

# INTERIOR DESIGN<sup>®</sup>

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2021

*inner circle*







## breaking with convention

At the Sonica headquarters near Dublin, Kingston Lafferty Design proves—and insists—that corporate can be far from staid

*text: dan rubinstein photography: ruth maria murphy/living inside*





**Previous spread, left:** At the entrance to the corporate headquarters of Sonica, a commercial contractor in Skerries, Ireland, by Kingston Lafferty Design, flooring transitions from acid-stained, blackened concrete to porcelain tile. The light fixtures are custom.

**Previous spread, right:** On the office's second floor, the main corridor is populated with prefabricated soundproof phone booths.

**Top, from left:** Flooring by a pair of stainless steel-clad niches is vinyl. Powder-coated steel frames, custom tables, and Orangebox Eva chairs form hot-desking workstations. **Bottom, from left:** A custom bolster bench lines the perimeter of the lounge on the ground floor. In the café, powder coated-chain screens inspired by those found in 1970's nightclubs divide seating areas, this one furnished with Jens Fager's Hug chairs and a Pio e Tito Toso's Ikon 869 table.

**Opposite:** Also the office's main events space, the lounge includes Torbjørn Anderssen and Espen Voll's Tibu stools by the window, Gropius CS1 low chairs by Kateryna Sokolova, and custom modular sofas upholstered in felt.



**“We deliberately don't specialize** solely in commercial work.”

So states Róisín Lafferty, who founded her studio, Kingston Lafferty Design, in 2010 in Dublin. Instead, the Irish talent has built her portfolio as a mix of hospitality, healthcare, and residential, overseeing everything from graphic design and branding to interior architecture. What all her projects do have in common, however, are strong points of view: swathes of intense color—blue kitchens, pink dining rooms—and a progressive, contemporary style that rarely leans on the expected. To Lafferty, variety is the spice of life—and work. “My desire is to be constantly learning and inspired by different genres,” she says.

So, it's understandable that when KLD was first invited to design the corporate headquarters of Sonica in Skerries, a coastal town near Dublin, Lafferty was skeptical about taking it on. Sonica is one of the country's leading commercial contractors, focusing on workplaces for such blue-chip companies as Adobe, Salesforce, and IBM. Lafferty assumed the project would be too buttoned-up. But after meeting Sonica founder and managing director Donnacha Neary, she appreciated his “crazily ambitious and unafraid” outlook.

Neary's goal for the 80-employee office was not just for Sonica to show off its technical abilities and commitment to and respect for good design but also for it to become an entrepreneurial hub for his sleepy hometown. Far from just cubicles and conference rooms, he wanted the project to include a VR suite, a podcasting studio, a 125-seat theater, events

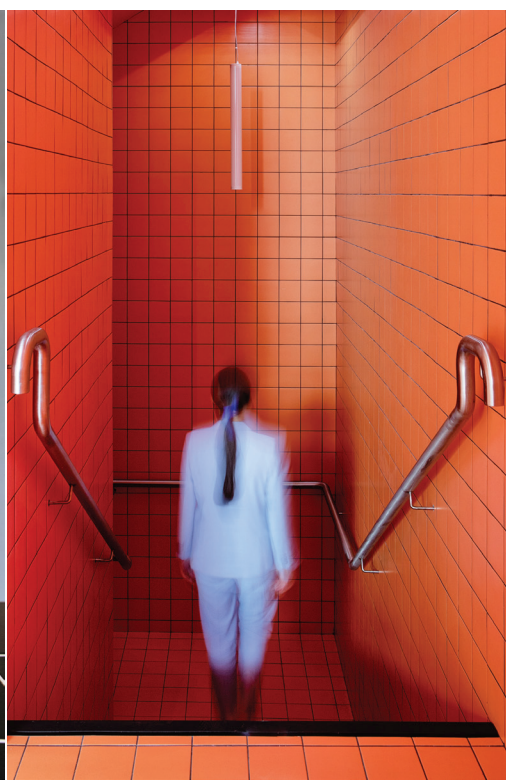
spaces, and flexible areas that would be a magnet for the community. With that, and after being given carte blanche to conceive the office—dubbed by Sonica as First Landings—as she saw fit, Lafferty ultimately accepted the commission.

