

Scottish brewers drink in the benefits of plants

At Fountain House in Edinburgh, Scottish Courage Ltd is not only thinking beer - they're thinking plants! The central atrium over-looked by three floors, is filled with three large modular units planted with large specimen trees.

Investing in workforce's health and well-being

By recognising that plants have more than just aesthetic appeal, Scottish Courage have invested in the health and well being of their workforce. Research into the positive benefits of plants, circulated by Plants for People, shows that plants are known to reduce minor ailments by improving the quality of the air and reducing stress, consequently improving productivity.

The benefits of the 'calm oasis' at Scottish Courage is well recognised now, but Administration Manager, Alan Bell told us, "When the original space planning options were being considered, there were designs to overfloor the atrium to maximise the work space. Thankfully these were dropped at a very early stage." Alan added, "Scottish Courage management were extremely supportive of the oasis concept." A forward-looking and productive decision which was subsequently proved correct by the high profile the planting has given the building - amongst others, it has featured in The Times - and the appreciation of staff and visitors.

Planting the calm oasis

The planting is impressive. Specimen Ficus, Cocus palms and Washingtonia reach for the glass roof of the atrium. The under-planting is textured and colourful and boasts Hedera, Spathiphyllum, Maranta and Bromeliads amongst the species included.

James Gilchrist of GP Plantscape responsible for the installation and maintenance of the plants commented, "The choice of plants was dictated by the light levels. The glass roof is fitted with an automatic blind which shades the area when the sun reaches certain levels, so the plants were chosen for natural habitats which resembled those of the atrium."

The open plan offices at Fountain House surround the planting on three sides and three levels, with the upper two forming mezzanines with walkways around the edge. The view for everyone looking up or down is one of a calm green oasis.

A staff member at Fountain House commented, "I think on a sub-conscious level, the plants have an effect on how we feel. I certainly enjoy them being here."

Go-ahead landscapers

"We always use the positive benefits of plants as a selling tool," explained James Gilchrist of GP Plantscape, a year old company from Kirkfieldbank, Lanark. "We explain how plants clean the air of toxic chemicals and consequently reduce headaches, fatigue and other minor ailments."

This go-ahead, family-run, wholesale and landscaping company is also responsible for interior landscaping at Scottish Courage Brands Ltd at South Gyle Business Park,

Working side by side with plants

At Scottish Courage Brands Ltd at South Gyle, there isn't an impressive atrium but each open plan office has purpose-designed filing cabinets which feature planters on top as an integral part of their design. These are used as dividers between desks or sections.

Workers at Scottish Courage will benefit from these planting schemes because the plants offer more than just aesthetic appeal. Not only will the plants absorb noise, but according to research, workers will also suffer less stress and be more productive. Beneficial effects which should please both workers and management.

Certainly those who work at the South Gyle unit enjoy the presence of plants. One worker commented, "Now we are used to having plants around us, we wouldn't want to work without them."

South Gyle Shopping Centre

It isn't unusual to see planters or planted areas in shopping centres these days. Perhaps this isn't surprising when you consider some research which was undertaken in Norway, it found that shoppers stayed between 30-35 minutes longer and returned more often once plants were introduced to a shopping centre. The retailing rule that the longer they stay, the more they spend proved true in Oslo and should prove true in South Gyle.

At South Gyle Shopping Centre, which is built in the shape of a cross, the aisles are planted with tall Cocus palms under-planted with Ficus benjamina. The under-planting can be removed in their containers to

be replaced with seasonal plants as necessary, such as *Euphorbia pulcherrima* at Christmas.

In the café, shoppers take well-earned rests surrounded by large specimen *Ficus 'Alii'*, under-planted with delicate Jasmine, whilst the entrance and exit are screened by brightly flowering Hibiscus hedges. It looks self-evident that shoppers will be encouraged to stay longer in this attractive centre.

Plants are here to stay

Commercial interior landscaping is becoming the requirement in Scotland. Thanks to pro-active landscapers and forward-thinking businesses with a broad understanding of the benefits of plants in the working environment it is being built into the essential fabric of building.