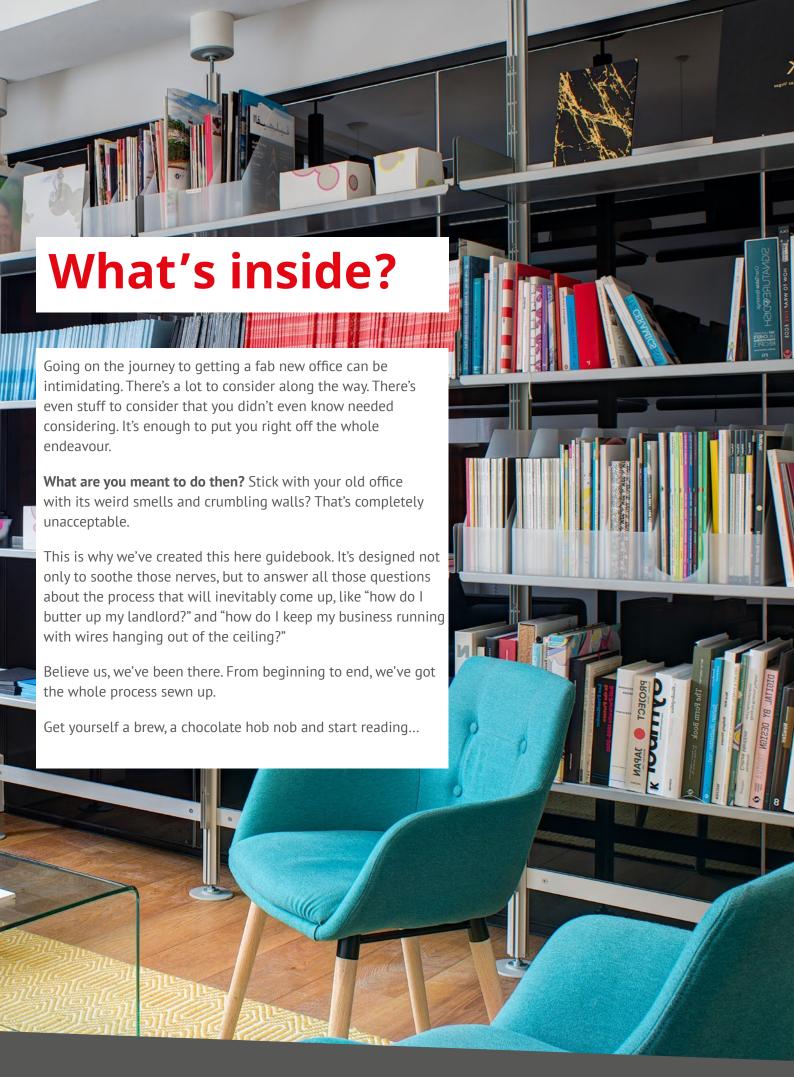


Learn the essential ingredients of a successful office refurbishment.

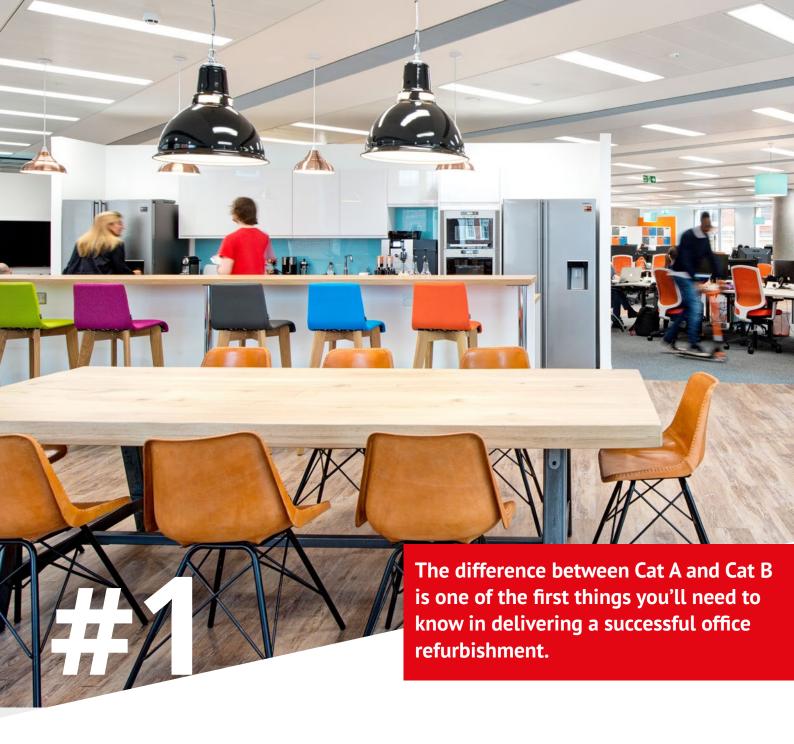






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Do You Know Your Cat A From Your Cat B?

