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MARKET TALK



iQMETRIX, VANCOUVER

Industry: Technology

Recognition: Gold, 2010 Awards of Excellence,
Interior Designers Institute of BC

To understand iQmetrix's office space is to understand its business. The Vancouver-based company creates software that helps bridge the gap between the virtual and physical retail worlds.

Like the opening screen of a computer program, iQmetrix's office opens into one main space that takes staff and visitors to different corners of the business. "It's a central hub and everything forks into that," says president and CEO Christopher Krywulak. A majestic meeting area for his 70-person head office staff, it looks like a coffee shop, bar and hotel lounge fused into a single space. "Rather than having a social room, a boardroom and a common area, we blended everything," says Krywulak.

Along one wall is a long bench with café-like outlets hidden underneath for laptop charging. The hub's minimalist white and lemony-yellow kitchen would look good in any upscale B.C. home, but it's got something most kitchens don't have: a fully functioning beer tap.

Other touches that make this a pleasing space include ceiling-to-floor windows that bring in natural light and a soundproof "Zen

room" where people can lay down and, if they want, take a nap. It was also important that the office reflect a love of technology.

The place is Wi-Fi equipped and has several iPod docks that blast music. But the crown jewel is the Microsoft touch screen surface embedded in the hub's bar. The company can demo its XQ Retail Interactive software on the device.



While the space looks state-of-the-art, it's also clean and uncomplicated, just like a good piece of software. "It doesn't matter what it is," he says, "great design is about making things simple."



BORTOLOTTO DESIGN ARCHITECT INC., TORONTO

Industry: Architecture

Recognition: 2008 Award of Merit,
Association of Registered Interior
Designers of Ontario

As the founder of Bortolotto Design Architect, Inc., Tania Bortolotto has designed her fair share of office interiors. So when it came time to create her own office space, she already had a good idea of how she wanted it to look. "Minimalist and simple," she says. "That's our design philosophy."

When the award-winning architect set out to design the space, she set three criteria for herself: it had to meet a tight budget, it had to reflect her style to serve as a compelling example of the firm's work to clients, and it had to be a comfortable, ergonomic and healthy place for staff.

What makes the space stand out, says Bortolotto, is the work desks with translucent glass dividers and the black laser-cut built-in bookshelves – custom-designed by her firm – set in an open-concept layout. The six-by-six desks have ample room for two computers and numerous drawings and blueprints.

It was also important to design the space sustainably. Large clear windows and natural ventilation bring in plenty of light and air, and much of the original flooring, ceiling and perimeter walls were cleaned, painted and reused.

Bortolotto points out that the boardroom's glass walls also serve as a display function for work sharing. "You can write on the glass with just a marker," she says. During meetings, people go up to the wall, scribble notes and discuss.

JENNINGS CAPITAL, CALGARY

Industry: Financial

Recognition: 2012 Award of Merit,

Prairie Design Awards

When the executives at Jennings Capital Inc. started designing their new office, they let their interior design firm do mostly as it pleased. But there was one important restriction: it couldn't look like their previous space. "We wanted something fresh and modern," says CFO and COO Nancy Peck.

They got what they asked for. The final product is a stunningly sleek, modernist space that looks more like a high-end spa than a financial firm that caters to high-net-worth clients and energy-sector companies.

Most of the budget went on the reception area, and for good reason – it's the first thing their clients see. "It's about value," says Peck. "If people decide to spend their money with us, we need a place that's attractive and inviting."



Jennings Capital



Bortolotto Design Architect Inc.

That attention to detail, and what the ARIDO judges called a "timeless and sophisticated" look, are what staff and clients are most pleased with. "It's very warm and the design is harmonious throughout all its parts," she says. "It reflects our style."



Jennings Capital

Award panel judges noted "clean white surfaces [and] glass and strategic lighting create a bright minimalist atmosphere, balanced by walnut-sculptured walls. Glass entry doors allow a view to the grand [Calacatta] marble reception desk, which captures the modern essence of this bright environment."

It's likely the judges also liked the eye-catching pistachio green seats in the waiting area and the walnut-infused cafeteria and kitchen, with its long bar-like table that serves as the company's social space.

But the office's pièce de résistance is the two handmade wooden feature walls that subtly split an open-design concept into multiple rooms. In the lobby, the wall divides the reception area and "the cage" – a secure room where clients drop off money. The wood contractor, says executive assistant Natalie Reid, told her the walls were "one of the most interesting – and, at times, tedious – projects he'd ever done."

Peck couldn't be happier with how the space turned out. "It looks fantastic," says Peck. "It's a much more inviting office."