

Reinventing Your Look

Firms turn to interior designers to keep pace



For its Northrup Eye Clinic at Northwest 19th Avenue and Northrup Street, *Eye Health Northwest* needed to update what Bainbridge calls "... a tired, 1970s interior to better reflect the new demographics of this now more upscale neighborhood." Photo by Steve Cridland. Photo courtesy of Bainbridge Design Inc.

By Brian Libby
for the DJC Magazine

When West Coast Bank decided to open its first Portland branch in the Pearl District, the institution decided that the traditional bank model that had been employed in its small town and suburban locations needed a reinvention for this chic urban district. So with the help of Portland's WGS Design, West Coast Bank decided to create a new spin on banking.

"We've done branches for them in Keizer, Clackamas, Salem and a whole different series of locations," said Paul Gibbons, a partner at WGS. "And this branch wouldn't fit in any of those other locations."

At the 12th Avenue and Glisan Street branch of West Coast Bank, you can surf the Internet, browse local art for sale, and even get your dry cleaning picked up when you step inside to make

a deposit. With the Pearl District being a more pedestrian-friendly neighborhood that plays home to creative types, West Coast Bank decided that adding a variety of additional services to traditional banking was a way to lure people to open accounts there. And while personalized banking has been utilized for several years to cater to high-income customer this is all unprecedented attempt to bring that same level of service to a wider array of people.

At the same time WGS worked to fuse the industrial-chic vernacular of the Pearl with the cutting-edge feel of West Coast Bank's new branch. "The facility uses a modular system with brushed aluminum columns housing Internet and phone and electrical connections," explained Gibbons. "The space is so small [approximately 1,000 square feet compared to 3,000-4,000 for a

traditional branch] that it's a fairly neutral palette with very crisp kinds of materials brushed aluminum, gray plastic laminate. There's also an arched barrel vault manufactured out of ceiling panels. All the light is indirect lighting that bounces off those panels, with some pinpoint lighting on the artwork. The air conditioning comes through exposed ducts in the ceiling in the center of the space. The industrial spirit that you see in loft spaces is repeated here, but we've combined it with some of the crisp, clean lines that represent current technology."

The Pearl District branch of West Coast Bank is but one example of how increasingly interior designers are charged with helping their clients take on the challenge of responding to rapidly changing neighborhoods, demographics and even psychological factors.

"Although interior design has always been used for enhancing the corporate and retail image, it is needed more so now than ever before," said **Andrea Bainbridge of Bainbridge Design**. "Independent business owners are struggling to maintain visibility and stay competitive in this economy. It is critical that the design professional really understand the company and current and future demographics of the neighborhood. These independent smaller companies are also looking for solutions that are very cost effective. The challenge is to make a statement that won't be out of date in five years. Most of these spaces will not be remodeled again for 10 to 15 years.

In partnership with Scott/Edwards Architecture, Bainbridge recently completed a redesign and remodel of Monte Shelton Motors, a Jaguar dealer on West Burnside Street. "With a revamped corporate image, Jaguar is making a play for younger automobile buyers with the launching of a new car, the X-type Jaguar, with lower sticker prices," explained Bainbridge. "The goal of our project is to reflect this new market

image to attract the younger affluent buyer. Gone will be the 'old English men's club' atmosphere, replaced with a light, contemporary environment utilizing brushed aluminum, custom glass and cherry wood elements."

Another transformation came at Mari's Coffee in Vancouver, Wash., which recently saw a Starbucks open up down the street in competition. "Although she has a steady customer following, Mari asked us to provide ideas to update the look of the store and increase the visibility from the street," recalled **Bainbridge**. "Her goal was to create a more comfortable, 'come in and stay' atmosphere, in contrast to the other coffee shop's contemporary, edgy style." As a result, Mari's Coffee can now position itself as an alternative not just as an independent business competing as a chain, but as a different kind of experience: A warmer, friendlier way to sip your cappuccino.

"Enlightened business owners already know how important their brand is, whether it is a product or a service," said **Bainbridge**. "A strong interior design team addresses issues beyond just the physical space. It is critical that the design professional really understand the business plan of the company, who their customer is and who they want it to be, what the changing demographics are."

Interior transformations can also come as a result of new technologies. When Providence Hospital became the first medical center in the Northwest to obtain a gamma knife machine, which uses gamma rays to eliminate tumors without breaking a patient's skin, administrators sought a space for the treatment that communicated a sense of technological wonder while emotionally reassuring its ailing patients.

Thus, WGS fashioned the new Gamma Knife Center of Oregon into a space that's both exciting and inviting. "We do an awful lot of color and environment research," said Ward. "With health care there's a lot of

emphasis on creating a healing environment. Studies show people actually heal quicker in the right space. So we did some copper faux-finish walls that added warmth to the high-tech feeling. We also wanted to add something that had some sparkle, so we added some future walls in cast glass that added a lot of color and texture. It has an accent wall behind it and is almost like a little prayer station. It suggests a kind of reverence that people respond to. People in these clinics are pretty sick and pretty scared, and they seem to want a reason to have faith that this gamma knife technology is going to work."

Still others may want to respond to the changing needs of their neighborhood, but don't have large budgets to fashion an elaborate remodel. In these cases, sometimes a little color goes a long way. For its Northrup Eye Clinic at Northwest 19th Avenue and Northrup Street, Eye Health Northwest needed to update what **Bainbridge** called "... a tired, 1970s interior to better reflect the new demographics of this now more upscale neighborhood. Not wanting to spend money for a total remodel, we completed their transformation merely by the careful selection of new colors, finishes and materials and by creating one strong focal point."

To that end, perhaps more than any other aspect of interior design, it is the differences in color that can make or break the right look for a space and help affect subtle psychological effects to match the client's wishes. "The color and texture and lighting and the form really support the image or the feeling that you're trying to achieve," said Ward. "It's not just a matter of picking out a chair and a certain fabric. It's a whole picture, with emotional ramifications that come out of that. I think there's a lot that goes into an interior space that people don't realize."

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