





SOVEREIGN: A NEW CHAPTER

THE SOVEREIGN GROUP ESTABLISH NEW ROOTS AT 117 MAIN ST.

The Sovereign Group, comprising several teams across 22 jurisdictions, has relocated their Gibraltar branch from 143 Main Street to their new custom-designed premises on 117 Main Street.

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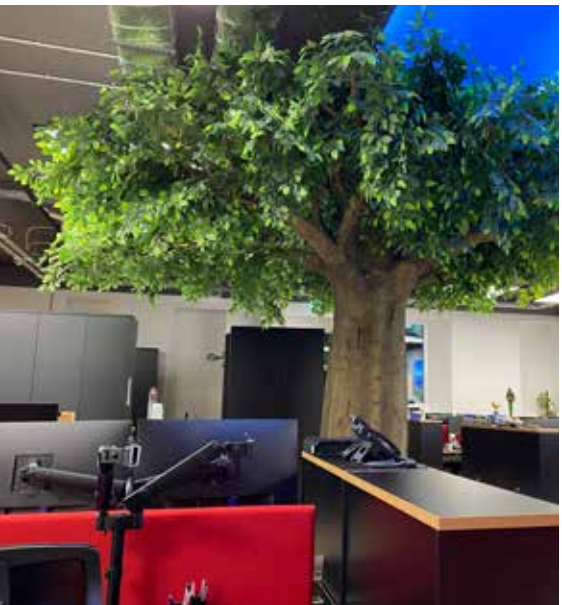
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Outgrowing their former shell, the Sovereign Group cast about for a more suitable premises which would allow the various divisions within the Sovereign Group to all operate under one roof.

CEO of the Sovereign Group, Gerry Kelly, explains “We have just over 100 people here; 4 licensed entities. We were operating from 143 Main Street, which has been really good to us, since 1992. We ended up spilling over into Bell Lane, across two buildings and six floors – the main drive was to get all of our staff into one place.”

The size of Sovereign Place is deceptive from the outside; once you enter, you ascend into a veritable rabbit warren made up of team areas and offices, each with their own unique features.



Originally designed to be a mixture of offices and apartments, Sovereign have taken over the four-storey building including a mezzanine level and rooftop terrace, and made it their home. The first two floors remain in their original form, although transformed into a number of fit-for-purpose office suites, with the back of building undergoing a total rebuild after having been unoccupied for some twenty odd years

The sheer extent of the building becomes apparent as you head down the entrance hallway, beautiful Arabic mosaic tilework adorning the walls either side of you, past the unusual, one-of-a-kind hanging divider feature made up of old painted boat oars, and step foot into the foyer.

Above the reception desk hangs a replica of one of Britain’s largest oil paintings. At 42.5 square metres, the original painting currently resides in the Guildhall Art Gallery in London, where it occupies the entire back wall of the main exhibition space. The eye-catching piece depicts a scene in the Great Siege of Gibraltar; General George Augustus Eliott on horseback, pointing to the rescue of the



defeated Spanish sailors by the British. “It’s a talking point,” Gerry admits with a smile.

Sweeping across the reception area into the far room, we reach an area designated specifically for the IT team, complete with faux-foliage and a disused well, mercifully covered with thick glass allowing you to stand over it – not for the faint-hearted!

The building has been carefully converted, extended, and restored by Heredium Ltd, which last month saw 117 Main Street presented with the Heritage Group Award, for their efforts in repurposing the building for “modern day office use in a sympathetic and appropriate style, maintaining original features and sense of Gibraltar’s unique architecture both inside and out”.

The Heritage Awards, presented annually since 1993, aim to promote careful design and quality of workmanship in restoration, modernisation, adaptation and maintenance with sensitivity to Gibraltar’s heritage. Casting an eye over the original fireplaces, detailed cornicing, intricate tiling, and the mid-century well, it’s clear that this award was rightfully bestowed.

Designed by Frankwin Van Kleef from In Vision Design & Construction, the interior has had an overhaul fit for the 21st century – and perhaps even beyond. “The brief we gave him was to just give us something different to a standard office,” Gerry reveals, and different is exactly what they got.

It’s not often you find a tree in the middle of your office, and yet as we migrate to the first floor, this is the sight that greets you as you enter the Trust area of Sovereign Place.

The large, fibreglass trunk dominates the centre of the room, its leaves acting as a canopy over the desks below. Beyond this

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sits an innovative meeting booth; a sort of soundproofed confessional. At the far end of the office, tucked away in a little nook, is a training area decked out with desks, computers and TV, perfect for staff training days. On the opposite side of the room is the kitchenette, which with its homely hues and soft lighting seems as though it belongs in a trendy young home as opposed to an office.

To compensate for the lack of natural light in an old building such as this one, a ceiling feature screen mimicks the natural sky complete with clouds, à la *Harry Potter*, whilst backlit images of the Rock decorate the walls and contribute to the illumination.

Forgoing the initial design of a standard office dropped ceiling, overhead the suspended air vents and exposed piping add a touch of ‘industrial chic’ to the office. “Given the lack of natural light in a building like this, we wanted to make sure that we had as much space and light as possible,” states Gerry.

Arriving at the Finance area across the landing, you’re greeted by a distinct blend of the old and the new. The room is unlike any of the others, as indeed they all are, with echoes of the former grand space it once was. White corning and wall panelling punctuate the magnolia-coloured walls, and an ornate ceiling rose supporting a rather grand chandelier which hangs above the desks. “We’ve heard reports of people attending weddings in this room in the past,” Gerry divulges. “But I can’t tell you who...”

Up a floor we come to the Wealth and Pensions area. Unsurprisingly it has been imaginatively designed, with ‘floating’ desk drawers and computers raised up above the desks to keep both floor and desk space clear for cleaning and working purposes. Each feature in the building, it seems, has been carefully planned with not only aesthetics in mind, but functionality and sustainability, too. “The lift in this building is also quite

interesting; it’s partly powered by solar cells and connected to a mobile app, so the energy usage is constantly monitored and we know of any faults,” Gerry notes.

Up further still, and wishing I’d made use of the solar-powered lift, we reach Gerry’s office; a modest-sized glass-walled and impeccably designed space, leading onto a patio, which is shared by the company’s apartment. The apartment itself boasts a living area and bar that wouldn’t be out of place on the cover of *Ideal Homes*, as well as a double bedroom for visiting clients and employees (but not Editors – I did ask).

Atop a filing cupboard in the corner of his office, I notice a small pink pig statue, overseeing Gerry’s day-to-day operations. “That one was made by the artist Paul Cosquiere. It’s part of a collection of pigs commissioned as part of the Sovereign Art Foundation. One hundred and eight hand cast resin pigs were made of various shapes and sizes to mark the Year of the Pig; all Sovereign offices had one pig painted by a local artist in that country/jurisdiction. They were auctioned off, with the proceeds going towards helping disadvantaged children using the arts as rehabilitation, education and therapy,” Gerry informs.

So, knowing what we do now about the current pandemic and its potential longevity, would Sovereign still have made the big move? “Three months ago, a lot of our staff wanted to work from home,” Gerry admits, “But I think the view has generally changed since then. People like the new office environment, and enjoy coming in to this new space. They’re able to generate ideas and bounce ideas off one another – there’s a whole added social aspect.”

With an office space this functional, quirky, and convivial, one can only agree.

