



THE QUEST FOR ZEST

The brief was for a lively, innovative office. ACXT ARCHITECTS delivered, with a ring of quirky geometric boxes in a vibrant orange setting.

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PHOTOS EUGENI PONS

A CIRCLE OF VIVID BOXES ADDS ENERGY AND OPTIMISM TO THE WORKSPACE

Commissioned to redesign the offices of the Information Technologies and Telecommunications Centre (CTTI) of the Catalan Regional Government, ACXT Architects' Barcelona studio faced the challenge of transforming a dismal basement space into a new, collaborative working environment. As well as functioning as a base for CTTI's activities in Catalonia, the new office also had to represent the organization's core values: innovation, excellence, service and communication. 'The starting point was a new way of working – a new scenario that would represent a different perspective on office operations and would further CTTI's desire to be a truly excellent technology-services supplier,' says ACXT's Marc Casany Estrada.

The new office concept had three main objectives: to promote collaborative work, to encourage communication among employees, and to create a new corporate identity that would embody these goals. The choice of vivid orange for the logo and office interior was a crucial step in the development of a new corporate identity. 'We wanted a colour that would distinguish CTTI from the image projected by the typical technology company in this part of the world,' says Estrada. 'What usually comes to mind is a palette made up of cold, expressionless grey and other dull colours.'

He describes the vivid orange selected as 'an energetic shade that transmits vitality and luminosity. It's halfway between red and yellow – a combination that we ruled out because of its overuse in the corporate identities of so many Catalan companies.' Orange – 'a colour that stimulates the mind and the sense of creativity' – seemed to be the perfect choice for an innovative office.

The original, uninspiring, premises were filled with obsolete computer racks. Worse still, the basement space was dark and humid, which meant that the architects' intervention had to cover not only functional but also environmental improvements. The space was badly in need of natural light, better ventilation and a good temperature-control system. >>>



THE WHITE OFFICE BOXES WERE FINISHED WITH GLASS, INSIDE AND OUTSIDE, TO GIVE THEM EXTRA GLOSS.

EACH OF THE TEN WHITE BOXES HAS A UNIQUE SHAPE. GLASS WINDOWS PREVENT A CLAUSTROPHOBIC EFFECT.

The architects set out to convert 2100 m² of the interior into a sequence of working areas surrounding a central, open zone. Their plan also includes a library, various meeting rooms, two classrooms, an archive, three laboratories and two workshops. Rooms dedicated to collective working sessions are housed in individual boxes that encircle the communal area while also concealing the building's load-bearing columns, thus creating the illusion of a continuous, open space. This effect is emphasized by the mirrored surfaces of some of the outer walls, which visually enlarge the space.

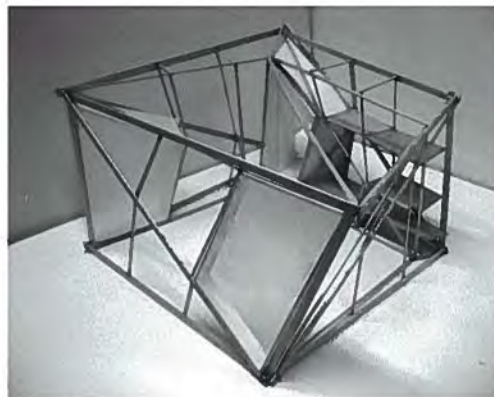
Each custom-designed box has a galvanized tubular-steel frame. Although the boxes look like digitally generated objects, it was impossible to use software to design their nonstandard forms. The angular geometry of each box reflects the team's efforts to work around obstacles, such as columns and mechanical systems that had to remain out of sight. The architects did use AutoCAD (2D and 3D), however, to calculate the profiles of the boxes before drawing them. Once the model's structure, joints and finishes had been defined, it was exported to 3D Studio MAX for the final imaging of each room. Having been assembled, the steel-frame boxes were covered in wood fibre cement board topped by glass panelling for a glossy finish. Interior walls are opaque except for clear-glass entrance doors and a few electrochromic-glass windows that can turn opaque for greater privacy.

The architects succeeded in illuminating an otherwise dark basement by drawing daylight from the roof, five storeys above, into the space by means of a periscopic apparatus created with mirrors. This 'light well' serves not only the basement but also an inner courtyard, which features a bed of white marble pebbles that reflect light. Natural light also enters the basement through transparent glass lifts. Randomly arranged, energy-efficient fluorescent tubes brighten the central zone and provide a contrast to the black-painted ceiling, making overhead mechanical systems and supporting columns virtually invisible. The interior of each boxed office is lit by ceiling-mounted LEDs hidden behind a surface of thermoelastic fabric, which acts as a diffusing screen.

