



# *Creative law in triplicate*

*They say good things come in threes — not usually a term applied to a bunch of lawyers. At least, that is, until Alt Group and Stack Interiors got to work on the boutique office of new creative law firm Hudson Gavin Martin.*

Text Vicki Poland Photography Emily Andrews



01 \ Corporate artworks from Alt Group speak not of wealth and status, but of brand messages about teams of three.

02 \ A custom carpet signals a welcome rather than the customary reception desk. In the offices behind, free-standing furniture and flexible power and data access means people can arrange their rooms however they like.

03 \ Stack reproduced the new law firm's logo as a sign in the entry lobby, where visitor press a doorbell to enter the greeting area.

04 \ Graphics throughout the office carry fun word triplets of relevance to the law, business or protection.

05 \ Stack cleverly sourced this Hungry Light fitting above the cafe leaner to extend the idea of Alt's 'knife, fork, spoon' framed artwork. The sound-absorbant panel, in three shades, is arranged with dark tiles nearest the highest risk of spillages.

**Some visitors** have told the legal eagles at Hudson Gavin Martin that their new office looks more like the home of an advertising agency than a law firm. They quite like that. They didn't want old fashioned and stuffy. They wanted light and open and fun. And that's exactly what they got.

Stack has created an office in collaboration with brand and design firm Alt Group that sets an unusual, welcoming and even entertaining tone on Level 8 of Union House in Auckland's downtown Britomart precinct. The brand and office design flourishes are firmly based on the idea that all good (and sometimes bad) things come in threes.

The three lawyers from two of New Zealand's largest law firms started their own this year with the idea of working with small and medium sized enterprises and start-ups in need of technology and intellectual property law services. And they wanted an approachable brand.

"We do the type of law we do because we like doing it," says Mark Gavin, formerly of Russell McVeagh, where he spent 21 years, the last 14 as a partner. Both Wayne Hudson and Simon Martin came from Bell Gully, where they'd been law firm partners for 21 and seven years respectively, with law experience of 28 and 14 years.

"I was a general litigator once, but I love doing the IP work," says Gavin. "And I think that's partially a reflection of the personality of the people here, that's why you like doing it. I like working with creatives because I get an opportunity to play a creative too sometimes. So that's the feel we want in the office."

With just over a dozen people, the firm is able to maintain the sense of friendliness that can elude larger firms. "We like the idea of clients coming into the offices, seeing where we work, coming into a space," says Gavin. This was very much part of the designers' brief.

The partners originally hoped to find a heritage space but with the assistance of Stack Interiors, found an ideal alternative with a floor of the totally refurbished Union House including extensive natural light and panoramic views of the Waitemata Waterfront.

"We basically started with a concrete shell without services," says Stack managing director Rose Whitley.

## Open symmetry

Like the underlying seriousness of the law itself, the law firm and its office design are built on strong foundations which the lighter touches could later embellish.

"The floor plan is rigidly modular," says Whitley. "It is designed to eventually expand into the subtenancy space, when it will be perfectly symmetrical."

That will provide a total of 20 individual offices, and since moving in at the end of March, the new firm has occupied most of the existing 16.

Whitley says it was an interesting challenge that the client wanted everybody in an office, "which was a hard thing to marry with 'we want light and open'." Gavin says although some law firms have gone for open plan, "you hear mixed reviews on it." The nature of their work means a need to concentrate, analyse, draft and think as well as taking conference calls with files at hand. "And besides, Wayne is quite loud," he laughs. However, the sliding doors are usually wide open and the central café gathering space is pivotal to the office.

Stack's solution was to maximum the use of glass using a partitioning system that is reasonably new to the market, from Hafele. It has very light aluminium frames, she says, married up with the much more traditional flush wall partitioning system. Narrow floor to ceiling glass infills also run through every office wall at the building perimeter, and care was taken to ensure outside views were protected at each end of each corridor. This maximises the open feeling and ensures natural light reaches deeper inside, where support staff work. "The partitioning system allowed us to really get the light, frameless look as much as possible, while retaining a reasonable amount of sound control between offices and corridors," says Whitley. The glass also left plenty of scope for graphic treatment of safety strips.

It was at about this point that the two design agencies began comparing notes.

