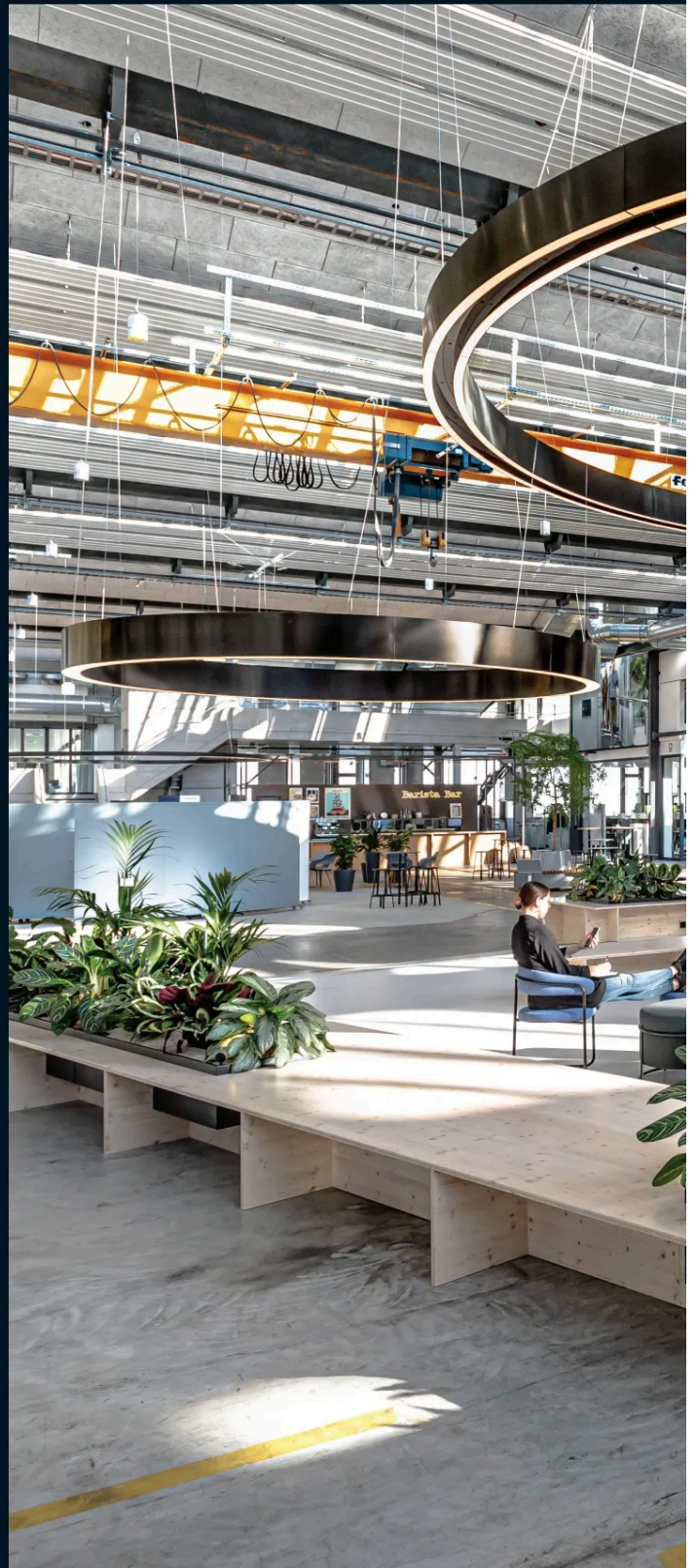


Offices that mimic the form and function of small towns can meet many of the workplace challenges faced by firms in the new era of work. Ben Capper visits a new space in Switzerland that points the way ahead

Right: A former industrial building lends itself to become a very contemporary workspace.

