

BAR 613: RESEARCH THESIS

# **EVOLUTION OF CORPORATE OFFICE DESIGN IN NAIROBI**

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## DECLARATION

This thesis, *Evolution of Corporate Office Design in Nairobi*, is my original work and to the best of my knowledge, has not been presented in the University of Nairobi or any other university or institution for the purpose of awarding a degree.

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This thesis is submitted in part fulfilment of the examination requirements for the award of Bachelor of Architecture degree (B. Arch), Department of Architecture and Building Science, University of Nairobi.

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## DEDICATION

To my father, mother and brother, I dedicate this to you, with all my love and gratitude.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

First and foremost, I would like to thank God for the ability, knowledge, strength and good health throughout the course of this research study. This achievement would not have been possible without His guidance and blessings.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Today, most people are not working in an office setting that works for them. The office should not be a place to add onto the daily stresses of modern life for a place where people spend a huge chunk of their day. The design of corporate offices is lagging behind despite advancements in technology and more agile business practices in the past few decades. We are now at a point in time where the focus of corporate office design is being centred on people and nature.

This study will therefore seek to explore how the design of offices has changed over time from the perspective of corporate organizations and user needs. The study was done by critically analysing 3 offices in Nairobi namely, Kenya Railways Headquarters, KCB Towers and BAT Kenya Head Office. The results showed that BAT Kenya was the best office among the three as the designers balanced needs of the organization and the users of the space. Concluding from that, it is recommended that corporate offices should provide a variety of workspaces, have a connection to nature and high-rise office buildings should be designed with careful consideration to the human scale.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION



Figure 1.1 Tents where railway workers lived  
Source: Retrieved from <https://nairobi.go.ke/history/> on 09/10/2019



Figure 1.2 Kenwood House, Nairobi  
Source: Retrieved from <https://abandoned-playgrounds.com/kenwood-house-nairobi-ernst-may-1937/> on 09/10/2019

### 1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Nairobi, the area of study, was first established as a transportation centre, which later grew to become an administrative centre. The site was chosen by the Kenya-Uganda Railway (KUR) constructors in June, 1899 (when the rail line reached Nairobi) because it offered a suitable stopping place between Mombasa and Kisumu. There was adequate water supply from the nearby Nairobi River and the Mbagathi River; ample level land for railway tracts, sidings, quarters; an elevated cooler ground to the west suitable for residential purposes. (See Fig 1.1)

The transfer of the provincial offices from Machakos to Nairobi first and later the protectorate headquarters from Mombasa to Nairobi contributed to the change in perception of Nairobi from a railway town to an administrative and commercial centre within the British protectorate. European settlers were encouraged to settle in the country as British authorities hoped these settlers would develop a modern economic sector that would enable the railway to pay for itself. Until that happened, the railway scheme seemed a useless venture that would consume more money than was called for in the initial plans.

In these early years, the growth of the town had been controlled only by economic forces, with no co-ordination of development other than by the layout of a gridiron street pattern in the CBD. This led to massive land speculation and development occurred in an uncontrolled manner. Art-deco office buildings such as Kenwood House on Kimathi street were built during this period. (See Fig 1.2)



Figure 1.3 Norwich Union House

Source: Retrieved from

<http://www.archidatum.com/articles/politics-and-architecture-in-africa-as-synonyms-of-progress/> on 09/10/2019

After World War 2, population in Nairobi began to increase. The first comprehensive plan of the city (Nairobi Master Plan for a Colonial City) was commissioned in 1948. The plan laid down guidelines for Nairobi's future development and earmarked land for major uses as well as making important proposals for extensions to the road network.

In March 1950, Nairobi became a city by the Royal Charter of Incorporation. With time the city became densified with high-rise speculative office buildings such as Norwich Union House (1959) (See Fig 1.) and Maendeleo House (1960). The period after Independence saw relative political and economic stability which saw corporations and investors developing more office buildings such as Kimathi House (1970), International Life House (1971) and ICEA Building, currently known as JKUAT Towers (1982).

During the 1990s and early 2000s, as land and office space became scarce and exorbitantly priced in the Central Business District, more businesses relocated to Westlands and Upper Hill, where land and office space were more readily available and less expensive. In recent years, both Westlands and Upper Hill have experienced exponential growth in corporate office buildings such as Delta Corner (2013) and UAP Towers (2016) due to the expansion of roads and infrastructure.

With the development of new office buildings in every decade and the sweeping transformations experienced by virtually every industry, there have rarely been matched by complementary, comprehensive workplace redesigns.

