled Director. Whoever is chosen, it is essential they are familiar with your organization, is able to communicate well with their management colleagues, has authority to make decisions and most importantly has the time available to oversee the project from inception through to completion.

Ideally your project organizer would have a grasp of the fundamentals of an office fit-out, and would understand budgeting & information technology. Many firms chose a designer that can deliver a ‘turnkey’ solution but if it is a particularly large project then it may be wise to appoint an external professional Project Manager. An experienced designer or project manager should anticipate and prevent problems before they arise and make sure the project does not impact greatly on the daily routine of busy managers and staff.

Check List

Essential attributes of a project organizer are:

- EQ – Emotional Intelligence
- Authority
- Respect
- Patience
- Influence

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04 Consider how **design** will support your people most effectively

Make sure you set up an in-house project team

Effective and efficient project management calls for attention to detail, prudent resource management, tight budgetary control and collaborative communication and exceptional focus. It also calls for teamwork.

Just as you choose your designer carefully you should spend time setting up your internal project team. The team should be able to contribute to the design and development process and be able to provide specialist information, within their own particular field that is relevant to the project. Depending on the size of the project the team should meet every week.

Check List

You should consider the following people in your team:

- Facilities Director / Manager
- Office Manager
- Finance Director / Controller
- IT Director / Manager
- Operations Director / Manager
- HR Director / Manager
- Marketing Director / Manager

Related:

05 Take time to develop a proper **project brief**

Develop a detailed premises selection criteria

The number of properties that may appear to meet your requirements is likely to seem overwhelming at first. If you have not commissioned an audit, at least consider your organisational structure, growth plans, working practices, storage requirements, open- plan versus cellular layout preferences, inter-departmental relationships and disabled staff requirements.

Armed with your basic requirements, you will need to consider size of unit, type of location, amenities nearby and corporate image. It is also wise to choose a location that is not unpopular with staff and clients. Your criteria should also take into account the building specification, occupation costs, preferred lease terms, landlord's incentives and timescales.

Just as important are the services such as air-conditioning hours, power supplies, car parking, lifts, security arrangements, fire protection, natural light, washroom and kitchen facilities.

Related:

01 From the outset always appoint an in-house **project organiser**

Consider how design will support your people most effectively

Design goes way beyond a floor plan, workstation layout, colours and finishes. A well designed work environment becomes the bedrock of your company's culture, brand experience and is a way of communicating your company's ethos.

Consider design solutions that not only support employees with private and open areas but also empowers them to work in a style suitable for both the individual and the workgroup they belong to.



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07 Consider what other key **professional advisors** you may need

04

Take time to develop a proper project brief

The difference between an efficient fitting out project and an outstanding one, usually reflects the amount of time and energy that goes into the planning and briefing of the teams.

When the project brief is coming together it is important to consider to what extent the design solution could accommodate your company as it develops in coming years. A good approach is to see the brief as a small-scale road map that anticipates and addresses every possible twist and turn of the project.

Check List

Consider to following

- Current working methods
- Future Plans
- Expansion / contraction
- Open Plan / cellular
- New ways of working / image
- Furniture / Filing / Storage
- Timescale phasing / programming
- Available finance

Related:

12 Ensure that you are involved in every stage of the **design process**

05

Invest time in selecting a reputable designer and fit out specialist

A good designer should have all the key disciplines 'in house' within their company, including workplace consultancy, design, IT, project management, construction, furniture supply and funding, as well as post contract support and facilities management. You also need to consider whether the relationship will work between the designer and your in-house team as they will be working closely together over many weeks/ months.

Analyse their track record and performance, look for experience of your type of project in your industry and study their technical skills and knowledge. Consider whether your project is the right size (too big/too small) for them, whether they specialize in high or low value contracts and whether they can easily service your project from wherever they are based.

Most importantly, how keen are they to secure your project, are they committed, and will they do whatever it takes to deliver your brief on time and on budget. Check them out thoroughly, satisfy yourself that they have the right level of financial stability, an exemplary health and safety record and sophisticated insurance cover.

Check List

Be sure to:

- Choose a partner with a 'turnkey' approach.
- Analyse their track record and references.
- Assess their financial stability.
- Satisfy yourself they have adequate insurance cover.
- Visit completed projects.
- Visit their offices and their teams – not just their salesmen.

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02 Make sure you set up an **in-house project team**

Consider what other key professional advisors you may need

Your selected IT consultant should have a hand in ensuring that your hardware, software and networking objectives are all met cost effectively.

