

# Designing the future

A bright new architectural firm which launched in Sevenoaks last summer is flourishing. Offset Architects now boast an impressive portfolio of clients and the business is booming. *Vine* dropped in to meet the team

## **Vine: Tell us about Offset Architects**

**Offset:** We launched the business in July 2009, after separating from another local firm, where we were all senior directors. We're based in the town centre, just above Chez Gerard, which is ideal for networking and meeting clients. Sevenoaks is a great place to work; the town is buzzing. Despite the economic gloom and the slow housing market, our workload is steadily increasing and we're now looking to expand our workforce and office space to meet demand.

## **Vine: What makes Offset different to other local architect firms?**

**Offset:** We adopt a highly personal approach to our work. We are client-focussed and service-led. We're passionate about working with the client from the very outset to fully understand their brief and see the project through to fruition. We carry out a detailed viability and feasibility study with the client to identify issues and problems at the beginning. All clients deal directly with a senior level partner and we are very happy to go the extra mile. Although we're a young team, we have over 65 years of collective professional experience between us.

## **Vine: Which industries and areas do you specialise in?**

**Offset:** Residential, domestic and commercial projects form the majority of our work. However, we also have extensive design and technical experience across a range of other sectors including industrial, retail, leisure, hotels, health and education.

## **Vine: What exciting projects have you been involved with recently?**

**Offset:** We are currently working at the planning stage for a large, ambitious, contemporary house in Speldhurst adjacent to the green belt. We are also pleased to be involved in the new development of Culverstone preschool in Meopham and recently obtained planning approval on a new oak-framed residential property in Chichester.

## **Vine: Do you have a selection of preferred contractors?**

**Offset:** Although we must remain impartial, we have extensive connections across the industry with local and national contractors and developers, many of which go on to use us for their own design projects.

## **Vine: Do you have an involvement in the interior design of the projects you develop?**

**Offset:** Very much so. We often work closely with the



client to advise on the sourcing of products, suppliers, fixtures and fittings. We are also happy to work with interior designers to help develop the final look of the buildings and realise the client's

vision. We often act as the lead consultants, liaising with all other relevant contractors, consultants and authorities on behalf of the client.

## **Vine: What time scale do your projects work to?**

**Offset:** Initially, there is a free consultation period with the client where we will work hard to fully understand the brief. After our appointment to the project, there is then a short design period, followed by the planning stage. Applications are submitted to the local authorities and the public have an opportunity to view and comment on the proposal. This takes around eight weeks, sometimes thirteen for major developments. Once approved, the detailed design process begins and the timescale for this depends greatly on the size and scale of the project. That said, we have recently partnered with Sevenoaks Building Control which has improved this process.

## **Vine: How does your fee structure work?**

**Offset:** Typically, many architects work on a percentage fee of the contract value. Instead, we have a clear and honest pricing structure that is agreed with the client before work begins. Our fees vary considerably depending on the complexity and scale of the project. However, our new company structure has enabled us to become more competitive.

■ **Do you have a question?** Beginning next month, the expert team at Offset Architects will be answering your dilemmas. Email your queries to [editor@onlinevine.co.uk](mailto:editor@onlinevine.co.uk)

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▲ **Top team:** (l-r) Paul Grattan; Rob Ranson; Rob Colley and Paul Hagell