Right at the very start of your journey, this is the first question you need to ask yourself. You may have heard these terms slung about by a landlord, estate agent or office design and build contractor, but has anyone ever explained them in plain English?

Let us lay it all out for you...

Cat A - The Basic Bits

A Category A fit out refers to the basics. The blank canvas. This is what you should expect your landlord to have sorted before getting you lovely people in. Cat A includes the following:

- Raised floors and suspended ceilings (because bare concrete isn't office chic – yet)
- Mechanical and electrical services (lighting, heating, power for the computers, kettle, phones, GHDs etc)
- Sprinklers, fire detection services and smoke alarms
- Air-conditioning and ventilation (HVAC)
- Toilets and showers
- Common parts like lifts, lobbies and reception areas
- Basic internal finishes (what is this obsession with magnolia about, anyway?)

Your landlord should have got these things sorted, but it's always worth checking the small print before signing your work life away. There's nothing worse than your first summer in a new office, when someone asks you to turn the air conditioning on, and you realise you've consigned your work mates to a life of slowly cooking in a glass box of misery.

So that's Cat A. It's basically like putting the bare minimum of clothes on in the morning. This means your office is ready to go, right? Turn the lights on, stick some computers in, put the kettle on...

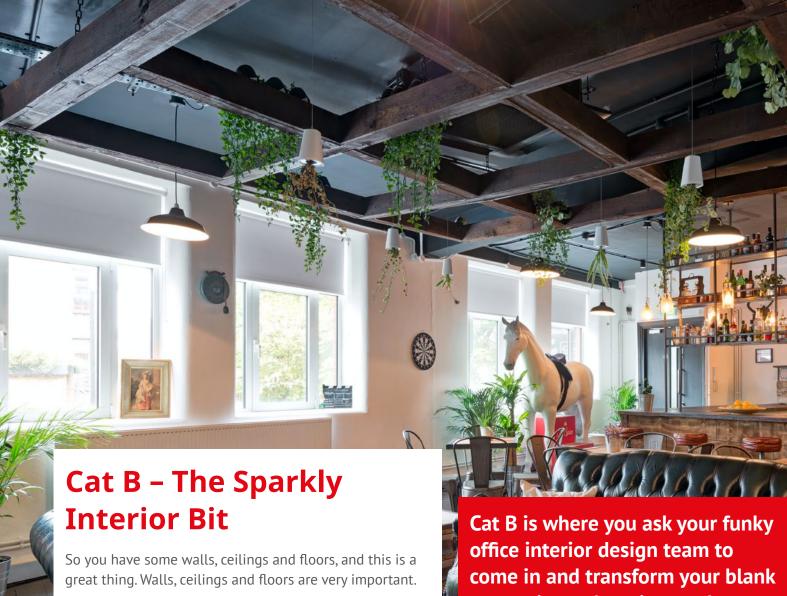
Woah, no, no, no, no. That's like rolling up onto Oxford Street just wearing your underwear. Sure, it's the bare minimum, but you're going to get a lot of weird looks. And your Mum is going to be very disappointed in you.

See, what you need are the rest of your clothes, some spangly accessories and a kick-ass pair of shoes. This is where Cat B comes in.



Your landlord should have got these things sorted, but it's always worth checking the small print before signing your work life away.





But here's where things get interesting. Cat B is where you ask your funky office interior design team to come in and transform your blank canvas into a banging workspace.

This isn't as simple as throwing a few tables and chairs in and calling it a day. It's better than that.

