

A sizeable presence

BY CLARE TATTERSALL

The year was 1982. Calgary — and the rest of the country for that matter — was in the midst of a major recession. With its economy interlinked with the energy and petroleum sector, the introduction of the National Energy Program in 1980 and subsequent drop in oil prices devastated Alberta — inflation was out of control, interest rates soared and unemployment was at an all time high. However, in the midst of this economic downturn, interior designer Georgi-Anna Sizeland was able to still find work.

At 28, shortly after being laid off from Morley Winnick Design (a direct consequence of the recession), Sizeland joined Rice Brydone Ltd., a Toronto-based firm that had just opened an office in Calgary. Though originally hired for three days, Sizeland stayed seven years — a decision that changed the course of her career.

“At that time, Rice Brydone was pretty much the only job in town, so I was fortunate to be hired there,” says Sizeland who realized just how lucky she was years later while working alongside Patricia Evans.





The other half of Calgary-based Sizeland Evans Interior Design Inc. — the largest interior design firm in Western Canada — Evans joined Rice Brydone around the same time as Sizeland, after two years with Interdesign, a year with City Interiors and a brief stint with Hayashi & Associates. The two friends, who are now “49-years-old and holding,” have been more or less inseparable ever since.

“When at Rice Brydone, if one of us saw the other in the office alone at night hard at work, we’d offer a helping hand,” explains Sizeland who is originally from Vancouver.

“And in those days that meant we were both sharing the same parallel rule,” she laughs.

Both graduates of the University of Manitoba where they studied interior design (albeit at different times), the two worked together for six years before Sizeland branched off on her own. In 1989, after having collaborated on a variety of projects, including the interiors of the Petro-Canada Centre, Esso Research Centre and Macleod Dixon’s legal offices in downtown Calgary, Sizeland left Rice Brydone to take a full-time teaching position with Mount Royal College’s interior design department. But the two were reunited a year later, when the opportunity to “go it on their own” presented itself.

In 1990, as the recession waned on, one of Rice Brydone’s partners, Peter Rice, took early retirement, prompting Eleanor Brydone to close the Calgary office. With no buyer in sight, Evans approached her long-time friend and the two entered into a business partnership, which has been nothing short of a success.

“We had talked for years about starting our own company but it wasn’t until Pat stepped forward and offered to take care of (Eleanor’s) clients that the timing was right,” explains Sizeland.

What started out as a firm of two, with the founding principals working out of Sizeland’s home basement, has since ballooned to an impressive 50. Today, the design team occupies almost two whole floors of an office building in Calgary’s downtown core.

“We actually had a branch office when we started,” says Sizeland, adding ‘the office’ was, in fact, a rented parking spot downtown.

“We called it our branch office just for fun but it served its purpose,” she continues. “It was 10 minutes away from my house so we always knew when a client called how long it would take to get to their office.”

With the goal of expanding the fledgling company to six, both Sizeland and Evans were pleasantly surprised when the staff roster doubled and then tripled in just 12 years.

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Then, after growing naturally until 2002, the firm expanded once again when Alberta Energy Corp. (a client for 10 years) merged with PanCanadian Energy Corp. to become EnCana Corp. — one of the largest independently owned oil and gas companies in the world — and Husky Energy Inc. (also a client) acquired Renaissance Energy Ltd.

“At that point we actually doubled in size to 32 to cope,” says Evans, adding the merges created a domino effect, which kept the firm very busy.

“EnCana moved into space previously held by Enbridge (another longtime client of Sizeland Evans), which, in turn, moved into space originally occupied by Renaissance before it merged with Husky.”

Occurring at the exact same time, the projects required Sizeland Evans to develop three new interior looks as well as a corporate identity for newly branded EnCana.

“It was really challenging and entailed a lot of long hours but our clients were very supportive,” notes Evans who is originally from Flin Flon, Man.

