



meeting places



As working models shift and a growing number of professionals adopt a more fluid and informal approach to their working patterns, many freelancers turn to their local cafe as an **unofficial workspace**. Genty Marshall examines two hospitality projects in France that have embraced this trend, delivering work-friendly environments that foster sharing and promote chance encounters between like-minded professionals.

In 2002, economist and social scientist Richard Florida turned our attention to the increasing value of creativity in our global society in his controversial book, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*.

Described by Florida as the engine of urban renewal, this growing socioeconomic group – which included scientists and engineers, artists and architects, designers and professors – was said to be reshaping our economy, our work and how we choose to live. Typified by a departure from traditional workplace hours, location, attire and behaviour, Florida's creative class represents a paradigm shift away from the traditional management structure.

When Florida's book was published, this group of qualified and mobile professionals was beginning to take advantage of the casualisation of the workplace. For many new freelancers, the local cafe was the closest thing they had to a formal place of business.

Regardless of whether you subscribe to Florida's definitions, there is no doubt that, 10 years on, the growth of this group has been significant. Many of these workers have dispensed with the home office in favour of co-working spaces. Creativity, too, has become an increasingly valuable asset to many professionals: social media site LinkedIn reported in late 2011 that the most used word in member profiles was 'creative'.

As a result, many of the cafe owners that found themselves playing host to a growing number of mobile professionals have since embraced this new market, adapting their establishments to provide work-friendly areas or simply providing free wi-fi. In France, two projects in particular take tailoring to the needs and values of this dynamic audience a step further.

Craft is a new cafe in the 10th arrondissement, a dynamic and diverse neighbourhood beyond the Parisian hyper-centre and an increasingly popular residential location for home-based creative professionals and start-ups. As much an urban project as an economic venture, Craft is designed to serve the local creative class by offering a space that meets its needs and aspirations. Inspired by working concepts he had seen in New York, owner Augustin Blanchard had a clear idea of the ambience he wanted to achieve and brought in young French design studio, Pool, to realise the graphic identity, interior design and most of the furniture.



text Genty Marshall

Top—Cafe Craft in Paris, designed by Pool / Centre—Geometric lines on the Cafe Craft noticeboards / Left—Craft's slick, monochromatic palette. All Cafe Craft photos by Samuel Kirszenbaum

Top—Owner Augustin Blanchard and design team Pool have created a contemporary take on the Parisian cafe

Above—Described as a 'coffee workshop', Craft features a central table that doubles as workstations for freelancers



“Philippe Starck’s Mama Shelter Marseille feels like a playground for the creative soul.”

...| Described as a coffee workshop, Craft prides itself on its top quality espresso from a choice of artisan micro-roasted beans. The heart of the offering, however, comes in the form of a community table of 12 elegantly designed workstations with discreet access to power outlets, ethernet cables and wi-fi. Bookending the space is a lounge area for informal meetings, as well as a shared table allowing customers to socialise more freely.

For Blanchard, it was also important that patrons weren’t made to feel in any way pressured to continually order from the bar

or move along to make space for others. And so, in contrast to their retrofitted counterparts, Craft is determined from the outset to create a welcoming environment for independent and creative workers in what is a contemporary and original interpretation of the Parisian cafe.

Over on the eastern edge of Paris in the 20th arrondissement, another urban neighbourhood is home to the success story that is Mama Shelter. Run by the Trigano family (known for their role in building the Club Med chain) and designed in collaboration

with Philippe Starck, Mama Shelter is a hospitality concept designed to appeal not only to the needs but also the philosophy and values of this creative socioeconomic group.

Seven years in the making, the first Mama Shelter opened in late 2008 to outstanding reviews. With the recent opening of the new Mama Shelter Marseille (2012) and a third offering, Mama Shelter Lyon, due to open in April 2013, it’s worth taking a look at the business model that is happily expanding in a challenging European market and rewriting the rules of the hotel experience.

