

With ecological issues at the forefront in the media there continues to be a lot of discussion about going green in all areas of life. To create a simple, environmentally sound office space in the city was no easy task for architect David Saunders, principal of S2 design.

LIVE IN australia

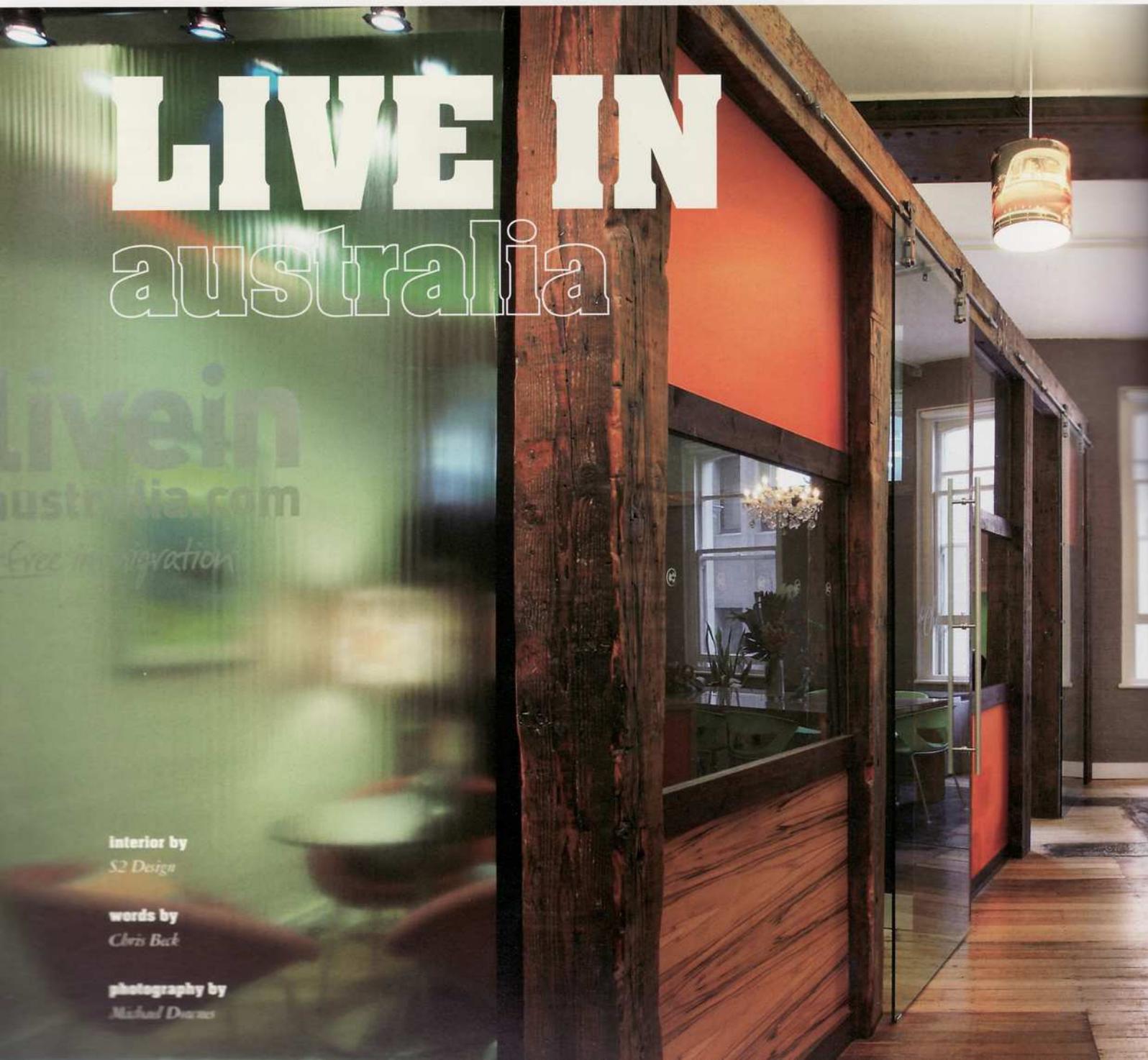
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Free inspiration

interior by
S2 Design

words by
Chris Beck

photography by
Michael Downs



The sense of untainted surroundings begins at the entrance to LIVEIN australia.com, an immigration law firm in Melbourne. A water wall has a cooling effect on this humid day in a largely wooden space with open windows and air circulating via overhead fans. Indoor palm plants throughout the office also contribute to the air quality.