This has been the case since the firm was founded 18 years ago. When the two entered into the joint venture, they were joined by many of their Rice Brydone clients. Then, in 1991, Sizeland Evans added a new client, AMEC (formerly Monenco) and landed its first big project (totalling 100,000 square feet) for North Canadian Oil Ltd., which put the small design firm on the map.

Since then, Sizeland Evans’ predominantly corporate client list has grown to include Petro-Canada Inc., Tonko Realty Advisors Ltd., Carma Developments Ltd., law firms Macleod Dixon and Borden Ladner Gervais, Telus (one of Canada’s leading telecommunications companies), and the Calgary Airport Authority. Over the course of six years, the interior design firm worked with architect and prime consultant Cohos Evamy Partners to update the Calgary International Airport. A key hub for regional, national and international air traffic, the multi-phased project included two new central halls and public gathering spaces as well as pier and terminal concourse expansions.

“That project gave us a lot of national exposure,” says Evans, adding it’s one of the projects she’s most proud of to-date.

Having built up its client base to include many of Calgary’s best-known corporations, developers and institutions, it was only a matter of time until Sizeland Evans diversified. In line with the founders’ belief in living a balanced life, the duo launched a residential division in 2005, and is doing more regular work in Edmonton and Vancouver.

“One of our corporate values is about balance and this relates to balance in the type of work we do as well as our home and work lives,” explains Evans, adding the firm has begun to pursue work in the hospitality industry and has partnered with Kerry Busby Interior Design to support this initiative.

“Diversification has also been a desire of our employees.”

As well as some of Sizeland Evans’ corporate clients interested in working with the firm on their own, personal, residential projects.



Photo courtesy Jayson Bruce Shultz

LEFT Living room from a suite at the Pinnacle Condominium in Canmore, Alta. Client: Stone Creek Properties Inc.

BELOW Lunchroom/lounge with a variety of seating and casual meeting areas. Client: EnCana Corp. — Bankers Hall.

BOTTOM “Spring/Summer” living room for private residence in southwest Calgary.

With a focus on high-end residences, resort properties, inner city infill housing and multi-residential condominiums, the residential division currently comprises 10 per cent of the firm’s portfolio. However, it is hoped the firm’s rebranding efforts, which includes a new logo, website and additional tagline — “shaping the way we live” — will help grow this side of the business.

“Repeat clients and word of mouth will also play a pivotal role just as it has throughout the firm’s history,” says Evans, noting 50 per cent of the 300-plus projects Sizeland Evans’ works on each year is repeat business.

The happily married mother of two also credits the firm’s design philosophy for its repeat (as well as new) clientele.

“Each and every project reflects the client’s corporate culture, brand and values,” she continues. “When you look at our portfolio, you can see a difference from project to project as no two look the same.”

“We’re not about cookie cutter design,” adds Sizeland whose husband is a mechanical contractor.

Well established within the marketplace, Sizeland Evans has a proven track record across a number of industries and is continuously searching for new ideas and opportunities.

The nationally recognized and award-winning firm is also committed to sustainable design.

“The goal is to be the ‘go to’ interior design firm for LEED CI (Commercial Interiors) projects,” says Sizeland.

And with a flourishing firm and 50 years of experience between the two, it’s a feat Sizeland and Evans will likely meet. **DD**

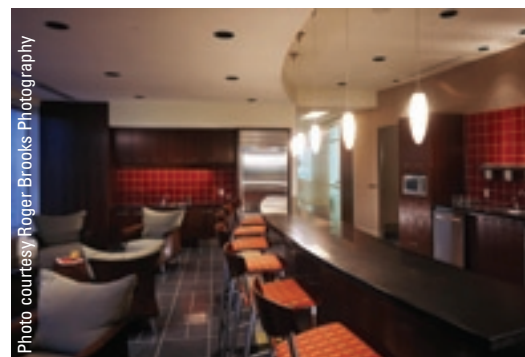


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