Workbays
Workbays

Developed by Vitra in Switzerland.

Design: Ronan & Erwan Bouroullec.
WORKBAYS

concept 04
designers 11

MEET

Workbays for communication.

FOCUS

Workbays for concentrated work.

SPACE

Workbays for functional zones.

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<table>
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Workbays MEET
Meet 8 medium 15/40, orange
Cluster: Meet 4 medium 15/35
Meet 2 medium 10/20, grey/stone

Workbays MEET + FOCUS
Meet 4 medium 15/35, grey/stone
Focus 1 medium 15/10, grey/stone
Designed by Ronan & Erwan Bouroullec, Workbays is a micro-architectural system which redefines the work environment, bringing flexibility to rigid office layouts. Workbays not only meets office planners’ requirements for simple, multi-functional furniture systems, it also offers employees the freedom to pursue their current, often changing and varying tasks in a suitable working environment.

Team offices, conference rooms, work and meeting areas, cloakrooms, kitchenettes and public lounges are all environments that can be created using just a few furniture elements and easily changed when needed. The variation of organic floor plans, room sizes and wall heights help create a new, emotional office landscape, which breaks with the usual stereotypes of open-plan and cubicle offices. Users use the topography of the Workbays as a source of orientation – as they would a natural landscape – and instinctively select the work situation (open space, place of retreat or community area) most suitable for the task at hand.
The Workbays’ organic design vocabulary is reserved, but still has a strong presence in a room. Workbays installations are simple to plan and can be integrated into all kinds of rooms. They can be connected, expanded or adjusted to changing conditions as needed.

The Workbays’ structure consists of thin aluminium profiles and wall elements made of pressed polyester fleece. The use of light, robust materials is an innovation in the field of furniture. It has a soundproofing effect, feels pleasant and textile-like to the touch and brings a cosy piece of home to the workplace. The seemingly delicate yet very stable Workbays is available in various colours.
“The actual goal here is to do away with the office itself so that it does not even feel like we are at work.”
Ronan & Erwan Bouroullec, born in 1971 and 1976 respectively in Quimper, France, studied at the École des Arts Décoratifs in Paris and the École des Beaux-Arts in Cergy-Pontoise.

Ronan began to work independently directly after finishing his studies, assisted by his brother, who was still studying. The brothers have been running a design studio in Paris as equal partners since 1999. Their field of work ranges from small articles of daily use through to architectural projects. In addition to designing household and office furniture, vases, porcelain crockery, jewellery and various household accessories, their creative work also revolves around creating and using space. Their cooperation with Vitra began with the Joyn office furniture system, which they designed with Vitra between 2000 and 2002 and have been continually developing ever since. Not only have Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec made pioneering developments in office space, they have also contributed a large proportion of Vitra’s ever-growing Home Collection.

When Rolf Fehlbaum first met designers Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec, the two French brothers were already quite familiar to him. He had already been following their work for many years, although it was only known to select circles of connoisseurs at that time. He was for example perfectly acquainted with their experimental projects, such as the “Disintegrated Kitchen” (a free-standing, modular kitchen,) or the “Lit Clos” (a raised bed structure). He admired their design approach, which seemed to break away from preconceived rules governing space and function.

A friendly meeting in the Bouroullecs’ backyard studio in Paris led to the first contract: Rolf Fehlbaum invited the two young designers (aged 26 and 31 at the time) to put together a new design for an office space. This project gave the brothers completely free rein, although the expectations were high, the Bouroullecs were expected to orient their
Read Ronan & Erwan Bouroullec

ideas on the many influential projects in this field. Designers such as George Nelson, Charles and Ray Eames and Antonio Citterio not only designed and influenced furniture and the office environment, to some degree they also redefined the way in which people think and work in this field. Completely untroubled by this, they bravely answered: “We actually work best when we focus on things that we initially know little or nothing about.” Ronan and Erwan began to approach office design from various new perspectives. They were free from preconceived opinions and were armed with Christopher Alexander’s encyclopedia “A Pattern Language”, which had been a present from Fehlbaum.

By this time, the Bouroullec brothers were already following one important rule: “Design should be regarded as an opportunity to initiate serial production with a certain degree of diversity and as an attempt to escape authoritarianism.” They decided not to conform to standard criteria for efficient and profitable work and also wasted no time on analyses or survey results relating to the world of work. They were far more concerned with the obvious answer, drawing on their personal experience, which allowed them to imagine and create their very own type of office. “People have to be able to discuss things with one another; there has to be a certain proximity to other colleagues. However, they also require personal space to be able to concentrate and relax.” They were inspired by a particular environment, that is more in sync with human nature and therefore matches it more closely than any office: the apartment.

Apartments are traditionally interactive, flexible and relaxing all at the same time. At home, you can withdraw to a private room or spend a quiet moment alone in a peaceful space before returning to the company of others. The majority of everyday family life takes place in communal areas, often the kitchen. Ronan asks, “Can you remember the pictures of farmhouses back in the day, when everything went on around a large table?” adding, “Someone would sit at the table reading a newspaper while someone else was peeling potatoes opposite and a third person was repairing a watch at the end.” This is how the question originally asked by the two

“The word ‘office’ signifies: ‘I am working’.

