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## Landlord's lure: You pick the lobby



NATHAN SKID/CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

Howard and Michelle Davis, principals with Farmington Hills-based Davis & Davis Interior Design Co., stand in front of one of three banners depicting possible new looks for the lobby of a building in Troy's Baluster Park.

BY DANIEL DUGGAN  
CRAIN'S DETROIT BUSINESS

Owners of a vacant seven-story office building in Troy faced a dilemma in the lobby.

The building's 1980s decor was outdated, but spending at least \$1 million to update it could be wasted money if the next tenant didn't like the new look.

Audris Shau was on a subway in New York staring at advertisements when she thought up a solution.

"I saw the ads, taking up space from the floor to the ceiling," said Shau, an asset manager with New York-based Emmes Co., which owns the building and seven others in Troy's Baluster Park complex. "The idea evolved from there."

The end result is three banners designed by an interior architecture firm, each 8 feet by 12 feet, in the building's lobby. Each banner shows an entirely different view of the same space and is large enough to give prospective tenants a sense of standing in the new lobby.

"It's a way to visualize the space and take the attention away from the old ceiling tiles," Shau said.

Given the size of the building — 244,000 square feet — Shau said the landlords are holding out for a tenant to take a large block of space in the building. That user would be included in the decision.

Michelle Davis, principal with Farmington Hills-based Davis & Davis Interior Design Co., said she's never had such a request from a landlord before.

Her goal was to show different looks for the lobby. One traditional look uses rich wood and marble, while a more contemporary option employs metal and sharp edges. She calls a third image "traditional with a twist."

"It was an opportunity to give some options on what a space can feel like," she said.

Local brokers say they've never seen such an approach for a vacant lobby.

"It's creative, and definitely thinking about other ways to close on the small amount of prospects out there," said Steve Morris, managing partner of the Farmington Hills office of Newmark Knight Frank.

The Troy office market currently has a 21.9 percent vacancy rate for Class A buildings more than 20,000 square feet, according to Southfield-based Signature Associates. That's compared to a 20.1 percent vacancy rate for the region.

Shau expects the lobby designs will play well and wants to show them off at a party for real estate brokers Sept. 18.

"You have to be creative right now," she said.

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