

## Nesting instinct Studio Rhonda designs HQ for chicken-run champions Omlet

Omlet – the pioneering pet-accessories company behind the now-iconic Eglu chicken coop – is renowned for the functionally inventive, visually engaging design it brings to its products. Now the interiors practice Studio Rhonda is bringing that same playful practicality to the company’s new headquarters in Banbury, Oxfordshire – with a little help from kitchen designers HØLTE.



Supported by a nature-inspired colour palette, biophilia is a key feature of Rhonda Drakeford’s concept for the space. Image: Veerle Evens.



## Sociable, adaptable, and full of character

With Omlet having outgrown the industrial unit it has previously called home, and having expanded its team to address the explosion in pet ownership, it was clear the company needed a new, larger space flexible enough to support its hybrid working model.

Familiar with Rhonda Drakeford's work as the co-founder of design brand and retailer Darkroom, Omlet chose her studio for the task of sensitively transforming a 19th-century Palladian malthouse into an appealing workspace for a rapidly growing 21st-century brand. Presented with a vast, vaulted space crossed by original wooden trusses, Rhonda faced the challenge of preserving the historical character of the building while sympathetically bringing it in line with the Omlet brand and its workspace needs.

With many members of the Omlet team working remotely some of the time, the new offices had to be comfortable and stimulating enough to emphasise the benefits of shared workspace – an exciting social environment as much as an effective place to

work – while also being flexible enough to support both fixed desks and hot-desking. Plus, with the space having to accommodate both the phone-based customer service team and the company’s other departments, acoustics were a crucial consideration.

Completed in spring 2023, the new office gives Omlet ample space to comfortably accommodate 45–60 people.

## Connected to nature, inspired by colour

The main office comprises a central core of work spaces set under a mezzanine, operated from a full-height space surrounding it by elegant glazed steel partitions and doors, painted in a soft, coffee colour that complements and emphasises the timber trusses above. The glazed panels create quiet zones within the space while also allowing daylight to cross the cavernous room, keeping it light and airy.

To develop the interior style, Studio Rhonda took design cues from the raw state of the building, opting to work with the earthy tone set by the exposed brick and large timbers. The material palette has therefore been kept as natural as possible, with solid ash used in much of the bespoke furniture and cork – a natural acoustic absorber – selected for the flooring.

Studio Rhonda’s interest in biophilic design principles is evident in the abundance of greenery. As a pet company, Omlet has always been open to nature, with office cats, chickens and rabbits always on hand as resident product testers, so there was already a precedent for bringing the natural world into the workspace. Substantial planters in terracotta and Corten steel are full of trees and plants, making the most of the lofty ceiling heights and the sunshine from the skylights. These not only visually soften the edges of the workspace, they also help absorb sound, clean the air, and contribute to physical and mental wellbeing.

## STUDIO RHONDA

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London kitchen designers HØLTE supplied the cabinet fronts for Omlet's four colour-coded kitchens. Image: Veerle Evens.

Improving the acoustics – and emphasising the nod to nature – still further, Studio Rhonda introduced vast carpeted walls using Tretford goats' wool fitted over acoustic batten cladding. The walls beneath the mezzanine are clad with raw cork, hand-painted with murals in Indian inks. This combination of natural colours and textured materials creates an atmosphere of depth and cosiness, making the new Omlet office an inherently relaxing space.

To balance the grounding qualities of the natural colours and materials, Rhonda has introduced a palette of bolder pop tones, muted by the materials that host them. The goat's wool carpet on the walls is dyed in a variety of playful colours, softened by flecks found naturally in the wool, and pigment-stained ash in green, yellow, aqua, and blue is used for various pieces of furniture and the kitchens.

A graphic grid of solid ash strips frames the colour-blocked carpet wall patterns and integrates deep window apertures of ash panelling, unifying the varied styles of doors and original window frames. Strips of solid ash have also been used to create a linear cladding for the mezzanine stairs, integrating hidden storage, and also forming a screen that contains the stairs from the foyer. Both staircases have been clad with bespoke ash treads.

*"I was keen to create a layered effect of textures in both their natural and pigmented forms. It's intended to be cosy, comfortable and also playful, which I feel directly talks about the kinds of products that Omlet designs and sells."*

– Rhonda Drakeford, Studio Rhonda





Developed to promote sociability as much as productivity, Omlet's new HQ provides appealing, versatile workspace for the company's various teams. Image: Veerle Evens.

## Kitchens by HØLTE

For Omlet's four kitchen areas, Rhonda brought on board the London-based design studio HØLTE, which creates custom fronts, worktops and handles for off-the-shelf cabinetry from IKEA and other high-street brands – thus enabling designers to achieve the look of bespoke at a fraction of the cost.