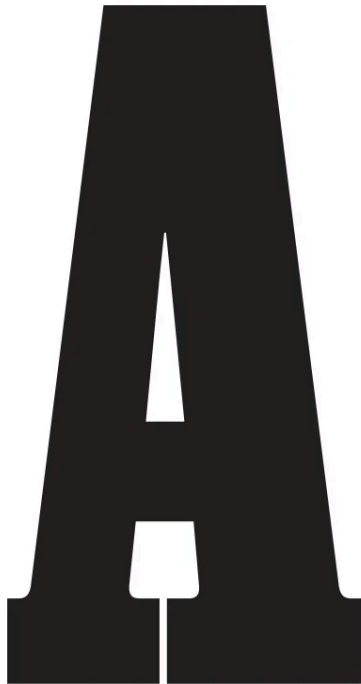
Town Planning







Above: Making the most of the retained features of the building



few kilometres north of Zürich, you'll find the small town of Rümlang. Flanked on one side by forests and farmland and on the other by Zürich International Airport, the contrasted setting for this municipality with just over 8,000 inhabitants seems appropriate for the Swiss headquarters of a multinational corporation which may be active in over 50 countries but also feels a strong connection to its hometown.

This juxtaposition also underpins the new workplace strategy of dormakaba, the firm which makes a range of access solutions from locks to movable walls to RFID fobs. If you've passed through any sort of doorway or entrance recently, chances are you'll have encountered a dormakaba product, even if you didn't know it at the time.

The strategy for the rethink of the firm's headquarters is founded on a six-word statement developed in partnership with built environment consultancy Drees & Sommer. "Every user needs a small town", they say. And by this they mean not only the setting for the HQ but how its interior works to serve the around 470 people who work there.

Centred on the renovation of a former factory building, Drees & Sommer delivered a wide range of services including the development of the new workplace vision and concept, interior architecture and design and a change management and user engagement programme.

With a wide variety of open and closed collaboration areas, the new living and working environment promotes interaction and collaboration - so existing and new teams can grow optimally and organically together.

It consists of different zones including bars, cafes and quiet spaces that stand alone like the districts of a city and at the same time only develop their full potential as the sum of their parts. Its industrial heritage is signalled most obviously by the preservation of features like its hoist gantries and a large, zig-zag glass roof that offers people an endless supply of one of the things they most value in an office interior - daylight.

The factory hall had already been converted for use as an office before its rethink. The aim was to increase the



number of people working there, literally bringing everybody together under one roof, to work together in a new setting that would improve their experience of work and add value to the business.

Drees & Sommer's project manager for the project was Johanna Trustedt. She talks about the roots of the project and how she came to be involved. "The factory hall was almost empty and the few office boxes were used, but very little," she explains. "The feeling was empty and cold. The goal was to make it lively and attract employees to come to the office. Although the space has that coldness, the look and feel of the factory hall was a great space to create collaboration areas combining the industrial look with warm natural elements."

Although this was the first time Drees & Sommer had worked with dormakaba, they were able to draw on their extensive experience of creating new offices of this type, including one they created for themselves. Johanna knew how important it was to adopt a collaborative approach to the creation of the new space and engage people in the process.

"We proposed a co-creating process by involving the employees," she says. "They could test and vote for meeting and other spaces. We analysed their needs, discussed the layouts with them and gave them regular updates of the project."

"The project goal was to make the space lively and attract the employees coming to the office."

