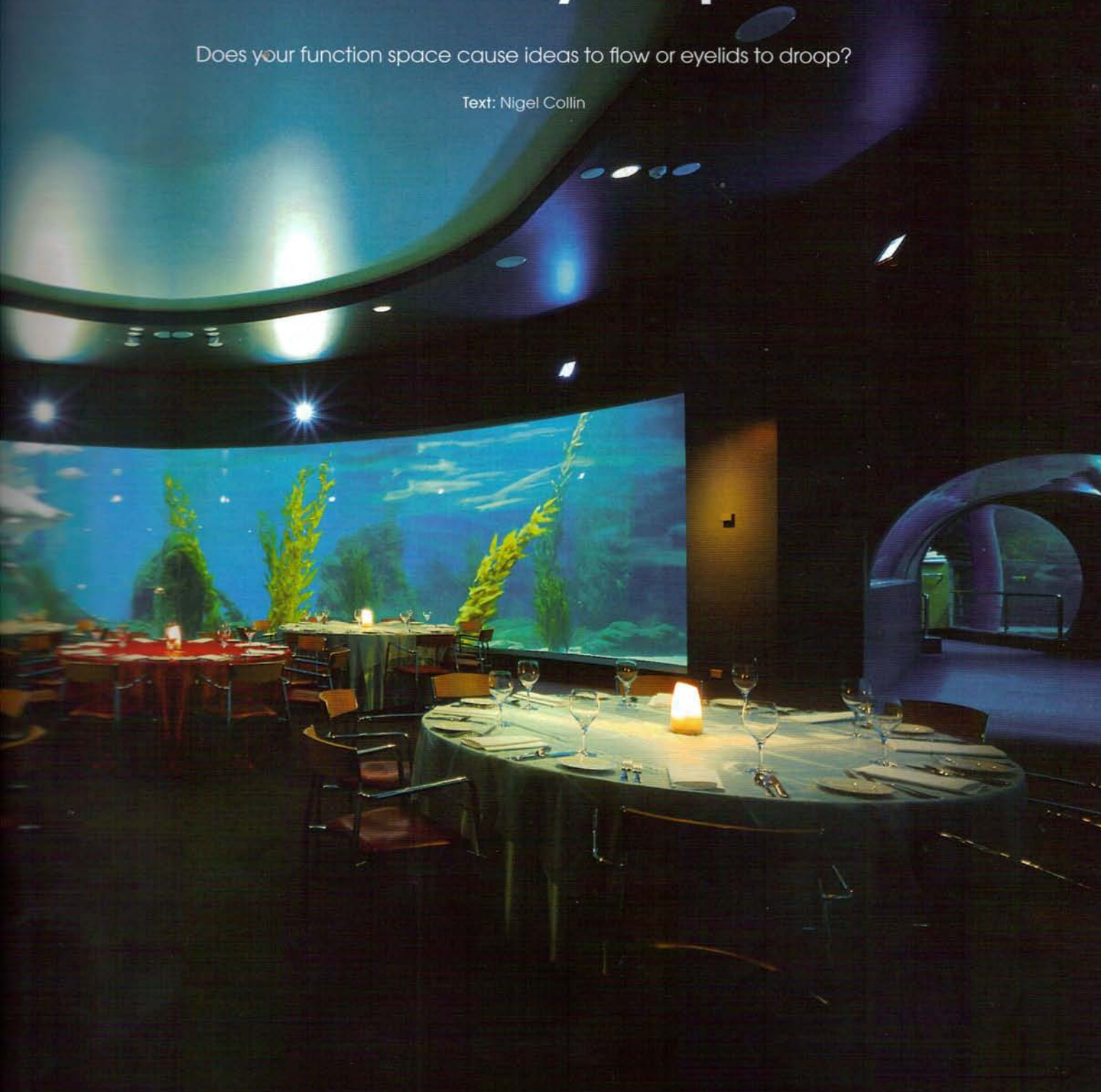


The Creativity of Space

Does your function space cause ideas to flow or eyelids to droop?

Text: Nigel Collin



“if you’re going to teach people to think more creatively then the last thing you need is to have them sitting in a traditional conference-type space”

Increasingly, business demands new ideas and creative solutions. To stay ahead of the pack we need to continually come up with these new ideas and creative solutions; we need to create a culture and environment that not only encourages creative thinking and harnesses idea generation but demands it. Ideas and creativity are everything.