## Power of three

At the start of the project, the new firm had yet to finalise its name and was consulting Alt Group, which had been a client of Hudson's at Bell Gully (and still deals with both firms) on its overall brand and identity.

"We sat and talked with them for about an hour about the type of law we did, the type of clients we acted for, the type of personalities we had and what we wanted the firm branding to reflect," says Gavin. "At the same time we were talking to Stack about premises and what we wanted for the premises. And it was the same thing: we wanted it fun, we wanted it a bit different, we wanted a place that clients could come into... Then Alt came up with their presentation, which we loved, and amongst it was some corporate art — and we thought, 'Oh, you guys should be talking to each other'."

Alt Group creative director Dean Poole says it's not



02



03



04

05



05 \ The kitchen, cafe leaner and breakout lounge provide a central gathering and meeting point for staff and their visiting clients.

06 \ The boardroom's corporate artwork – looking like a triptych of modernist abstract paintings – is actually constructed of coloured Lego bricks.

often they get to a chance to do something quite different in such a conservative sector. "We wanted to stick with convention and give it a slight twist," he says.

The convention was trading off the partners names; the logo twist was adding circular marks to each to show their business in copyright, trademark and registration work. So came the logo that Stack has faithfully reproduced as signage at the office reception – and the start of the threes.

The main idea around the concept is colloquial wisdom. "Three is more than a partnership – it's a team. Culture and customs offer up all sorts of threesomes, humorous and otherwise," says Poole. "The three wise men, Hudson, Gavin, Martin, are cool, calm and collected; advise on clients' assets, equities, and liabilities and are ready, willing, and able."

It captured what the clients wanted to trade on, which was not only their reputation, but also their attitude of a new type of business. Poole says Alt created a corporate art collection that largely rejects the idea of art a symbol of status and money. "All the artworks were a chance to tell a broader story around what the brand offered."


Some ideas behind the seemingly simple artworks are more subtle messages on the basics of business: "A lot of these things are to do with protection, like 'straws, sticks

and bricks', which is obviously around The Three Little Pigs; so it's how you build your house that determines whether the wolf comes knocking at the door or not."

The threes are represented both in words and form, which Stack then picked up in its own design, says Whitley: "It was just a great dovetailing of the two processes."

White became the wall colour to background the brand as it also appears on stationery. Graphic triple word ditties are sprinkled on glass throughout the floor, proportions such as shelving displays are proportioned in thirds – and even the finishes on the lobby wall are in satin, matt and gloss.

On arrival, visitors are greeted not by a reception desk, but a customised mat that reads upside down like a road sign, and leads either to meeting rooms or to the café were clients are likely meet their IP lawyer over a coffee. The lounge, complete with flat TV and sound system, can also double as an informal meeting room.

"It was great having a client who was so open to new ideas, but still really committed to a design quality ethos," says Whitley of Stack. Poole says he and Alt designers Clem Devine, Ben Corban and Toby Curnow thoroughly enjoyed this job too. "A lot of us trained as fine artists and entered design.... My only disappointment was that there wasn't three taps in the sink – hot, warm and cold!" 

worth going to work for



[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

[Redacted text]

 matisse

**Client**

Hudson Gavin Martin

**Designers**

Stack Interiors; Alt Group

**Project manager**

Stack Interiors

**Base building**

Bledisloe Properties (owner); Hawkins Interiors (base refurbishment); Cape Interiors (base build, Level 8).

**Consultants**

Jackson Engineering Advisers (services)

**Fit-out contractor**

Cape Interiors

**Fittings**

Cite (Vitra display fittings); Artiture (kitchen joinery, signage); Hafele (architectural hardware, aluminium joinery); Adsel (AV, light installation)

**Lighting**

Fabbian Lighting (kitchen light feature); Aesthetics Lighting; Modus Lighting

**Glass**

Metro Glazing (glass work); 3M (window film); Alt Group (graphic design visuals); New Zealand Window Shades (blinds)

**Surfaces**

Woven Image (Echo Panel); Eurodesign (Stonex kitchen benches); Marblo (bar leaner); Heritage Tiles (kitchen, bathroom linings); Mokum, Vivid (textiles); Resene (paint); Decortech, Armstrong (ceilings)

**Flooring**

Interface; Sallee (customised mat)