There is little of the conventional office here apart from the computer screens. The colours are a mix of orange – the company's corporate colour – and lime green, a soothing effect for the workspace. The reception area joinery is constructed with a Black Heart Sassafras veneer on Hoop pine plantation plywood substrate. The small waiting area features lamps with mid-20th century Australian poster designs that enticed people to come to Australia.

The now multi-use building in the heart of the CBD began as a 19th century warehouse. The original hardwood floorboards have survived. The large concrete sections in some floor areas were laid to bear the

weight of massive printing presses, when the warehouse was converted into a printery in the 20th century. Coins have been set in one concrete area representing the generations of nationalities that touch much of our population.

LIVEIN australia.com deals with people's dreams to live and work in a country besotted with its heritage of farming, desert and bush – the wide-open land. Chief executive officer Assyl Haidar opted for simple, natural rustic design. The sense of space has been achieved through open plan design and little clutter.

The office planning is based on a non-hierarchical strategy – a variety of open plan and separable spaces to allow privacy when required. Opening the floor to ceiling vertical folding 'fire station' door that connects the boardroom to a workstation zone nearly doubles the usable space. Workstations can be divided or shared to encourage collaboration and a team environment.



Saunders is all about creating environmentally sustainable buildings and interiors. Lighting is strategic so the glow is where you need it. Workstations take advantage of natural and reflected light from north and west facing windows. The low energy compact fluorescent lights expend far less power than an equivalent office.

Everything is recycled or recyclable. Plantation plywood is used to construct much of the new joinery. Recycled Canadian Oregon posts and beams salvaged from a Williamstown shipyard are used to create the new partition walls.

The original iron beams, with hand-forged rivets, travel across the ceiling prominently exposed.

"My philosophy is not to use a lot of stuff," Saunders says. "We don't need to cover everything. If this were any other office you would have a suspended ceiling hiding all the building services. I think, OK, there is an existing ceiling, let's work with it."

An ornate Czech crystal chandelier hovers incongruously over the solid Huon pine table and green plastic chairs in the casual meeting area. The unobtrusive lampshades that dot the ceiling contrast with this light fitting seemingly from another thought pattern.

"I like to make people stop and think and consider why things are there and what features are there for," Saunders says, "The chandelier doesn't need to be in a Victorian house or hanging from a ceiling rose."

There is an element of homeliness in the chandelier. And the lampshades printed with 50s Australian travel poster designs would look comfortable in a home environment, albeit a trendy one. There is friendliness to the uncomplicated design that accepts an ornate chandelier with a sense of humour.

The staff lounge features a photographic mural of a bamboo forest, injecting, with more lucidity, the philosophy of nature. It works as a bit of the outside world for people in a city office. Above the wooden table