Below: Desk-based work remains an important part of the working day

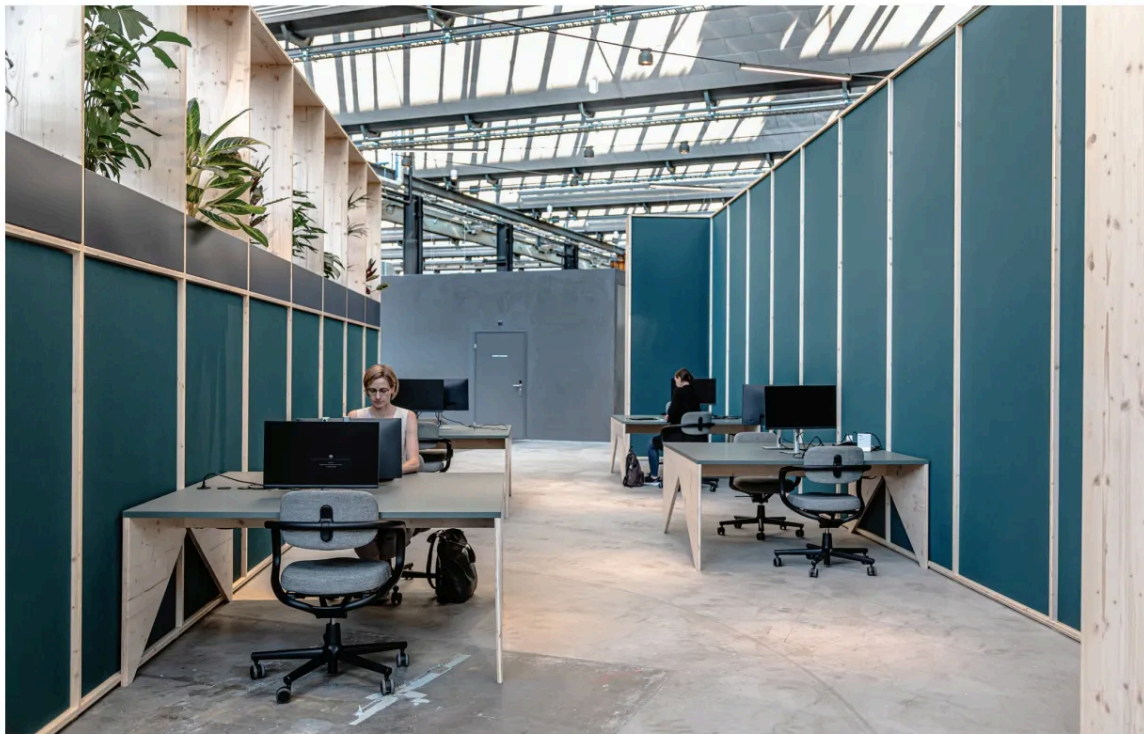
Right: A variety of meeting spaces help people to tailor their days

"The most important point was that the client wanted an attractive work environment that offered people different ways of working such as quiet zones for focussed work, open meeting areas for creative work, enclosed meeting rooms and acoustic pods, quiet rooms for relaxing, a barista bar for collaboration and other spaces to share ideas and information and to spark ideas."

According to Johanna, although dormakaba had very clear objectives about what they wanted to achieve, there was no assumption about how they would be achieved. The client was open to all ideas.

"There was no brief," she explains. "They gave us the headcount list and a rough idea of their needs in terms of storage space. The concept was developed based on our experience and what we learned from workshops with people, business leaders and feedback during the ideas development process."

"It was important to engage people in this process to ensure their buy-in and reassure them there would be plenty of space for them and it would be the right sort of space. This can be a challenge when they have become accustomed to a certain way of working but we were able to help them understand how they could work across the entire factory hall, rather than being fixed to just one workstation."