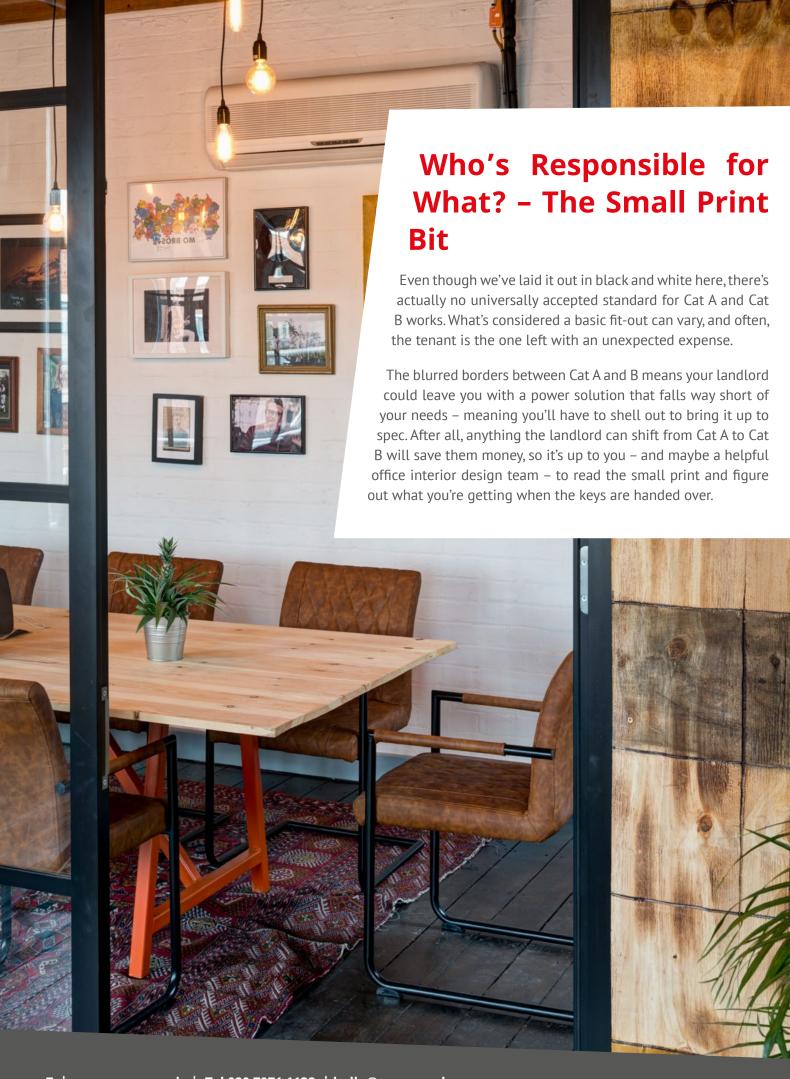
Cat B includes:

- Interior partitions for workspaces, breakout rooms etc (so your burnt toast smell stays in the kitchen and your directors stay in their offices)
- Final finishes for floors, walls and doors that are bang on brand
- Quality of work life upgrades, like fitted kitchens or a stunning reception area that tells your client exactly what to expect from you

canvas into a banging workspace.

- Better lighting and suspended ceiling upgrades (they can get pretty fancy)
- Placement of power outlets, AV facilities and general IT installation (an easy-touse boardroom video conference set up? It's possible!)
- Workstations and furniture (slick black chairs, or neon tartan?)

Cat B also includes the admiration and respect of your colleagues and the envy of your competitors – if you get it right.





How to Choose a Quality Office Design and Build Contractor

We get it. Your office is a part of you. It's the home of your business, apple of your eye, blessed keeper of the air conditioning. Finding the perfect design and build contractor involves placing your pride and joy in someone else's hands, with all the risk that entails.

Here's our tips on what to look out for:

A portfolio of good design

This goes without saying. A portfolio is where your contractor shows you that they've done it all before. Bonus points if it was for a client in a similar industry, or with a brand voice like yours, or if they have strong local experience.

Pick a portfolio that speaks your language. You might like the contractor's tendency to create open meeting areas with beanbags, but if your colleagues all wear suits, it's just not going to work out.



References

Of course your list of contractors are all going to tell you that they're the very best, no fibbing. But if they can support that with a long list of references and testimonials (not their mum), then they might be onto something.

Even better if they can put you in touch with one of their clients. Their clients are the ones who used to face all the same challenges you have and have come out the other side. They can also tell you of any issues in confidence. It's like talking to yourself in the future, only future you has a banging office already.

Credit Check

You know what's worse than a badly designed office? A half-finished badly designed office.