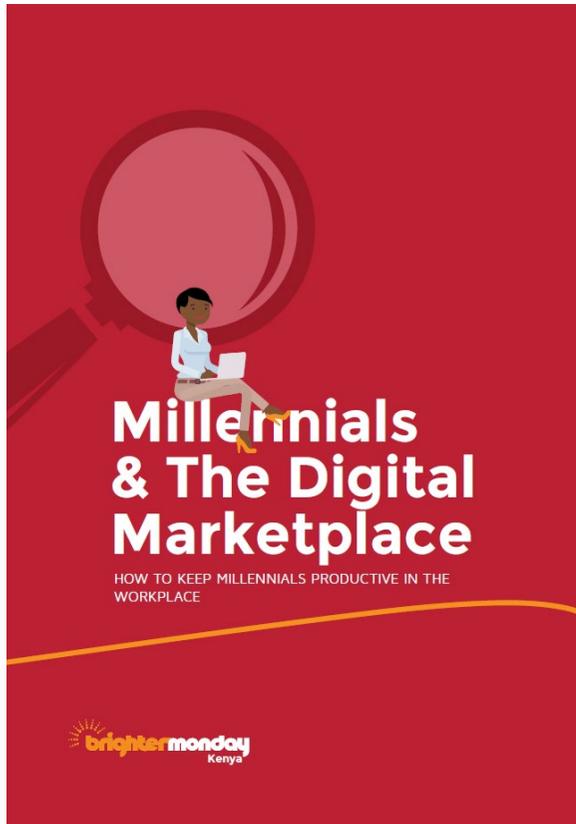


Figure 1.4 Millennials & The Digital Marketplace

Source: Retrieved from

<https://www.brightermonday.co.ke/blog/why-millennials-leaving/> on 11/10/2019

## 1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Corporate office design is changing at an unprecedented pace. These changes in the design of offices are as a result of coming to terms with new ideas in organizational structures, technology, user needs and organizational culture to name just a few.

Despite these changes occurring worldwide, many organizations in Kenya have stuck to the traditional approaches to office design and planning yet the workforce is becoming diverse and multi-generational.

According to *Millennials & The Digital Marketplace* (2019) (Fig 1.4), a survey conducted by jobs portal, BrighterMonday, millennials are projected to represent 50 percent of the entire global workforce by 2020. Companies need offices that are designed to cater for the varied needs of the different generations in place or risk having employees who are unsatisfied with their work environment. Retaining talented employees who are unsatisfied would prove to be a difficult task and end up losing them to competitors.

Hence, this research seeks to establish the changes that have been taking place in corporate offices found in Nairobi. It also seeks to determine the factors that influence the evolution and the direction that corporate offices are taking.

## 1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- I. How is the nature of corporate office evolving?
- II. What are the factors that have influenced corporate office design in Nairobi?
- III. Which direction is corporate office design taking?

#### **1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

- I. To explore the changing nature of the corporate office from the past to present.
- II. To establish which factors have influenced corporate office design in Nairobi.
- III. To determine the direction which corporate office design is taking.

#### **1.5 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY**

The design of corporate offices and the changes that have occurred over time, particularly in the context of the capital city, Nairobi, has not been examined. Nairobi is expanding rapidly towards Parklands and the Railway City area. Parklands is currently the choice for developers constructing new offices. The Railway City masterplan released in October 2019 by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, outlines a multi-modal urban development that seeks to expand and decongest the Central Business District. In a city dotted with numerous corporate office buildings constructed since the colonial era and with more yet to be conceived, a historical development of their design is necessary. This study will serve to cover the knowledge gap existing in the area.

#### **1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The findings of this study will help architects, interior designers and facility managers in corporate organizations to understand the complexity of office design. This will inspire the stakeholders to design better work environments that are suitable for the needs of the users not one-size-fits-all solutions that corporations have been influencing architects and designers to provide. The study elaborates the central role that the office plays towards the mental, physical and emotional well-being of the employees as a considerable percentage spend 8 hours or more in an office.

### **1.7 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The study focuses on changes occurring in the interiors of corporate offices located in Nairobi as it is the capital city and major commercial and economic hub of Kenya. Most of the corporate office buildings in Nairobi are speculative and are built with no specific end-user organization in mind. The building floors are left unfinished for the incoming tenant to fit-out to their taste hence there is a wide variation in designs.

The study is limited by time, finances and availability of archival information on corporate offices especially photographs. In addition, some corporations featured in old photographs in the literature review such as PricewaterhouseCoopers have moved their offices to a new location. The photographs serve to demonstrate their office design at that particular point in time.

### **1.8 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY**

#### **1.8.1 Chapter 1: Introduction**

This section initiates the study, gives some background information about the area in which the research is to be. It goes on further to highlight the problem to be covered, research questions to aid in the research, the objectives of the study and scope and limitations that arise when working in the field. Also featured is the justification of the study and its significance. Some of the abbreviations and operational terms to be used in the study are defined and then there is a section elucidating on the breakdown of the organization of the study, before moving on to the next chapter.

#### **1.8.2 Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This chapter analyses written information on the research topic. This information is written works of other authors who have extensively researched on the topic under study. This chapter summarizes this information in a manner that it guides on the relevant terms and basis of argument.

### **1.8.3 Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

This section gives a detailed explanation of the methods employed in carrying out the research. It explains the type of case studies that were used as well as an explanation why the author chose those methods.

### **1.8.4 Chapter 4: Data Presentation and Analysis**

This chapter presents detailed findings of the author during the case study (field investigations) and an analysis of the findings on a case by case basis.

### **1.8.5 Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations**

This chapter summarizes the thesis and gives conclusions on the basis of the analysis in chapter 4. The chapter also provides recommendations and mentions further areas of study in the field.