

NewsCommercial property

Uplifting update a new departure

A modern office fit-out reflects its function, writes **Stephen Crafti**.

THE World Trade Centre at Northbank Wharf conceals a little architectural gem by Carabott Holt Architects.

Occupying what was once an atrium space, the 400-square-metre space is a reflection of the innovative work done there by occupier Thales, which produces air traffic management systems.

"They wanted the innovation laboratory to demonstrate they are at the forefront of the industry," says architect David Carabott, a director of the practice. "We weren't allocated a large space, but it was quite impressive, with ceilings of 11 metres."

While Carabott Architects were given a functional brief to provide a laboratory and two training rooms, Mr Carabott was keen to provide an inspirational environment to capture the essence of Thales work, he said. Thales produces software co-ordinating flight times, provides risk management and fuel assessments.

Past rows of standard workstations is an aluminium fridge-like door, inspired by science fiction movies from the 1970s. Relatively modest in scale,

the journey begins past this threshold. The architects designed a tent-like roof, made from Luxalon aluminium grids, varying in height from 2.4 metres at the point of arrival, to 10 metres at the furthest point — there is a deliberate sense of "take-off".

Back-lit with LEDs, there are obvious connections to a runway. "We also used perimeter lighting in the wall and floors," says interior designer Adele Bates. Curvaceous Corian tables add to the aerodynamic environment.

The key space is the laboratory, loosely divided into a meeting/presentation area and a workstation. With the flick of a switch, a large video screen is activated. And with another motion, a wall drops down from the ceiling at the rear of the space, concealing a banquette of workstations.

"It was quite a challenge to come up with something that reflected the company, as well as creating a design on the edge," says Mr Carabott, who concentrated on images of a plane's fluid, softer form, and the feathery tracks of vapour trails left as it moves across the sky.



The wall treatment echoes the feathery tracks of a plane's vapour trail, for air traffic management company Thales.