Your contractor needs to be solvent all the way through the project programme, so you'd best check that credit rating. Checking is cheap and quick, and definitely worth raiding the petty cash for some peace of mind.

Health & Safety Record

If your contractor has a RIDDOR report with more injury numbers than a world cup knock out round at extra time, it's time to make your excuses and leave. Your staff are your business, and exposing them to unnecessary risk is a big no no. Make sure they show you their records.

Insurance in place public liability (PL) and professional indemnity (PI)

You know we were just talking about risk? A contractor without the proper insurances is as much protection against risk as a chocolate fireguard. Without PI, any mistake they make, whether bad advice or breaching confidentiality or forgetting to design something important, like, a floor - well, you're going to have to take them to court to claw back some recompense.

Same with PL. You don't want to be held liable if a member of the contractor's team injures themselves or your staff in your place of business.



A good team will respond quickly and clearly to your early enquiries, without using jargon. Look for plain English.

Call us experts (our mums do), but we reckon staff won't be able to work effectively if people keep falling through the massive hole in front of the reception desk. No, not even if your office interior design contractor insists on calling it "dilapidation chic".

Good, clear communications

You can tell a great office interior design contractor from the chaff at the very start of your journey. If they're quick off the mark in responding to your enquiries, if they answer all your questions without using jargon, and especially if they can talk fees without whistling backwards through their teeth - you've got yourself a company you can do business with. No faffing about.





Working with Your Landlord

So you know what you want, and you know which contractor you want. Time to knock some walls down right?

Well, sadly, not quite. The route to a banging office space involves playing nice with your landlord, such as figuring out:

Who's responsible for what?

Just like moving into your first home, you can't just call up your landlord and make them fix those mysterious holes in the ceiling from flaming beer pong night. They're your responsibility now, so you better pony up for a plasterer, and a long hard look at how you spend Tuesday evenings.

See, most commercial leases are "Fully Repairing and Insuring" contracts (FRI for short). And just like it says on the tin, this makes the tenant liable for all maintenance and insurance costs for the length of the lease period.

This doesn't just extend to the obvious aesthetic stuff like touching up the paintwork or sticking the wallpaper back on after Sauna Fridays. It's your actual legal responsibility - and let's get boringly serious for a sec here - to carry out a health and safety risk assessment every year per The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

There's a whole host of stuff that gets bundled up with that, such as fire and gas safety, the safety of electrical equipment, managing asbestos if there is any and providing safe and comfortable working conditions. Anything that gets flagged up from the assessment is your duty to fix, under pain of the law (and maybe under pain of a missing finger if your workplace resembles a rusty bear trap).

Now OK, the landlord isn't totally off the hook with this stuff. If you share a building with a bunch of other businesses, then the landlord has a responsibility to manage the communal areas like lifts and reception, as well as the structural integrity of the building itself.



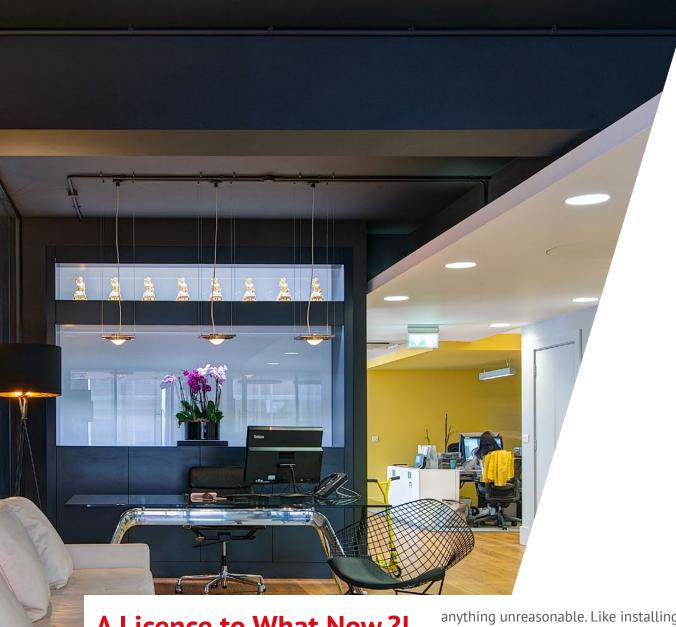
So, what does this have to do with office refurbishment?

