



Spacious designs – for freedom of the soul

Wenner-Gren Center's 20th floor, designed by Ross Architecture & Design, is not just walls, flooring and furniture. The space somehow manages to capture the client's core.

By Malin Norman | Photos: Mikael Damkier

Known mostly for its stunning private villas, characterised by rounded silhouettes and interplay with nature, Ross Architecture & Design also brings magic to commercial spaces. The mix of spacious yet homely atmospheres has made its way to office environments, holiday resorts, museums, boutiques, restaurants and even care homes. Imagine a place our beloved elderly can actually long for.

Standing tall in the Stockholm borough of Vasastaden, the Wenner-Gren Center was Europe's highest building with a steel

frame when it opened back in the 1960s. Since a few months back, one of the structure's top floors houses an office unlike any other. With a plan on their hands for the 20th floor, created by another firm, the client noticed the energetic and 'un-square' office environment of Ross Architecture & Design, which has been nominated as Sweden's Most Beautiful Office. Architect Pål Ross and his team were given only 14 days to come up with a new layout for the 400 square metres. "Our solution blew their minds," says Ross. "In those two weeks, we managed

to come up with a completely new space. They had never seen anything like it!"

This translated to all systems go. As the construction firm had already been contracted by the client, the project moved fast and was completed in only a couple of months – quite extraordinary, as the complex administrative and building process would usually take much longer. Unsurprisingly, Wenner-Gren Center's administrator Fabège was suitably impressed with the functional, beautiful and creative space, as well as its rapid completion.

Welcome to the core

Upon entering the 20th floor from one of three elevators, visitors will find themselves facing the skyline of New York.

The wall straight ahead has been covered with a panoramic image from the client's own website, giving visitors and staff the sense of standing on a balcony, admiring the fantastic view. Like the first sentences of a book, this introduction invites people to come inside and see more.

The rest of the floor certainly does not disappoint. By removing 80 per cent of the corridors, Ross Architecture & Design has created a flow and interesting dynamic with curved walls and open spaces. The new layout comes with five more work stations than in the original plan, without feeling cramped, and is well balanced with secluded areas. With added height and hidden lighting, the ceiling almost opens up to the sky, a bit like light therapy – essential to make it through those long, dark winters in Scandinavia. Another surprise is the golf green, a quirky feature inspired by the client's interest in the sport, and screens with customisable image galleries to suit any meeting.

Architect Ross himself says of the design: "Ultimately, we have optimised the space to the core requirements of this company. And we have quite radically improved conditions for the people working there. They will not only feel better and have fewer sick days; they will actually want to come to work!"

Freedom of movement

Ross is no doubt a master at creating homely atmospheres, cleverly striking the balance between seclusion and community spirit. For more than 20 years, his team of architects, engineers and designers has been improving living conditions for families and work places for employees. The firm has been awarded for Best Architecture Single Residence Sweden, received the Building Preservation Prize for Best New Construction, and named Most Beautiful Villa in Sweden.

With a mix of ultra-modern and ultra-classic, Ross enables flow and freedom of movement. By clearing out walls and

corridors, he recreates new environments not based around cubicles and straight lines but instead vibrant areas filled with energy. In the private villas, bedrooms are grouped in one area of the house with their own bathrooms and wardrobes, a bit like secluded islands, whilst the communal areas are more linked. Both are needed for a meaningful existence, as is the relationship between indoor and outdoor space, which is so often forgotten in this part of the world with cold weather and long winters.

Does commercial design differ much from private housing? According to Ross, not so much. "We work a lot with creating freedom indoors. Our projects are characterised by generous high ceilings, without making them anonymous. The soul needs space, and we make room for a sense of freedom in our design."

The 20th floor of Wenner-Gren Center will be open for viewing at the end of March.



Architect Pål Ross.
Photo: James Holm

For more information, please visit:
www.ross.se