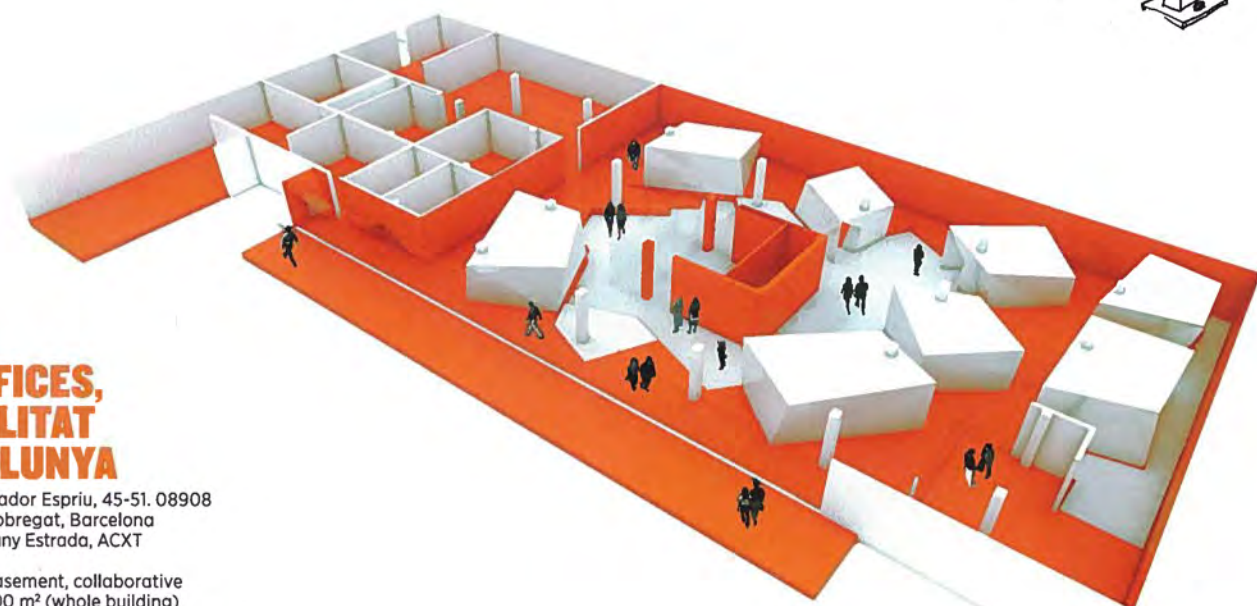
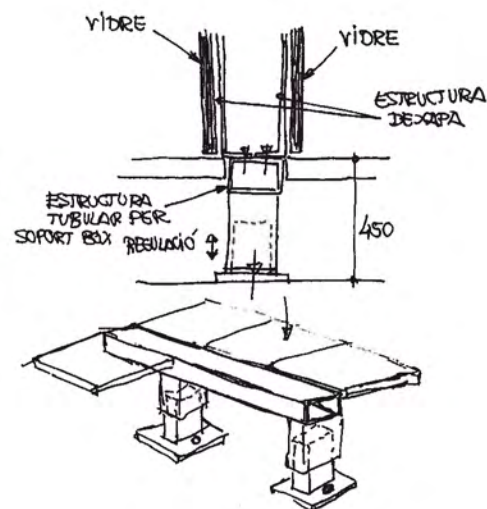
All materials used in the project reinforce the colour scheme of CTTI's new corporate identity - floors and walls combine orange rubber coverings with neat, white surfaces, while pebble beds soften the transitions between inner and outer spaces, generating faux interior gardens. The end result is a vital, optimistic working space that's a far cry from the original dismal basement.

**THE SPACE WAS
ORIGINALLY A DANK,
DARK BASEMENT**

THE BOXES WERE CONSTRUCTED AS STEEL FRAMES WHICH WERE THEN COVERED IN WOOD-FIBRE CEMENT BOARD TOPPED BY GLASS PANNELLING FOR A SLEEK AND GLOSSY FINISH.



DRAWINGS SHOWING THE FOOT CONSTRUCTION FOR THE BOXES (SEE PHOTO LEFT): EACH BOX IS DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHERS, WHICH RULED OUT COMPUTERISED DESIGN.



CTTI OFFICES, GENERALITAT DE CATALUNYA

LOCATION C/ Salvador Espriu, 45-51. 08908 L'Hospitalet de Llobregat, Barcelona
DESIGN Marc Casany Estrada, ACXT (acxt.net)
AREA 2,100 m² (basement, collaborative work area) in 6,700 m² (whole building)
BUDGET €4,000,000 (for 6,700 m²)

LIKE A MINI-VILLAGE, THE BOXES CLUSTER AROUND A CENTRAL CLEARING. THE DESIGN IS SUPPOSED TO ENHANCE PRIVACY, BUT ALSO AID COLLABORATION, BY PROVIDING PLENTY OF CLOSED, PUBLIC, AND TRANSITIONAL SPACE.



GLASS DOORS AND WINDOWS FORM CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL BOXES AND THE MAIN SPACE. FURNITURE USED IS KEPT WHITE AND SIMPLE.

'WE WANTED A COLOUR THAT WOULD DISTINGUISH CTTI FROM THE IMAGE PROJECTED BY THE TYPICAL TECH COMPANY - NO COLD, EXPRESSIONLESS GREYS OR OTHER DULL COLOURS. VIVID ORANGE IS AN ENERGETIC SHADE THAT TRANSMITS VITALITY AND LUMINOSITY. IT STIMULATES THE MIND AND THE SENSE OF CREATIVITY'



RANDOMLY PLACED FLUORESCENT TUBES CONTRAST WITH THE BLACK-PAINTED CEILING AND EFFECTIVELY DISGUISE OVERHEAD MECHANICAL SYSTEMS AND SUPPORTING COLUMNS.