Already a fan of HØLTE's material approach and eye for colour, Rhonda thought they would be ideal collaborators to realise her colour-blocked kitchen concept and asked them to create cabinet fronts for the four kitchen areas situated around the perimeter of the space – ranging from the main canteen to three smaller kitchens and coffee stations – as well as making bespoke open wall cabinets and colour-matched tops for the tables and benches that Studio Rhonda designed for the canteen.

The two studios worked together to develop bespoke shades for HØLTE's WOOD-E front designs in ash so that each kitchen could have its own personality – an intentional, colour-coded part of the wayfinding in the vast new building. A bespoke

angular, integrated handle was also developed to Rhonda's brief. The craftsmanship behind the kitchens is palpable: HØLTE took care to match the wood grain so that it continues across each bank of cabinets unbroken from door to door, and fitted integrated corner handles onto the doors so each kitchen is visually expressed as a single block of colour. The colours – dark and light blue, yellow and green – inform the neighbouring wall treatments, creating distinct colour-coded zones within the space – playful breakout areas where individuals can take time away from their desks, relax and spend time with colleagues.

*“People are expecting more from their office environments as our attitudes towards work and mental health are changing. Companies that are either unable to offer remote working due to the nature of their business or would prefer their employees to be present in the office as much as possible are under increasing pressure to provide comfortable and enjoyable workspaces. The kitchen is a fundamental part of this as it encourages staff to take breaks from their work, thus providing respite, a need for movement and a space to socialise.”*

– Fi Ginnett, co-founder, HØLTE

## Setting the standard in craftsmanship

To complement the high-level design presented by the kitchens, Studio Rhonda has employed a combination of bespoke furniture and selected pieces from leading designers.

Several pieces from the Darkroom-designed BLOK series of monumental furniture in pigmented ash have been commissioned in bespoke colours.

The meeting room features a bespoke built-in bench made from Ash alongside a bespoke circular boardroom table, both designed by Studio Rhonda. The canteen's bespoke benches and tables are complemented by an eclectic selection of chairs and stools sourced from twentytwentyone, including designs by David Geckeler, Herman Studio, Thomas Bentzen, and Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec.

## STUDIO RHONDA

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Traditional Mallorcan tile maker Huguet supplied the bespoke green floor tiles for the Omlet canteen.  
Image: Veerle Evens.



The canteen floor is paved in bespoke concrete tiles from Huguet Mallorca, whereas the ceiling is hung with Tham & Videgård's sculptural Alma pendant lights. In the main office area, Davide Groppi's huge, ethereal Moon lights make the most of the vast vaulted ceilings in the mezzanine.

The extraordinary standard of craftsmanship and attention to detail that is apparent in the space is very much a deliberate choice. As well as making the workspace a more appealing place to be for staff returning to the office, Studio Rhonda hopes that the exemplary design standard will help inspire the Omlet team in the products that they themselves design.

*"This project had the luxury of time due to the staff all working from home during the later part of the pandemic. It was really helpful to have the space to ponder how to make it feel right and relevant to the workforce and to continue developing the space with them over the last year. The completed space offers them just the right combination of surprise, joy, comfort and functionality."*

– Rhonda Drakeford, Studio Rhonda



Thoughtfully bedecked with art, ceramics and plant life, the welcoming space includes break-out areas for moments of relaxation. Image: Veerle Evens.

*For images of Omlet office, interviews with Rhonda Drakeford, or more information about Studio Rhonda or HØLTE, please contact [emily@zetteler.co.uk](mailto:emily@zetteler.co.uk)*

## Notes to editors

### **Studio Rhonda**

Founded by designer Rhonda Drakeford in 2018, Studio Rhonda specialises in the creation of site-specific, joyful, functional and texturally rich interiors and exteriors for residential and commercial spaces. Characterised by a strong, skilled deployment of colour and pattern and fine balance of function and sensory surprise, the studio's work encompasses creative direction, interior design, bespoke furniture, product, textile and surface design.

[studio-rhonda.com](http://studio-rhonda.com)

### **Omlet**

Founded in 2003 by four friends who met at the Royal College of Art, Omlet began by reinventing the chicken coop for a new generation of garden keepers through the Eglu. Since then Omlet expanded across the animal kingdom, creating a range of ingenious and innovative designs for domestic animals that have delighted thousands of pets and their owners around the world.

[omlet.co.uk](http://omlet.co.uk)

### **HØLTE**

Established in 2017, HØLTE designs high-quality, hand-finished fronts and worktops for proprietary cabinet carcasses, bringing a high-quality but accessible designer finish to any kitchen. Founded by architecture and fashion veterans Tom and Fi Ginnett, HØLTE has quickly established itself at the forefront of the rapidly evolving 'semi-bespoke' design market, earning a reputation for timeless design, robust engineering, cost efficiency and dedicated client service. Whether created in collaboration with architects and interior designers, or developed by the studio's own design team, HØLTE kitchens offer the quality and aesthetics of custom joinery but typically cost a third of bespoke options. HØLTE's studio is located on Andrews Road, East London, just off Broadway Market.

[holte.studio](http://holte.studio)