The most competent consultants are those who can meet today's requirement with a flexible and scalable solution that will not quickly become obsolete.

Check List

Other professionals to consider:

- IT / network Consultant
- Furniture Specialist
- Mechanical and electrical engineer
- Structural Engineer
- Security Consultant

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14 Examine new **furniture options** thoroughly

Ensure that a detailed accommodation study and workplace audit is commissioned

Many leading designers now have experienced workplace audit teams who are skilled at establishing whether the space you have selected will be able to support your culture and able to meet the day-to-day operations of your business.

They should talk to staff about their views and requirements and produce a utilization plan that accounts for the operational relationships between the members of numerous teams. The results of their research should then be collated, presented as a briefing document for review. This should also address IT issues, the location of the comms room and visitor areas etc.

Check List

Areas to cover should include:

- Staff survey / questionnaire.
- Company structure, departmental headcount, staff adjacencies
- Meeting rooms, breakout areas and other facilities
- Reception and client areas
- Open-plan or cellular
- Storage requirements
- Future space usage / expansion
- Calculation of space required
- Production of a detailed briefing document

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16 Never forget to carry out a **detailed storage audit**

Detailed building surveys must be undertaken

A fundamental early stage in your fit-out project should be a fully detailed assessment of your selected building. A full measured survey should ensure that every sq inch of space is taken into consideration when the design team draws up the building shell, before they commence space planning.

Your designer should be able to undertake the majority of the survey work required but may need to recommend other professional advisors such as structural engineers and hazardous material specialists. Once the surveys are complete, it should not only present an accurate guide to the state of the building but also confirm the physical size/suitability and potential limitations/opportunities.

Check List

Points to consider as follows:

- Detailed surveys should be undertaken before space planning commences
- Surveys will highlight potential hazards
- Disabled access issues can be highlighted
- Other specialists maybe required.

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13 Fully investigate all the **technology options**

Formulate a project budget from the outset

Although some aspects are easier to accurately budget, many less apparent expenses can be obscure and it is the great unknowns of a typical commercial fit-out that often causes budget overruns. Leading designers owe their success to the accuracy budget a project and deliver within this margin avoiding any unpleasant surprises.

Budgets should always have a contingency for unseen challenges or elements of the project that you wish to change mid-stream. When budgets have been established be sure they include professional fees as well. To reduce capital expenditure you may also wish to consider leasing your furniture.

Check List

Make sure you:

- Seek professional advice.
- Don't forget to budget for professional fees
- Include a contingency element
- Explore leasing options

Related:

06 Invest time in **selecting a reputable designer and fit out specialist**

Look carefully into your reinstatement obligations

Your lease is likely to insist that you leave the premises in the same condition as it was when you took over. This area of dilapidations / reinstatement is complex and notoriously contentious, so it is crucial that you work closely with your designer to ensure that you are absolutely clear on the consequences of any fit-out.

Check List

Issues to take into account:

- Seek the advice of your property agent and designer
- Pay particular attention to the condition of the premises at the time of handover
- Usually your designer will prepare a schedule of condition at the time of taking possession
- Look at ways to limit your need to reinstate i.e. finding a replacement tenant

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17 Beware of occupational **loading regulations**

Ensure that you are involved in every stage of the design process

It is crucial that you are fully aware of the look and feel of the design and it is crucial there are no surprises at this stage of the project.

Every aspect of each room /working area is assessed reviewing everything from finishes, colours, textures, fabrics/veneers to flooring, lighting and joinery works.

Check List

Always insist on:

- Visuals / artist's impressions.
- Virtual reality walk through
- Samples, mood boards, colour swatches
- Furniture showroom visits
- Visiting previously completed projects
- Full and detailed explanation of the design solution
- Technical plans and drawings

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15 **Communicate** well with all your staff before, during and after the fit-out

Fully investigate all the technology options

There is no better time than a relocation/ refurbishment to take stock of your technology and consider whether it really supports your business.

So if years of reacting to the patchwork of stopgap technology solutions you have acquired starts to cost more in breakdowns, system mismatches and management headaches than the cost of replacement, it may be wise to consider some changes.

Check List

Take into account the following:

- Assess whether your technology does what it should.
- Replacement might work out cheaper.
- Get specialist guidance.
- Opt for systems that improve efficiency.
- Beware of obsolescence.

Related:

09 Detailed **building surveys** must be undertaken

Examine new furniture options thoroughly

It would be wise to select a designer with a furniture division that could help you meet your requirements. First establish the type, quantity and quality of furniture required and whether you wish to compliment or replace your existing styles. Once these variables are defined, a budget and timetable decided then the choice becomes far less daunting.