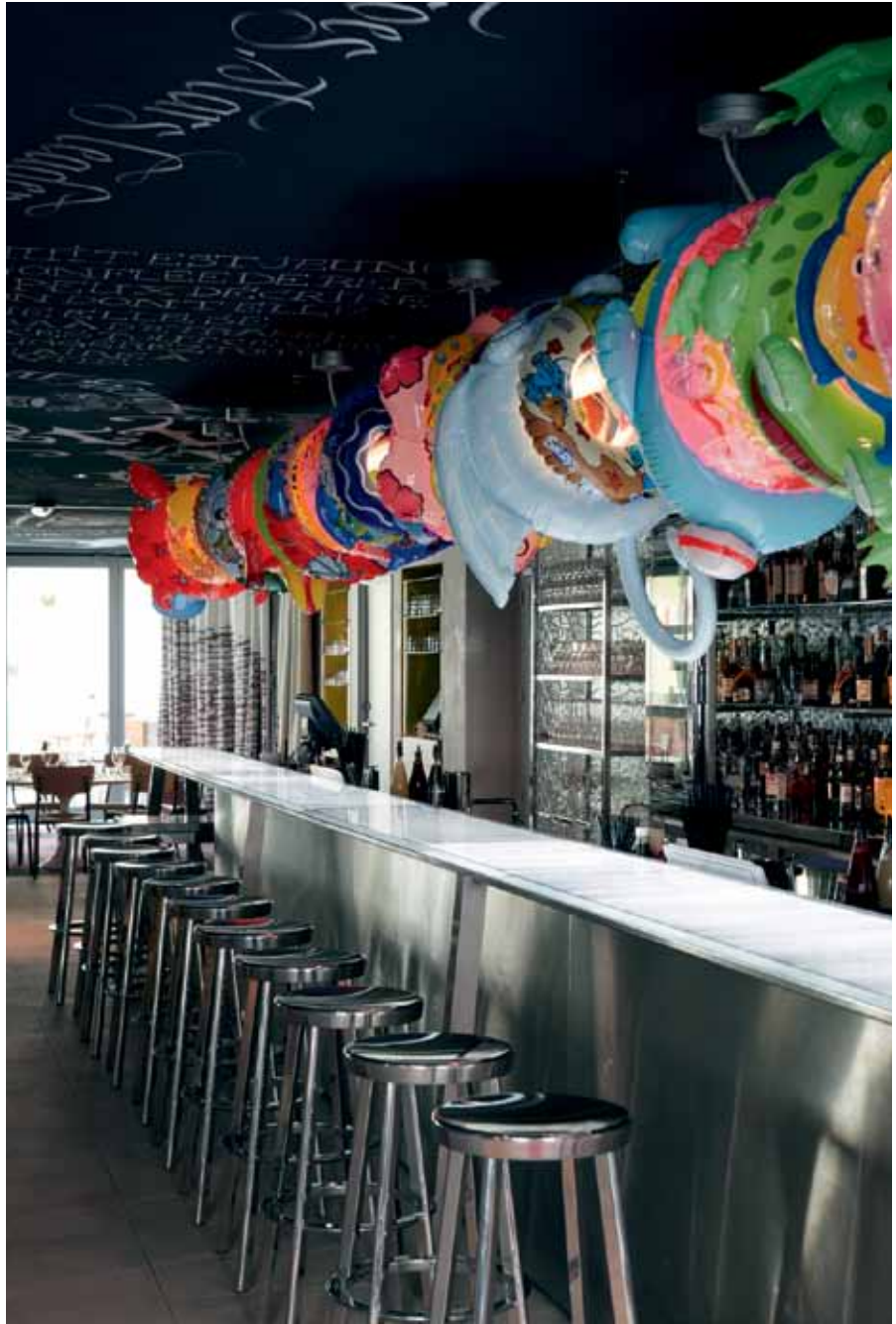
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Above left—The custom-made carpet at Mama Shelter is embellished with graffiti, words and sketches in a nod to the creative process. All Mama Shelter photos by Francis Amiard

Top right—Mama Shelter’s hotel rooms range in size and price, making them accessible to a broad range of budgets

Above right—Playful details continue in the meeting rooms






...| The success of this hotel chain lies in the owners' commitment to breaking free from the tiered hotel system defined by budgets: rooms range in size from 15 to 35 square metres and in cost from €79 to €499 per night – making it an affordable option for most travellers. Inside, each room is fitted with a luxury mattress, an office space and a specially designed 27-inch multimedia iMac, providing free movies, internet access, music, local guides and TV.

The rest of the hotel is all about bringing people together – encouraging chance

encounters and casual interactions among business guests. The task of realising this was given to designer, Philippe Starck, and the result feels like a playground for the creative soul. The furniture is a mix of design icons, vintage pieces and standard commercial items that range from utilitarian to borderline kitsch. Light fittings incorporate everything from pool toys to plastic Disney masks, and the floors and ceilings, adorned with scribbled words and sketches, give a nod to the creative process.

While for some it may appear excessive, this visual stimulus serves a greater purpose than mere aesthetic quirk. By keeping guests entertained and engaged by their surroundings, the space encourages them to look around – beckoning them into the present moment and providing them with the opportunity to interact with each other. Beyond that, it's up to the individual.

Thankfully, with the likes of Craft and Mama Shelter opening their doors, it's getting easier to say the words: "May I join you?" 

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Left—Public areas promote informal encounters among like-minded hotel guests

Right—A light fitting made from inflatable pool toys adds a touch of kitsch to the bar

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