But only because of the meaning of the word, not because of the horror of the place.”

Erwan Bouroullec
brothers: “What happens when an average of fifteen people spend their entire working day together in a single room?” became “What does ‘office life’ really mean?” And “Is it possible to create a system that fulfils all the different requirements and needs of so many people?” The answer to these questions was the Joyn office system, a work desk made up of a large, empty board without a predefined layout. This system uses a uniform white surface to centralise all of the tasks that the people there are working on.

With Joyn, the Bouroullecs were not only able to reorganise spatial thinking, but also managed to break down outdated office hierarchies typically characterised by factors such as the location and size of the office. “The table itself has no real reference points. You cannot say for sure whether it’s for a manager or a secretary. It would be just as at home in a bank, as in an architect’s office,” is Erwan’s comment on the design scope offered by their system. “It is simply a large, borderless landscape where things happen.”

Joyn signalled the completion of the first part of Ronan and Erwan’s office concept: a platform for communal work. The launch of the Alcove Sofa in 2006 saw retreat areas created in the office. The Alcove defines a separate area, blocking out outside disturbances with its exceptionally high side and back panels. Two of these sofas opposite one another create a room within a room. By combining the informality of a sofa and the intimacy of a conference room, the Alcove allows private discussions to take place within its fabric-covered, noise-absorbing walls without the participants in the conversation having to go behind closed doors. “Placing the sofa in an office was like plugging in a Marshall amp on an empty stage,” is Erwan’s comment on the integration of a piece of household furniture into the working environment. The message was clear: the Alcove changed the thinking behind office design that had existed up to 2006.

“We will return to more archaic furniture typologies that no longer differentiate between work and home.”
“We leave the page as white as possible, thereby giving the user the greatest number of possibilities.

One should not forget that office environments are changing and that the furniture will outlast many office concepts.”
While Joyn and the Alcove – and the 2012 developed height-adjustable table system Tyde – provide two very different kinds of working environments for cooperation and concentration, the Bouroullecs also developed a system called Workbays, which acts as a bridge between cooperation and concentration, facilitating the break-up of rigid office planning.

Workbays comprises a protective and durable shell with differently curved wall elements in various heights and can be assembled in all kinds of rooms. The robust industrial fleece was inspired by developments in the automobile industry and is supported by a lightweight aluminium structure, thereby shielding the unit from background noise. The choice of various warm colours enhances the friendly, almost homely atmosphere. With its organic structure, the system combines the Bouroullec brothers’ conception of the flexibility and modularity of free-standing micro-architectures with their characteristically anti-authoritarian approach.

“We asked ourselves the following questions: how can a person find the privacy for a personal phone call or private conversation? Where can employees think about important decisions? Where can they go to get a bit of peace?” Erwan continues: “For me, furniture means creating a sort of sanctuary, a place of peace where you can really begin living.”

The process of developing their idea of an office, which Ronan and Erwan began with Joyn and continued with the Alcove, was taken a step further with the Workbays. All three systems reflect the brothers’ fundamental understanding of design, which brings a degree of diversity to serial production.

“We actually work at our best when we dedicate ourselves to things that we initially know very little about.”
“Creativity means movement, and offices need to enable this movement – from the desk to a short discussion on the go, from the meeting table to the coffee machine, the gym or into the think cell. Those who move see other things. Those who see other things think differently and automatically come to other solutions.”
“The actual goal here is to do away with the office itself so that it does not even feel like we are at work.”

Ronan & Erwan Bouroullec
Workbays FOCUS
Focus 1 medium 15/10
grey/stone

Workbays FOCUS
Focus 1 medium 15/30
green
Workbays FOCUS
Focus 1 medium 12 / 10
3-Cluster Side, orange

Workbays FOCUS
Focus 1 medium 15 / 10
3-Cluster Side, sea blue
Workbays MEET
Meet 8 medium 15/40
orange
Workbays MEET
Meet 8 medium 15/40
orange

Workbays MEET
Meet 4 medium 15/35
grey/stone
Ronan & Erwan Bouroullec

Workbays MEET
Meet 2 medium 10/20
grey / stone

Workbays MEET
Meet 4 medium 15/20
2-Cluster Side, grey / stone
Workbays MEET
Meet B medium 15/40
2-Cluster Side, sea blue
“For me, furniture means creating a place that you can retreat to, a place of peace and quiet, and a place where you can really begin to live.”
Workdays look
Workbays look

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Workbays look

53
“For me, furniture means creating a place that you can retreat to, a place of peace and quiet, and a place where you can really begin to live.”
Workbays SPACE
Space Wardrobe high 15 / 40
green

Workbays SPACE
Space Service Point high 15 / 40
green
Workbays SPACE
customised version Space Room high
45 / 60, granite grey
EASY TO MOVE

Ronan & Erwan Bouroullec

Workbays MEET
Meet 4 medium 15/20
grey/stone

Workbays FOCUS
Focus 1 low 15/20
2-Cluster Side, green

EASY TO HANDLE
PRODUCTION NOTES

Concept & art direction
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