

Soft Work

Developed by Vitra in Switzerland

Design: Barber & Osgerby, 2018

Edward Barber and Jay Osgerby's work is characterised by appropriateness and precision. As keen observers of everyday objects and how they are used, they create designs that are gentle in gesture and always accessible while remaining unobtrusive. Their work exudes freshness, featuring bold colours and straightforward, linear shapes. Their latest design is in keeping with this approach: together with Vitra, Barber and Osgerby are introducing a modular seating system – Soft Work.

Never since the introduction of computers, have office structures and work habits undergone such a radical transformation as that taking place today. Public spaces are becoming workspaces: thanks to communication technology, people can now work in hotel lobbies, cafés, airports or even parks. And in reverse, offices are becoming public spaces: many companies are now creating open and inspiring locations in which employees – or external visitors – can relax, hold meetings or spend the day working. As work is no longer tied to a specific location, new behavioural patterns have developed, which are gradually finding their way into the office. For example, the sofa has become a place on which to work – even though it is not necessarily suited to this task from an ergonomic viewpoint.

With this in mind, Vitra and the designers Edward Barber and Jay Osgerby have devised and developed the new seating system Soft Work, uniting expertise from the home, office and public sectors. Instead of creating a working environment centred around desks with peripheral sofas, Soft Work has developed into a system in which table workstations are focused around a seating landscape. Barber and Osgerby see this as a long-term development: 'The workstation is going the same way as the dining room – it's disappearing as an archetype. The desk has had its day. With mobile technology you need a place to sit occasionally, or a comfortable place to hang out. That's our belief.'

Soft Work offers a versatile platform for both individuals and teams. Besides ergonomic seating options, users also find practical table surfaces, power outlets and charging stations. Mobile tables and chairs can be pulled up as needed and put away again, and the addition of panels creates spaces for quiet, concentrated work. Thanks to its modular concept, Soft Work can be easily assembled into diverse arrangements, enabling architects to structure the internal spaces of a building, create specific focal points, or define flexible public areas.

All these options are possible due to the sophisticated construction of Soft Work and its technical details: the arm-mounted desks are movable and enable diverse seating and working positions; the power sockets are located between the seat cushions and can simply be pivoted upwards for comfortable use; partition screens can be used to divide up zones and create quiet sheltered spaces.

All of the functional elements are seamlessly and elegantly integrated into the appealing overall aesthetic. Equipped with generously padded seat cushions and flexible backrests, the sofa offers comfortable working conditions, even over longer periods of time.

Straight and curved elements in single or double versions, platforms, tables, panels, arm-mounted trays, power and data connections, along with a choice of covers in a wide range of colours, offer countless possibilities for customised configurations of Soft Work that suit individual needs and spaces – whether in offices, coworking centres, universities, station halls, airport terminals or restaurants.

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