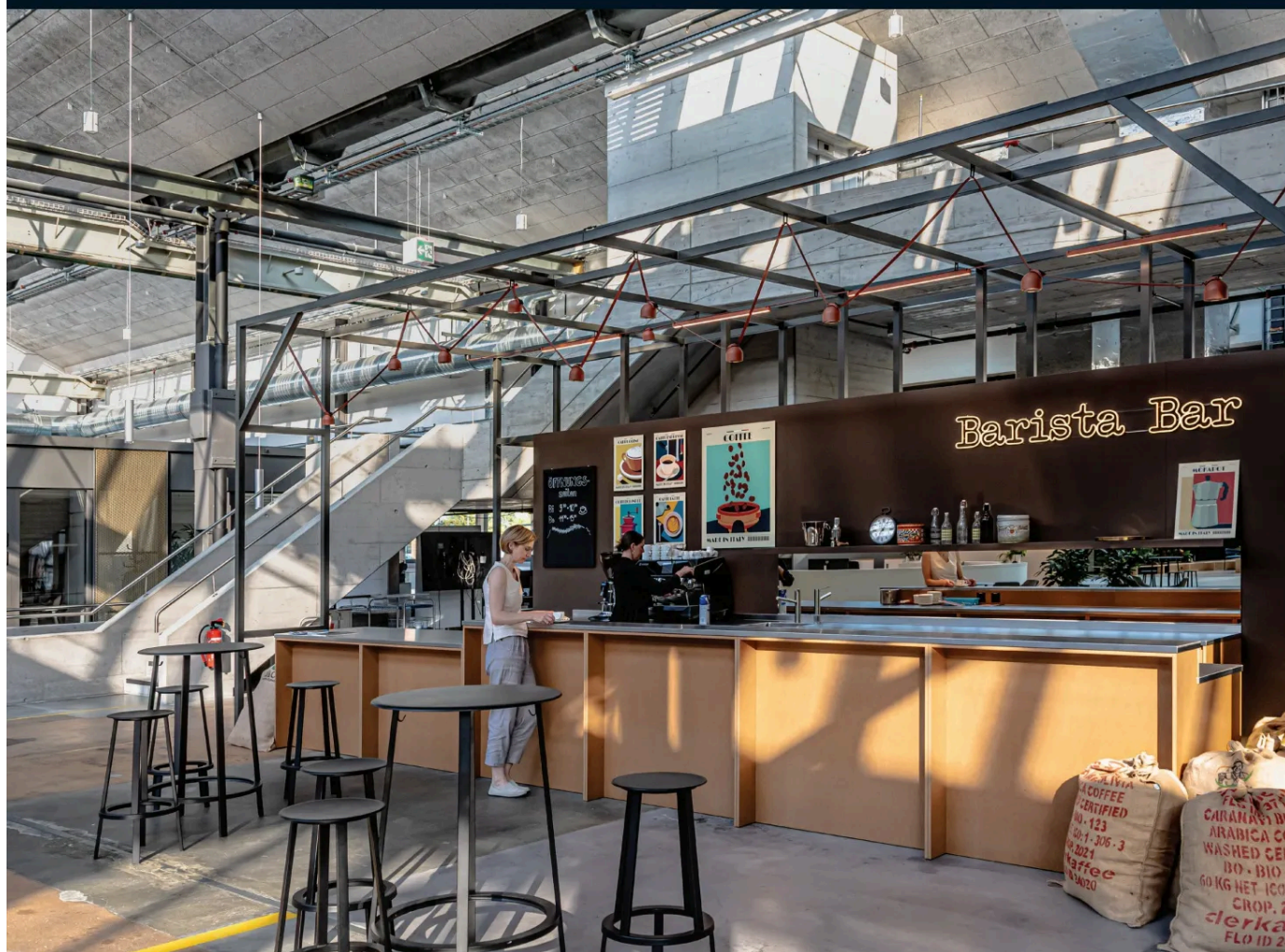
"The look and feel of the factory hall made it a great space to create collaboration areas combining the industrial look with warm natural elements"

"The most interesting aspects of human interactions take place in ritualised and predictable forms and the best spaces can foster those interactions"

Right: Enclosed meeting spaces are important even in a building dedicated to openness

Below: A cafe is a welcome sight in many modern offices.

Bottom right: The ability to work quietly, or even just chill out is essential.





"This is an urban system with a marketplace, library, green spaces, public spaces, private space"



Now they simply love it and work everywhere in the hall.

"Having been through this process, including encountering the occasional resistance to it, it's now great to see how completely people engage with the ideas. It says so much that the most popular space in the hall is the park at its heart. And people use it in so many ways – to collaborate, chat, share thoughts, chill and whatever. They love it."

Johanna thinks that this is the key demand placed on offices in the era of hybrid working and that the example of dormakaba offers a perfect example of getting things right, while also meeting broader business objectives such as sustainability.

"The ability to collaborate is at the heart of the project", she says. "This is why it was so vital to create a space that offers the benefits of a village or small town. This is an urban system with a marketplace, library, green spaces, public spaces, private spaces."

"It also means that the interior elements must align with this vision while also respecting the history of the space. We selected them carefully to find those that best matched the look of the retained industrial features while also being humane, biophilic, warm, and colourful. The design of furniture and other interior elements had a lot to do with that."

STIMULATING AND ENTICING

The design of cities and other places highlights the complex interactions between the built environment and the way we think, behave and interact with space and other people.

As long ago as 1970, a researcher called William H Whyte decided to carry out a project looking at the impact of urban spaces on people from an anthropological standpoint. Using techniques then most commonly associated with studies of indigenous tribespeople, The Street Life Project examined the relationship between people and their immediate environment in parts of New York. They specifically focussed on parks and other social spaces, trying to establish what worked about the spaces and what didn't. Their findings were ultimately reported in a short book called The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces and a film, fragments of which are available online, including one looking at the pleasures of being able to change seating arrangements.

What becomes apparent is that the most interesting aspects of human interactions take place in ritualised and predictable forms and that the best spaces can foster those interactions. Whyte writes about our tendency to engage with chance meetings in particular ways, to say goodbye as part of a three-phase ritual and our propensity to mirror the gestures of the people with whom we come into contact.