Space — The First Frontier

So let's get straight to the point: the way a venue is designed is enormously important to getting people into the right creative headspace.

That is why we're seeing many corporations redesign or build new premises with funky meeting and brainstorming rooms, sometimes with in-house cafes (see Issue 14 for some good examples). It's also why we're seeing a new generation of venues designed as creative refuges — where space, light, colour and mood are all elements used in creating environments which encourage and inspire open, free and spontaneous discussion and sharing of ideas.

I spend my career working with people and business, helping them to foster creativity and generate ideas. As a speaker, I travel a lot and work in the full gamut of meeting rooms and it never ceases to amaze me just how much impact the workspace has — it invariably dictates how effective the workshop is. It is incredible to see just how important venue selection is for working offsite, for brainstorming, conferences or executive retreats.

Let's look at four venues I have worked in recently which are great examples of venues serving a creative function.

The Melbourne Aquarium

Recently, a client wanted me to conduct a 'creative thinking workshop' for their key clients. The workshop was to be held in the morning after a short breakfast. The client was open to considering a selection of venues and we eventually agreed on the Melbourne Aquarium.

At first this may seem a strange choice, however, if you're going to teach people to think more creatively then the last thing you need is to have them sitting in a traditional conference-type space. We chose the Aquarium because it was a very different space to the norm, and that gave me an advantage right from the start. As a group they found themselves away from what was familiar, which very effectively allowed us to explore new and unfamiliar ways of thinking.

Hyatt Regency Coolum

While conducting a creative workshop as part of a leaders program at the Hyatt Regency, Coolum on the Sunshine coast in Queensland, the group was small and the question was asked, 'why bother taking your key people to the Sunshine Coast when you could have conducted



the whole thing in a nice five-star hotel in a major city?' Again, the answer lies in the environment. This resort is in an idyllic part of the world, surrounded by nature, with a world-class golf course, great restaurants and villas; a perfect environment to support people to be receptive to change and high-level discussions.

In addition, the organisers didn't just bring their people to Coolum and put them in a conference room in the conference facility, they used one of the summerhouses. Therefore, all the sessions took place in an open indoor/outdoor style room with lots of fresh air and light, keeping the energy of their team fresh and light.

Kosmos — Berlin

Another great example of a good creative space (or creative use of space) is in East Berlin at what is now one of my all-time favourite venues.

A large International Company was holding a conference in Berlin and instead of the East Berlin Convention Centre they chose a quirky and very old-world cinema complex called 'Kosmos'.

The complex has three main areas, all connected but with very different styles and moods — from the authentically Soviet and austere through to the newer and quirky.

The design, location and layout of Kosmos allows organisers to take people on a creative 'journey', placing them in different frames of mind and giving them different experiences. The physical nature of the space really encouraged the purpose of the conference.

Offsite Creative Space

One of my favourite venues in Sydney is a place called 'Offsite Creative Space'. 'Offsite' offers a relaxed, informal and open environment for companies to take their people for an out-of-

office experience. The team at Offsite Creative Space describe it as a place 'to inspire creation, collaboration, communication and play'.

It's a simple venue with a funky feel. There are lots of flipcharts, white boards, and bits of pieces to play with such as chalkboards, slinkies and mind puzzles. There's a proper barista coffee machine (important for creativity!) and loads of beanbags, tables and cushions. It's a space where the business of creativity occurs and, for the companies who use it, it inspires open discussion, self-discovery, risk taking and change.

Functional or Inspirational?

New conferencing and function spaces are being designed and built daily. And, yes, there are certain practicalities that need addressing — telecommunications, comfort, hospitality services etc — but there's no need to be conventional or stuffy. Business is looking for something that stretches and inspires the mind, not yet another drab space they've seen a thousand times before.

For me a great creative space is one that holds ones interest, with good use of light and space. It's a conversation starter, it is unexpected and has good energy which supports a creative spirit, which in turn leads to new and great ideas.

If ideas are born of creativity — then space is the catalyst.

» **Thinking Cap:** (above) Coolum Resort: great for some alfresco free-thinking; (right) Kosmos: Soviet-style brain-teasing; and (below) Offsite: quirky, oddball... better than a boardroom when it comes to 'blue sky' thinking.