Well, apart from the blindingly obvious – your employees need a space that isn't actively on fire you're also responsible for ensuring your brilliant idea for a new shiny office space is habitable, safe, and has decent toilets.

Any fixtures and fittings you introduce also need to be correctly installed and safe to use. Those awesome carpets made from recycled razor blades and asbestos just won't cut it, well, apart from in the obvious way.

But before you go about installing your nice fuzzy-felt desks with rounded corners, you're going to have to seek a Licence to Alter with your landlord.

Tip: before you go about installing your nice fuzzy-felt desks with rounded corners, you're going to have to seek a Licence to Alter with your landlord.



A Licence to What Now.?!

If you have a standard FRI lease (see earlier), then you must get permission from your landlord to make significant alterations to the property. This includes things such as taking down walls, changing windows, adding bathrooms etc. This is the Licence to Alter.

Remember, your office is technically their property, no matter how many times you've slept there at project crunch time.

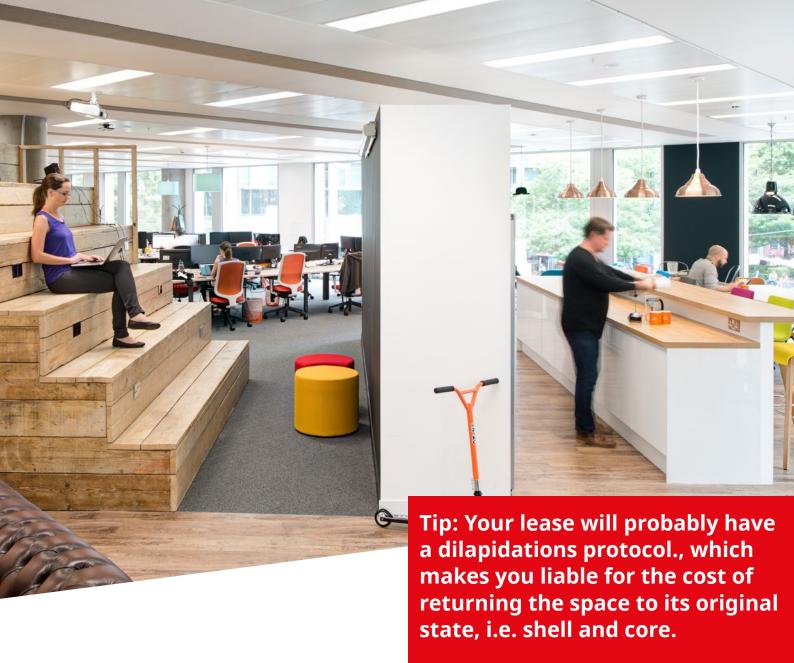
Now this licence can sometimes take a bit of time to get from your landlord, so an office refurbishment company (that's us) will generally recommend getting it done as soon as the initial design concept has been drafted. These plans will need to go to the landlord, who will sit down with a surveyor and solicitor to make sure you're not planning to do

anything unreasonable. Like installing a zero-gravity room, or a hot tub in the board room.

If the landlord agree you need a licence, then you will have to submit full details of the works, including drawings and specifications.

But there's good news in all this paperwork. If your request is reasonable (i.e. if you're not proposing taking out loadbearing walls to make the boardroom ceiling "extra droopy"), then your landlord cannot withhold consent. Neat! You're getting your license.

The landlord and surveyor may ask to visit the site occasionally to check you're not putting a stealth dance floor on springs in the kitchen, but that's a small price to pay for a wicked new workspace.



What happens when we move out?

Your contract will probably have a dilapidations protocol. This makes you liable not only for repairs to the property but the cost of returning the space to its original state, i.e. shell and core.

As you can imagine, this can get pricey. It's often a good idea to get a chartered surveyor and a solicitor on your side at the start and end of the lease. They can negotiate the detail of the dilapidations protocol (so you don't have to strip out big-ticket items like air conditioning), keep track of your maintenance programme and advise you of unreasonable demands. But don't despair. If the property was a sh - craphole at the start of the lease, then there's a whole bunch of wiggle room in the contract to get you out of having to pay dilapidation costs. You can even exclude anything that may be classed as fair wear and tear.

This won't stop your landlord from insisting you paint over those flaming beer pong burn marks, but it will make sure you move out with some money still left in the kitty.



If this is the first

time you've worked on an office refurbishment project, there's a good chance you've never heard of Building Control, let alone spoken to a building control inspector. But trust us when we say, these guys are crucial for getting your new office ready for business.