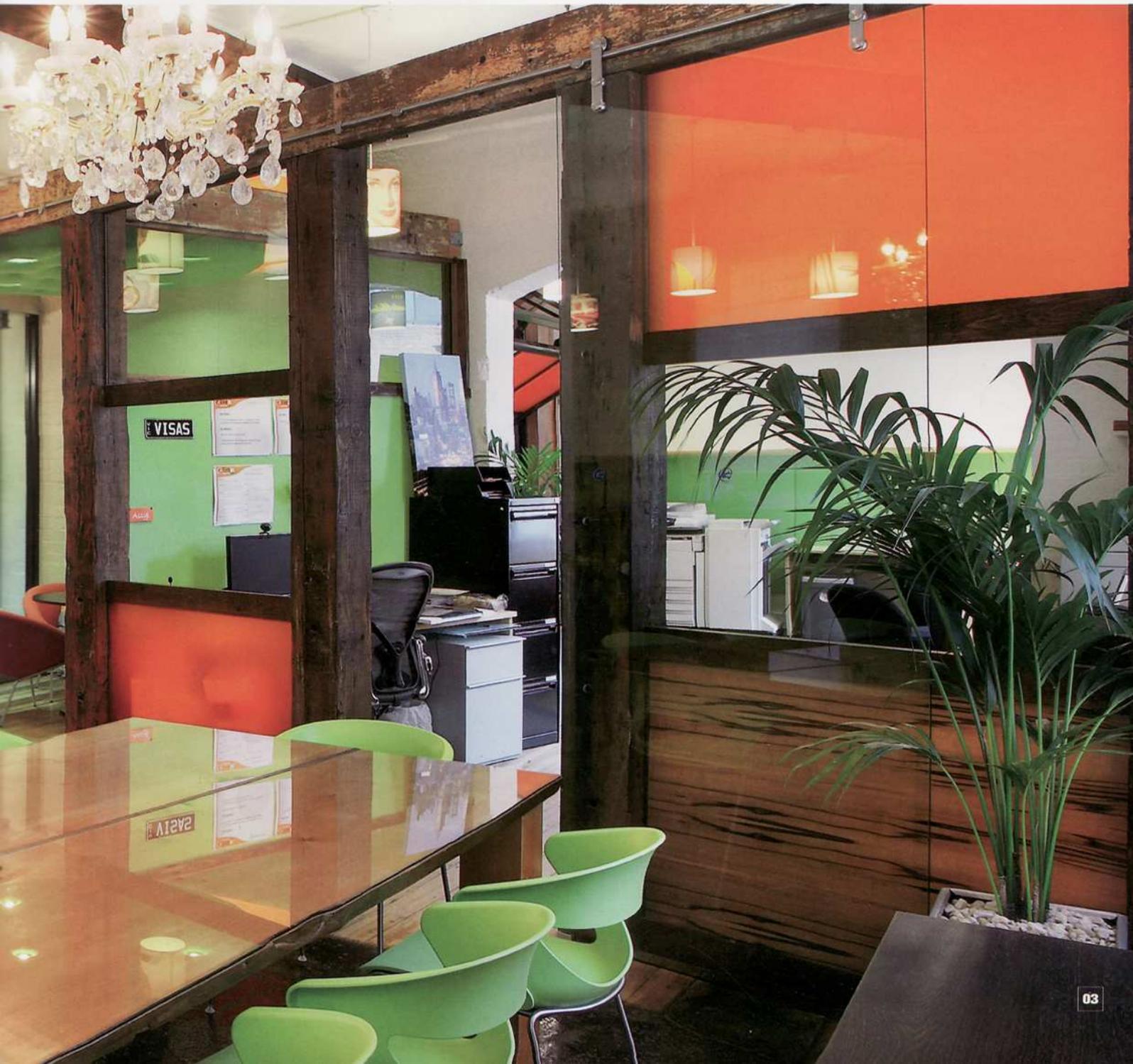
01. The exciting mix of colour adds interest to the reception and main office areas, complementing the hardwood floors and the Black Heart Sassafras veneer on the reception desk.

02. A casual meeting room for clients and staff features a suspended upholstered panel that helps with air flow and noise levels.

03. An ornate Czech crystal chandelier hangs over a solid Huon pine table surrounded by lime green plastic chairs in the casual meeting area.

04. A photographic mural of a bamboo forest adds a touch of nature to the staff lounge and another ceiling panel, this time in the corporate signature colour of orange, adds drama to this breakout area.

05. Leather chairs and 100% Australian wool carpet lends the boardroom an air of luxury. The room can double in size by raising the 'fire station' folding door that divides the adjoining workstation zone.



is a suspended upholstered ceiling panel that directs natural air flow and is also intended to keep the sound level down, because the lounge is next to a workstation zone. It resembles an upside-down couch and was inspired by Saunders's love of Chesterfield.

The boardroom floor is 100 percent Australian wool. Zero VOC carpet was chosen because it is a meeting place of significant business associates. It has to look impressive and perhaps, with its leather chairs (as opposed to the green plastic of the staff area), more conservative than other areas. The adjoining bar surface is made from 100 percent recycled laminate.

There can be a fine line between what people see as environmentally friendly and miserly. Saunders embraces new technologies, endeavouring to operate a paperless office. His contemporary office design may appear frugal on light bulbs, but its open windows and use of plantation timber is ecologically generous.

"My decisions are always made on many levels," Saunders says, "the cost, the origin, what it is made from, the way it looks, the way it feels, a whole bunch of considerations. I have to work within a budget, within an aesthetic, within a philosophy." (*inside*)