Items to look out for are issues like purchasing chairs. Try to avoid the common mistake going for the cheapest or best looking option. A chair actually, could be one of the most important pieces of office equipment that you buy. With the 8-10 hours your staff could spend in it every day, a chair may affect not just physical comfort but also productivity and long-term health.

Check List

Be sure to cover the following:

- Pick a designer with its own furniture division
- Start by selecting the preferred style and quality
- Then set a budget and work out when you need the furniture delivered
- Don't go for the cheapest option
- Make sure the you consider different manufacturers and warranties
- Work out whether renting will be more suitable

Related:

08 Ensure that a detailed **accommodation study** and **workplace audit** is commissioned

Communicate well with all your staff before, during and after the fit-out

Proper instruction and employee role designation may prove vital in assuring that work areas and departments are prepared for change. If you select your professional partners wisely, you should be offered help with the drafting of employee pre-project instructions and procedures.

Through focused communication, the provision of step-by-step guidelines and move status reports, management & employee anxiety should be minimized, communication maintained and time schedule met.



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03 Develop a **detailed premises selection** criteria

Never forget to carry out a detailed storage audit

Your designer will be able to work with you to audit your storage requirements and produce the optimum solution, which will then be factored into the space planning process.

As well as assessing what, where and how, the process should consider whether your storage requirements are best suited to open-plan or cellular office layout, security and even weight loading in the case of safes, compactors and other large storage furniture items.

Check List

Points to Consider:

- There will be a more efficient way for you to file and store documents
- A detailed audit is the first step to finding it
- The result of the audit will be factored into space planning
- Off-site storage might be an option

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18 Spend time finalizing the **design specification, costs and programme**

Beware of occupational loading regulations

It is important that your designer briefs you on the rules and regulations on over loading floors and exceeding density allowances. The occupancy load of the floor is the driver which ultimately determines the permitted headcount and will be set out in the fire certificate for the building. The occupancy load is calculated based on the uses of certain areas within the floor. The current allocation according to use is as follows:

So for instance, if you had a 50 sqm reception that would imply a notional occupancy load of 17 persons (50 divided by 3 = 16.660 for that area. Therefore, by way of a worked example, if you have a floor with an OL of 300 and you are analyzing the proposed tenant layout plan, you would need to deduct 17 from 300 = 283. You continue to analyse the layout plan space by space. Let's assume there is a meeting room of 35sqm – the loading for meeting rooms is 1.5 person psm (35 divided by 1.5 = 23) so you deduct this from 283 = 260. The procedure is continued to cover all useages. If the OL exceeds 300, which is the max permitted, then the designer will need to be more creative in the allocation of space.

<i>Useage</i>	<i>sq m / per person</i>
Reception Area	3.0
Lobby/Corridors non-simultaneous	
Waiting Area/Visitors Lounge	3.0
Admin Office	10.0
Business Centre	10.0
Meeting/Seminar Room	1.5
Archive/Library Stack Area	10.0
Reading Area	5.0
Filing Room/Store	10.0
Computer Room	5.0
Design Studio	5.0
Drafting Office	5.0
Trading Floor	2.0
Trading Gallery	1.5
Banking Hall	3.0
Deposit/Strong Room	30.0
Machine/Printing Room*(2)	10.0
Staff Canteen	1.5
Toilets non-simultaneous	
Storage Area	30.0
Mechanical Plant Room	30.0

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10 Formulate a **project budget** from the outset

Spend time finalizing the design specification, costs and programme

You can finalise your projects design, specification, costs and programme quickly and thoroughly and at the same time dramatically reduce the likelihood of cost and project overruns.

It is vital though that those four key elements tie up and that you fully understand what you're about to contract to. Remember the devil is in the detail ... and it's usually the lack of it that causes project to fail. Remember to allow for a contingency in your budgets and carefully review the cashflow implications of the project. This is also the time for establishing clear lines of responsibility for authorizing additional works over and above the agreed contract sum.

Check List

You should confirm:

- The project's design, specification, costs and programme tie up
- Start and finish dates are guaranteed
- That the contract price is fixed
- Long lead-in items have been ordered
- Weekly project meetings have been scheduled
- Furniture installation and move-management teams have been booked

Related:

20 Ensure that all **long lead-in items** are ordered well in advance

Make sure you fully understand all the building contract options

There are a handful of contractual routes to consider depending on the size, timescale and complexity of your project. However, for most average size projects your designer should be able to offer you a short form of contract often based on the internationally recognized Joint Contracts Tribunal (JCT) building contract. This should offer you the same basic protection but presented in a much more digestible form.