First Landings's 30,000 square feet are spread across three floors, the result of combining the vacant offices of two other companies. For Lafferty, this was a gift, being that most projects in Dublin and elsewhere in Ireland have small footprints where projects are constantly value-engineered. But in Skerries, that wasn't an issue, and therefore creatively freeing for the designer.

Always one to respond keenly to a brief and strong ideas of color, Lafferty began with Sonica's orange logo and Neary's wish that his office “be seen from space.” She was also inspired by a recent trip to New York, where she visited the former studio and home of Donald Judd and fell in love with his reflective metal boxes.

With all this in mind, Lafferty's resulting vision is anchored in bold colors—the Sonica orange, plus cobalt blue and stark white—and a series of “cubes” throughout, some mirrored, some in reeded glass, conceived to delineate various functions: an office, the boardroom, workstations. (There's also abundant 6-inch-square tilework.) She then utilizes the spaces between them as conduits for the vitality she felt represented the company's spirit. Track lines lead employees from one cube to the next, creating a kind of “running energy, pulsing through the building,” Lafferty notes. ➤





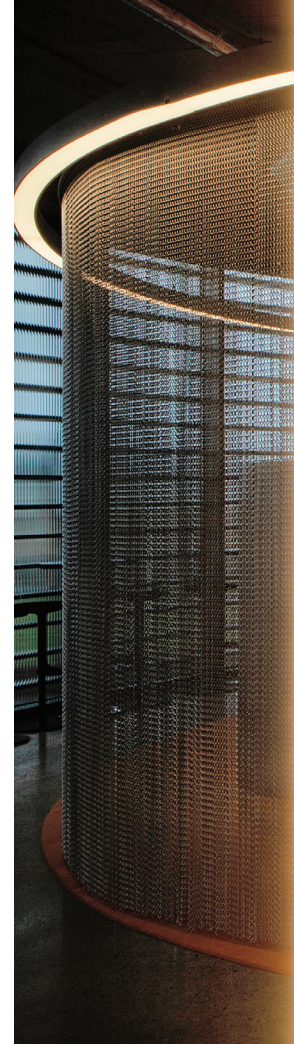
**Top, from left:** A "lozenge" cut-out frames the staff kitchen beyond, separating it from the café. The staircase connects the ground-floor lobby to rest-

rooms, golf-simulation and green rooms, and other service spaces below and above.

**Bottom:** The custom rectangular tables have concrete bases meant to appear as if they grew out from the floor, and the Abuela chairs surrounding them are by Favaretto&Partners.

**Opposite top:** An Eero Aarnio Bubble chair and a nylon rug appoint an upstairs lounge.

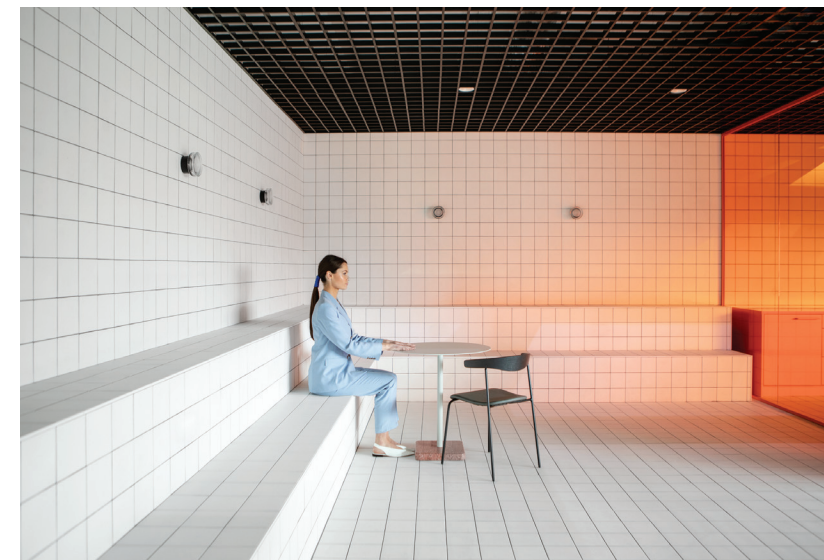
**Opposite bottom:** Porcelain tile also wraps the staff canteen, which seats 80 on built-in benches and has a suspended timber ceiling structure that mirrors the tile grid.