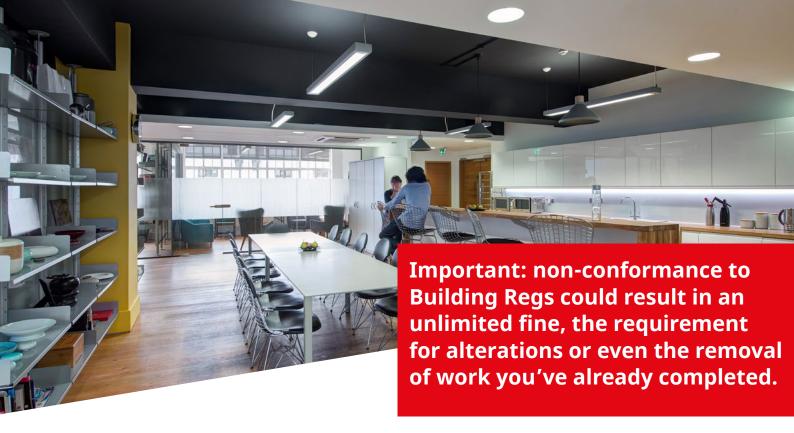
So, what is Building Control?

Building Control can either by your local authority - think the City of London or Westminster Councils - or a private sector company working as 'Approved Inspectors'.

Their role is to make sure your building works are spot on; things like steel beams in the right place to keep the building upright, doorways wide enough to fit through, fire escapes that work in an emergency. That sort of stuff.

They also make sure your building meets the regulations around inclusivity and the myriad of other building legislation and standards in place.

In an ideal world, Building Control is there to work with you to promote the highest standards of construction work. Simples.



Yes, But What Does **Building Control Do?**

While they don't give out gold stars to reward contractors, they do check to see if you're following the correct construction standards. They'll typically do this at various stages of your office refurbishment project:

- 1. They will review your drawings before the building works start to identify any areas where your design doesn't meet the required standards
- 2. They will visit during construction to check any significant milestones, like foundations going in if you're building from the ground up, or steel beams if you're replacing any supporting walls
- 3. They'll visit at the end of the project to sign-off that the works meet the required standards

Why are Building Regs Important to my Office Refurb?

Building Regs first came about because of the Great Fire of London. After the fire wiped out a mammoth sized part of the city due to its unsafe buildings, the authorities put regulations in place to help improve the safety of any new buildings - seems pretty smart to us.

Of course, since then, safety and amenity regulations have evolved a lot and continue to do so. Changes to the Building Regs are relatively frequent as the industry looks to continually improve best practice.

More importantly, without sign-off from your Inspector, quite frankly you won't be able to move into your office.

It's one of those milestones on the "critical path".

Oh wait, there's also the fact that non-conformance to Building Regs could result in an unlimited fine, the requirement for alterations or even the removal of work you've already completed. All of that sounds effing expensive to us.

Hang on, we almost forgot to mention, contravening Building Regs can result in prosecution by the HSE should the worst happen too. Yes, that does mean possible jail time too. We hope you look good in stripes.

This means that appointing a quality office refurbishment contractor for your project is super important. They'll take care of the fuss so you can sleep easy at night.



Health and Safety

Uh oh. First come Building Control, now it's the health and safety nannies. You know 'elf and safety, right? Typical, preachy, bureaucratic nonsense that takes the fun out of "no longer fully-functioning limbs".

Phew. Getting all that old-fashioned moaning out of the way feels great. But what's this got to do with your office refurbishment?

Well...

First off, what is the HSE?

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), in short, is the God of Workplace Safety. They are responsible for advising employers on how to manage risks correctly and prevent work-related death, injury and ill health. They also enforce the Health and Safety at Work Act. This means they get to put the boot in if your place of work drops the ball (especially if it is a wrecking ball).

The Health and Safety at Work Act is a bit of legislation that lists all the duties employers need to follow to protect the welfare of people on their premises. A big part of this is ensuring your current - The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), in short, is the God of Workplace Safety.

and future – office doesn't resemble an amusement park made of razor blades.

Notice how we said future office?

What does this mean for office refurbishment?

Well, for one, it means you're going to have to rip up your plans for installing a trapdoor in front of your desk.