Whatever form of contract you select, make sure that no works are undertaken without you having signed off the costs and having had the programme implications explained to you. Additional works and variations to the contract should be agreed and costed prior to commencement to avoid unnecessary stressful 'final account' negotiations at the end of the project.



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22 Make sure your **insurance** covers you for every eventuality

Ensure that all long lead-in items are ordered well in advance

Few issues are likely to cause more frustration and irritation than your failure to order certain facilities and equipment soon enough. Among the most obvious are any new telephone lines you may need and should liaise with your service provider if you would like any new numbers that relate to your existing one. Often a completely new location will involve new numbers all around unless you are moving to a building close by.

Your power supplies may well be underpinned by business continuity measures such as UPS system which also must be specified and ordered early. Your IT consultant should be keen to ensure that every aspect of your communication infrastructure is given high priority within the schedule and network equipment is ordered well in advance.

Check List

To avoid delaying your project, be sure to order the following early:

- Telephone lines and special numbers
- Air-conditioning equipment is necessary
- Back-up measures such as UPS
- Networking Equipment
- Furniture and storage
- Joinery

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24 Insist on having it **right first time**

Endeavour to gain all necessary approvals prior to commencement of works

One of the most important responsibilities of your designer is making sure that all their work is carried out with the approval of the landlord, planning officer, building supervisor, fire safety bureau, health and safety officer and building regulations department.

As part of the approval process CAD plans, featuring all the information and specification details required, should be produced and submitted as a matter of course and in the manner stipulated by the landlord and authorities. Once the project is underway, regular random site inspections should be a key, to ensure all work complies with statutory regulations and this level of vigilance should also mean that problems may be identified and addressed at an early stage.

Check List

Note that:

- Approvals are absolutely critical
- CAD Plans and specifications must be included
- Random site visits must be made during the work
- A safety file must be produced and kept up to date

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23 Once work begins, always attend **regular project meetings**

Make sure your insurance covers you for every eventuality

Your designer should be able to discuss the main areas of cover that relate to their area of management of the fit-out construction stages. Amongst the most important policies are Public Liability and Professional Indemnity, which your designer should have in place and most importantly, Joint Names All Risk Insurance.

Whilst adequate insurance cover is important it would be wise to remember that effective risk management might be able to help reduce exposure to allegations of neglect, error or omission but it may never eradicate the risk completely.

Check List

- Specific cover relating to the project
- The policies of your professional advisors
- Public Liability and Professional Indemnity
- Picking a partner with a good health and safety record

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11 Look carefully into your **reinstatement obligations**

Once work begins, always attend regular project meetings

Projects may easily be scuppered by a lack of respect for site meeting dates or worse still, an inability to prioritise them. It is not enough just to be interested in the progress of the project - you should be seen to be interested and this means treating site visits/meetings a fundamental part of your daily life.

Your professional partners should also be encouraged by your continuing and timely presence, which should give them reassurance that project critical decisions will be made on a timely basis.

Check List

Make meetings work by:

- Making sure everyone respects their importance
- Treating them as part of your working day
- Using them to make key decisions
- Using them to support your professional partners
- Using them to sound early warnings about issues that concern you

Related:

21 Endeavour to gain all **necessary approvals** prior to commencement of works

Insist on having it right first time

Many of the best designers owe their success to their focus on getting every element of every project right first time. Although last minute adjustments are inevitable, they should not result in less than perfection and you should resist the urge to take delivery of your smart new office until it has been agreed that every deadline and agreed objective has been met.

That means setting aside time to talk through the project plan, review the budget, inspect every inch of the space, be certain that compliance manuals are in order, ensure that regulations have been met and generally satisfy yourself that the project meets your expectations.



Ensure that occupation is a smooth transition

The weekend of the move is probably the most stressful part of the whole fit-out process. Whilst your move management consultant will bear the burden of the physical move there is also a myriad of task and contingencies for you to plan for.

Lining up the key people well in advance is the secret to success. It may be as mundane as arranging sufficient staff to unpack crates or as vital as having your IT and telecoms teams on hand.

Check access times with your landlord, request your designer to be on site, have your electrical contractor on standby for emergencies and insist the common parts and walkways are protected.

Check List

You should ensure you have:

- Key personnel on hand
- Access to the building
- Your designer is on hand
- Common parts and walkways are protected
- Staff training arranged
- Health and safety policy updated

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