The track lines begin shortly after employees and visitors enter the building. They're greeted by a lobby with a three-story stairwell, all covered in melon-hued tile. It has "old, weird hospital vibes," the designer says. The lobby took a bit of convincing to be client approved—"It cost a lot of money to have it look like that!" she says—but now serves as a "saturation point," where visitors "can't help but be transfixed" and are mentally prepared for the environment that awaits them inside. "We didn't want it be girly," she says, "but instead really masculine. Hard, almost uncomfortably sharp." Lafferty's tall cylindrical floor lamps in white polyurethane and stainless steel add to the clinical vibe.

A key element to the planning of First Landings are the round spaces on both the ground and upper levels that were planned around existing circular cutouts found in the concrete flooring. Open and flexible, they were designed as social areas with movable furniture. And they are where KLD's use of color and Jetson-esque style are in full force. The ground-floor lounge, for example, has blocky modular sofas upholstered in gradating citrus tones arranged atop a round of periwinkle carpet, with a halo of a pendant fixture overhead. The overtly groovy atmosphere is intentional. "Our aim is for people to act differently here," Lafferty says, "to bring their own energy." There and in the main café, used by both Sonica staff and clients, she employs another retro conceit: the metal-chain curtain, which allows for separation but not total disconnection. Further, an upstairs lounge features hanging Eero Aarnio Bubble chairs.

Since her years as a student, Lafferty has been obsessed with the works of mid-century titans like Aarnio and Verner Panton ➤







**Top, from left:** Walnut paneling and a custom desk outfit the office of Sonica's managing director. The canteen's functional areas are contained in a tinted-glass cube. **Bottom, from left:** Nylon carpet flows through the boardroom, where Luka Stepan's Lucky chairs surround the custom table. Felt upholsters a semiprivate seating nook off the second floor's main corridor.

**Opposite top:** Polyester velvet covers the 125 seats in the theater, used for talks and film screenings. **Opposite bottom:** Konstantin Grcic's Miura stools, reused from Sonica's previous office, furnish the canteen.



that had an organic, curvaceous style. "Their forms are almost like toys. Simple shapes that are scaled up, like living in a kaleidoscope," says the designer, who also admits to a fascination with magic and Harry Potter. For First Landings, she peppers in modern-day versions of that aesthetic, such as Luka Stepan's swooping Lucky chairs in the boardroom and the Kateryna Sokolova ottomans covered in a Yves Klein blue bouclé she placed near the project's various seating nooks.

The shocks of blue took some additional convincing. "If we had just used orange, then nothing would stand out," Lafferty explains. "We're always trying to find balance." These spaces aren't meant to be precious, they're meant to be used. "It certainly makes people appreciate design and the impact it can have on a much more corporate, commercial audience." 🍷

#### PROJECT TEAM

ANNA MULLINS; FIONA STONE; BECKY RUSSELL: KINGSTON LAFFERTY DESIGN. BARNEY COLEMAN ENGINEERING: METALWORK. STONE SEAL: STONERWORK. BCW SPECIALIST JOINERY: WOODWORK; UPHOLSTERY WORKSHOP. W2W: FURNITURE SUPPLIER.

#### PRODUCT SOURCES

**FROM FRONT:** ORANGEBOX: CHAIRS (HOT-DESKING). PEDRALI: ROUND TABLES (CAFÉ). EDSBYN: CHAIRS (CAFÉ, CANTEN). NOOM: OTTOMANS (LOUNGES, CAFÉ), CHAIRS, TABLES (LOUNGES). DRISAG: ACOUSTIC PANELS (LOUNGE). KVADRAT: SOFA FABRIC (LOUNGE), STOOL FABRIC (LOUNGE, CAFÉ). MAGIS: STOOLS (LOUNGE, CAFÉ). GABER: BLUE CHAIRS (CAFÉ). FLEUX: SCONCES. EERO AARNIO ORIGINALS: CHAIR (UPSTAIRS LOUNGE). MARSET: SCONCES (CANTEN). HAY: TABLE. COPIOSA: CHAIR (OFFICE). OLUCE: LAMP. BLÅ STATION: CHAIRS (BOARDROOM). YARWOOD: NOOK FABRIC (HALL). KIRKBY DESIGN: CHAIR FABRIC (THEATER). PLANK: STOOLS (CANTEN). **THROUGHOUT CE. SL:** TILE. TARKETT: VINYL FLOORING, RUG. **INTERFACE:** RUGS, CARPET. **ACEC DISTRIBUTORS:** LIGHTING.

