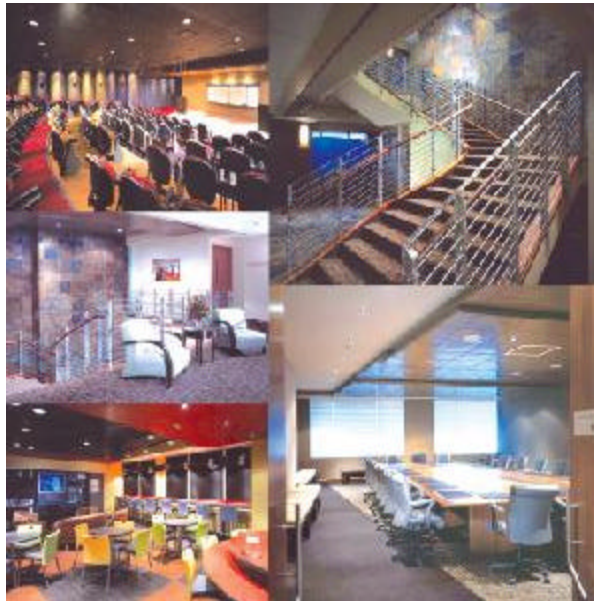


Interior Design; more than a paint job

by David Parker

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Professional interior designers must have a bit of a trying time explaining just what they do for a living; the title is a term that many would use to describe any kind of decorating to home or office. But there is much more to the job than changing the colour of your cushions after seeking advice through a Debbie Travis column.

On a visit to any of the larger interior design companies you most certainly will find people pouring over sample books of paints and carpets, but also team meetings with structural engineers and lighting specialists, mechanical engineers and security planners.

It's a fascinating field and one that demands a thorough education and constant research to stay ahead of the latest designs and products.

I paid a visit to the offices of Sizeland Evans to learn more about the industry and that company in particular. It was an enjoyable, eye-opening time chatting with principals Georgi-Anna Sizeland, Patricia Evans and their staff of 43, which make the company the largest interior design firm in Western Canada.

The first impression is that everyone likes working there, very important in a business in which so many of the staff is in constant relationship with clients. I felt a sense of relaxed enjoyment coupled with a heads-down enthusiasm to work together to get the job done well. They are an educated crew as I notice all kinds of letters behind everyone's name; there are A.T.'s and B.I.D.'s, D.I.D.'s and N.C.I.D.Q.'s, I.D.T.'s, B.A.A.I.D.'s and L.I.D.'s. And my old friend Tomislav Cerkvanc, who retired from his own lengthy practice, now uses his 39 year's experience to consult with Sizeland Evans, has a couple of extras – he's a K.C.M., N.D.D., I.D.C., I.D.A., L.I.D.

Staff is expected to reach for further educational goals as well as participating in company-arranged seminars and workshops so as to be aware of client's needs and how best to satisfy them. A strong emphasis is on leadership training in customer service.

Recently the whole gang spent a Saturday together at an out-of-town retreat in team building exercises. Weekly lunches are held when suppliers are invited into the office to show their wares and other suppliers are brought in to discuss the needs of the different teams on specific projects.

That's a lot of knowledge and experience amassed in the 10 short years since Sizeland and Evans decided to go it on their own. They had both worked with Rice Brydon before the Toronto-based company left Calgary after the downturn years of the late 1980's.

Sizeland graduated from the University of Manitoba with a Bachelor of Interior Design and also a Diploma in Art and Merchandising from Vancouver City College; well respected for her dedication to professional integrity she is very involved as a volunteer with the Canadian Interior Design Association.

Evans, like her partner, with 23 years of professional experience has a hands-on approach to both people and project management, incorporating her innovative and advanced knowledge through her active role in the Alberta Association for Architects, the Interior Designers of Canada and the Building Owners and Managers of Alberta.

After working together on a number of exciting projects like the interiors for the Esso Research Centre when it was built up in the university's research park, they joined together in opening their company in 1990, working out of Sizeland's home basement office. Most of the clients were in the central core so they rented a parking space in the core calling it there downtown office location.

Two years later when they had three full-time and three part-time staff they made the decision to lease space in the building they still occupy, 441 Fifth Avenue S.W. Now they have an entire floor to accommodate four licensed interior designers, 30 interior designers/facility specialists, five autocad technologists and six administration staff.

The company has been built primarily by growing with a group of satisfied clients. Firms like William Mercer, Tonko, Husky, Telus and AEC - when it recently merged with PanCanadian-Sizeland Evans helped relocate 3,200 people in a four month window. The work continued this past weekend as Encana took possession of new floors in Bankers Hall. High on the list of interesting projects must have been designing the interior of an Alberta Energy plane.

Telus Mobility projects have been completed here as well as in Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto and Montreal. It has also worked on out of province sites for Husky and Waterloo-based Sun Life, but perhaps the most challenging long distance job was designing and supervising construction of Macleod Dixon's Moscow office.

Most of the clients Sizeland Evans serves are corporations in downtown Calgary but one of my favourites is the new concourse at the Calgary International Airport. Working with The Cohos Evamy Partners, the architects for the new addition, it was responsible for the great design work that welcomes visitors to our city by highlighting the history of flight. As we are required to hang around airports so long before boarding there's lots of time to admire the themed floor, hanging displays and other attractions that blend so well with the rest of the attractive interiors in the walkways, waiting areas and food court.

Calgary's Yellow Pages list 169 interior designers plus companies that call themselves interior decorators so there's lots of competition. Sizeland Evans does well to stay in the forefront especially when so many architectural firms are opening in-house interior design departments which must make it a little tougher for the specialty firms.

Its success is due to excellence in design that can positively and dramatically affect the bottom line. It has a proven track record showing projects under its supervision are completed consistently on schedule and on budget resulting from detailed planning, careful site inspection and on-going project management.

Interior design is definitely much, much more than pretty colour schemes; it's a team driven profession in strategic deployment by a highly trained group of individuals offering a full scope of services for the management, design and implementation of corporate work environments.

Everyone has a photographic memory, some just don't have film