See, when it comes to the design of your new office, you can't just do whatever you like. The plan has to be compliant with the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992. This means you need to make provisions in your new office for proper lighting, heating, ventilation, workspaces and staff facilities, as well as being accessible to people with disabilities. Forcing everyone to limbo dance under the reception desk won't cut it.



But your job as health and safety master doesn't begin and end at the design stage. Nope, according to the CDM Regulations 2015, you're also responsible for all health and safety when your office is a building site.

Your responsibilities for health and safety on site

Now, don't panic. We don't expect you to be an instant health and safety vigilante saving people from the perils of falling masonry. This is where the HSE (remember those guys?) can offer advice, and where your friendly office design company can guide you along. You know, just like Robin to your Batman.

So, gadzooks Batman, this is everything you need to do:

Prepare a brief: give it to us straight in a perfectly formed office design brief. What do you want the office to look like, to function as, and why? What are your expectations for timescales, budgets, and health and safety? Who can your office design company contact if you unearth an ancient burial ground?

Appoint a Principal Designer and Principal Contractor: these are the guys who make sure everyone and everything is in tip-top shape. However, if you've done the smart thing and appointed the one design and build contractor to carry out all the works, you can entirely skip this step, as we'll do it all for you!

Create a health and safety file: this is where you sit down with us and get together all the information needed to ensure the wellbeing of everyone on site. This file should be updated regularly. Also make sure to provide stuff like previous building surveys and investigations, as it's handy to know that the east wall is called "Mr Wobbly" for a reason.





Keeping the Show on the Road

An office refurbishment isn't like an episode of Grand Designs; you can't just move your employees into a caravan for Christmas and wait for Kevin McCloud to ask awkward questions about your budget.

Refurbs can be expensive, and you're going to need a plan of action to keep your business ticking over when we're on site, knocking down walls and creating your version of office utopia.

Lucky for you, we can guarantee your new office handover party doesn't also come packaged with the presentation of P45s.

Here's how...

Timing is Everything

We get it. You're a 24/7 business, and the last thing you need is someone taking down the boardroom wall as you're launching your new product range, ("Now with Extra Plaster Dust!")

season to minimise disruption?

Yet, every company has their downtimes, and it's worth syncing up everyone's calendars to see when it's best to move the builders in. If half the office is taking their summer holidays at the same time (and the other half is daydreaming about Instagramming their beach legs), then take advantage of the downturn in productivity. Same with Christmas shutdowns and school holidays.

After all, this refurb is already costing you money. Don't compound the pain by making your accounts team do the end of year financial reports while balancing their laptop on a contractor's hardhat (we're a little too helpful sometimes).



Working evenings and weekends?

Speaking of helpful, we're the self-sacrificing sort. As experts in office refurbishments in London, we're used to working around our clients to put together a project programme that includes works outside of business hours.

Those client areas such as receptions and meeting rooms? We know they can't suffer any downtime. We'll therefore sneak in after everyone has gone home, spruce them up, clean up after ourselves and leave no trace that anyone was ever there, except for a kick-ass new office and the lingering scent of Fancy New Desk.

We're basically like refurb fairies or fit-out Father Christmas. So, make sure to leave some strong coffee in a saucer before you go home for the day. Sure, the programme might take a little longer to complete, but it might mean you don't have to kick staff out of the office for a few weeks.

What About Phased Works?

If you have a small office, we're not going to lie - this is a bold decision. However, if you're Billy Big Jobs, your office space may be big enough to remain in occupancy while the works are taking place. We're well experienced in this type of job - plus, we get to partake in the office birthday cake when it's being handed out.

If you're sticking around, our team will put together a handy guide to exactly what we're doing, when we're doing it, what facilities will still be available, and if any staff will have to move to a different desk.



If you have a multi-floor office, well then we're really cooking with gas. We'll occupy each floor one by one, and produce individual plans detailing where everyone in the building is moving, and when. This will be as seamless as possible so that your staff aren't playing a game of musical chairs every week.

However, if the works are fairly dramatic, you may find it better to...

Plan for Swing Space

Put away the car keys: we mean the other type of swing space. It's significantly less fun (we hear), but it does ensure staff can continue working without too much disruption.

For your more drastic office refurbishments, moving to a temporary workspace is the quick and dirty method to continuing business as usual. It means your fit-out company can move in, rip everything out at once, and put it all back together in double-quick time. It also means we don't have to worry about

Janet from marketing choosing to disregard the signs and climb inside the exposed ceiling void like a raccoon.

