

Press release

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Designs unveiled for landmark RMK headquarters in Yekaterinburg

Designs have been revealed for the sustainable new headquarters of RMK, one of the world's leading producers of copper – the project rethinks the conventional cellular office to set new standards in quality, comfort and flexibility. The 13-storey building has been tailored to the way that RMK operates, inside and out – the innovative modular office units are wrapped in an energy efficient enclosure, which provides a distinctive symbol for the organisation in Yekaterinburg.

Entrance is via a dramatic 12-metre high lobby, flanked by visitor lounges and displays of RMK's products, leading to scenic lifts. The starting point for the office floors was to reinvent the headquarters as a 'house for staff' – instead of large, open workspaces, the rooms are of a more intimate, domestic scale. The design team worked with the practice's workplace consultancy group, who analysed the client's operations, and helped to devise the innovative modular system for these rooms. This was then developed with the in-house engineering teams to enable rapid construction to the highest quality, and ensure ideal levels of natural daylight for concentrated work.

Each two-storey module comprises a pair of offices, stacked one on top of the other – this is expressed externally through the double-storey cladding module. The modules are arranged in rows on either side of a central hallway, which functions as a break out space, with lounge seating and views of the city through the glazed lift shaft. At level thirteen, this space is top-lit to create a flexible space for company-wide gatherings and events.

The façade appears to subtly change according to the season and path of the sun – it is made up of triple-glazing and triangular bronze coloured steel panels, which are textured to create a subtle patina. Each ten by six-metre cladding unit spans a two-storey office module. Responding to Yekaterinburg's high temperature shift between seasons, the balance between solid and glazed areas is designed to maximise low level winter sun, while blocking the heat of direct sunlight during the summer. The triangulated form draws inspiration from the chemical structure of copper, and the top of the building integrates RMK's new logo – a rebranding which has, in turn, been inspired by the architecture.

For the project, the practice has designed both the architecture and interiors, which use a warm, tactile materials palette of wood, stone and textiles in natural tones, which complements the metallic envelope. The interior office walls are faceted glass, and the junctions between the glazed panels are highlighted in metal, echoing and inverting the building's façade. Conventional down-lighting has been eliminated and replaced by task lights and indirect lighting to create a softer atmosphere.

The site is next to a public park and overlooks the city and river – the design enhances the connection with this setting. Extending this greenery to the base of the building, the footprint is shifted to create a private garden for staff. The landscaping echoes the cellular internal arrangement, with a sequence of

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'external rooms' that provide peaceful spaces for staff to relax and eat lunch. Further facilities within the building include a gym, sauna, meeting spaces and a dining room.

Luke Fox, Senior Executive Partner at Foster + Partners:

"This is a great example of our integrated approach – our architects and our in-house specialist disciplines have worked closely together as a single team to create a truly integrated solution that is both perfectly tailored to RMK's needs, and provides a powerful new symbol for their organisation."