**Furniture**

Matisse (Herman Miller workstation desks, chairs, boardroom tables, bar stools); Corporate Culture (waiting furniture); Forma, Eclectic Furniture (lounge); Formway (storage); Simon James

**Appliances**

Fisher & Paykel; Asko

**Artwork**

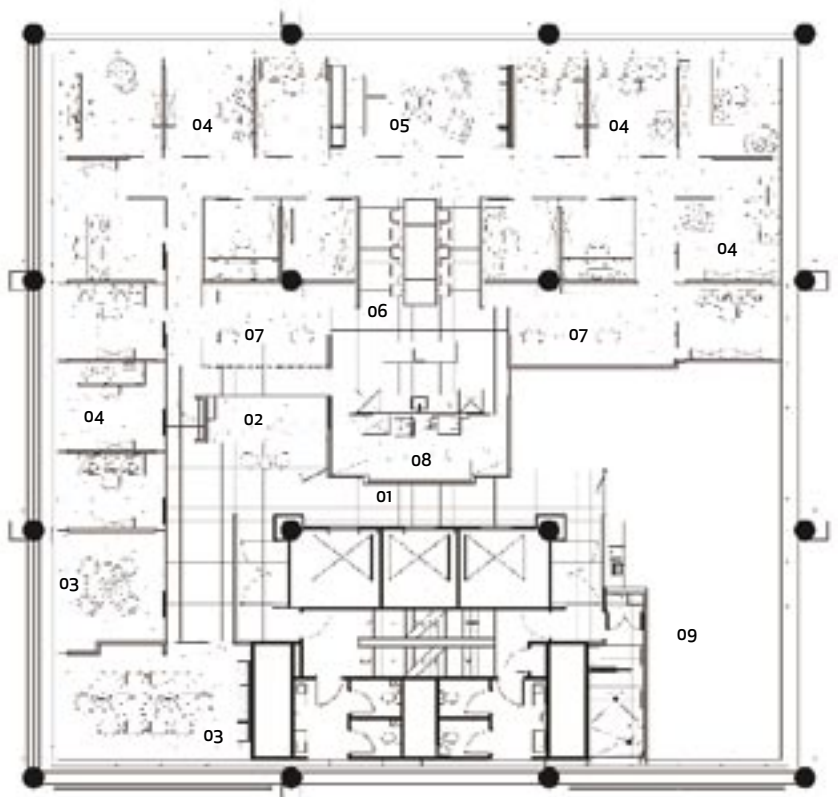
Alt Group

- 01 Lift lobby
- 02 Reception / waiting
- 03 Meeting rooms
- 04 Offices
- 05 Lounge
- 06 Cafe
- 07 Support desks
- 08 Utility room
- 09 Subtenant

[www.stack.co.nz](http://www.stack.co.nz)  
[www.altgroup.net](http://www.altgroup.net)  
[www.hgmlegal.com](http://www.hgmlegal.com)



07



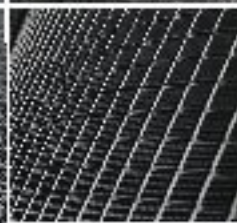
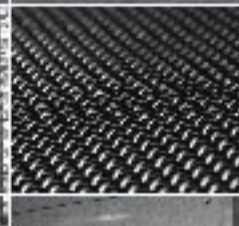


**CAPE**  
interior construction



# stainless style

IMAGINE THE POSSIBILITIES  
- THEN MAKE IT A REALITY  
QUALITY STAINLESS STEEL MESH  
FROM NEW ZEALAND'S BEST  
STEEL & TUBE STAINLESS



ARCHITECTS

DESIGNERS

SPECIFIERS

FOR CONSTRUCTION

FOR QUALITY

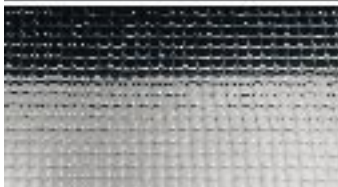
FOR DURABILITY

+ SHEET

+ FITTINGS

+ TUBE

FOR MORE INFO CONTACT



sales@ststainless.co.nz

**STEEL & TUBE**  
**SPACEMAN**

A DIVISION OF STEEL & TUBE HOLDINGS LTD