If you decide moving to swing space is right for you, make sure you talk to your staff about logistics. There's nothing more alienating than finding out your employer has decided to temporarily relocate from Zone 1 to deepest darkest Zone 5, and forgotten to provide you with a sleeping bag, a firelighter and a pack full of Pret survival rations.

Of course, you can also encourage staff to work from home, if you have the right IT support. Now might be the time to try out that new Skype thing everyone has been going on about.

But don't worry about staff getting too comfortable working at home in their pyjamas. By the time the office is finished, they'll be fighting to come back.

As long as the office is ready to be occupied. That means, finally, we've come to the last stage of the process...



What is **Snagging?**

None of us are perfcet. But that doesn't mean you should accept anything less than a banging office that is anything less than, well, banging. We wouldn't allow it. We couldn't. It's the contractor's responsibility, when they find any imperfections, to do a bit of snagging and make good.

What is snagging anyway?

Like when you meet with the inventory guy at the end of a tenancy, snagging is the process of inspecting your office for any defects. These may seem small at first, but we guarantee they will keep you up at night. Snags could include scratched paintwork or missing hinges, but could also be more serious, such as wrongly fitted sinks or cracked walls.

The first period of snagging usually takes place a couple of weeks before practical completion and is built into the project programme. Your office design company should compile a list detailing all defects, and ensure things are all buffed out before the handover.

You can then rest assured that you're moving into a place where all the nooks – and all of the crannies – have been meticulously pored over and given the nod of approval.



How long is a typical defects period?

So, the initial snagging has taken place, and you've reached practical completion with all the known issues sorted out. Now the defects period kicks in. This is a length of time written in the contract for when the office design company is still liable for dealing with snags at their own expense. It's like a warranty period for your new office and can be anything from 6 to 12 months.

But watch out for latent defects. These are the ones that have been lying concealed within the works, like a shrimp behind the radiator, which can only be found when something begins to smell. Your contractor may still be liable for these defects years after the fact, but it's up to you to check the contract to see whether it allows for a latent defect period.

What are your rights and responsibilities as a client?

As the client, you have the right to ask your contractor to do a full survey and a responsibility to give them a reasonable amount of time to fix any defects. You can even provide them with a list of the ones you have found. Although remember, you ain't no rockstar. That window you broke because you thought throwing a computer monitor out of it would put an end to the fourth hour of the finance meeting – that isn't on us.

The great news is that you are not liable for any costs the contractor accrues in making good during the liability period. But make sure you're using the same company as written in the contract – this commitment works both ways, and they're not going to shell out for another contractor's work.



You may want to write a retention into the contract to take into account the defects liability period. Once this period finishes, and a 'Certificate of Making Good' is issued (basically saying that all defects are ironed out), this final part of the fee is paid to the contractor.

They can then be released into the wild, only to reappear to gate-crash your office parties or boast that they knew your company before you became famous.

What should you expect from your office design and build contractor?

Well, first off, you should expect them to do their damn job – and do it right the first time.

Nothing annoys us more than a contractor not

taking pride in their work. It's like a baker who sets fire to the cake and covers it up with mountains of icing.

People have to eat that cake, every day, Monday-to-Friday. A whole community of hard-working people is dependent on that cake. Clients judge you on your cake. We mean office.

No amount of icing will fix what is essentially a bad job.

A good office design company snags as they go, and sorts out any defects when you bring them to their attention during the liability period. This means you get a perfect office handed over when they said they would, rather than dragging it out.

Sure, there may be some tiny issues that can be buffed out, but at least no one is drilling in the kitchen when the celebratory muffins are being handed out.



Conclusion

Phew. That, really, is everything. Put your feet up, get some orange slices, you're done.

Did we say done? We actually meant you're ready to take on the world! You have absolutely everything you need to get that office refurbishment project off the ground, risk free and with a smart eye on what's important.

But what's a journey without a stylish and savvy partner to experience it along the way? We'll be honest at this point – we may have given away a whole bunch of our best secrets to success, but we're also very good at picking up the phone and answering even the strangest questions. We're also damn good at creating office space that you'll be dying to share with everyone on the street.

After all, that's why we're here. We're friendly, helpful, and available in a moment's notice.

Test us out - pick up the phone and ring 020 7971 1132.



