

Couple team up to design office spaces



Michelle and Howard Davis in the receptionist area of Galaxy Plus, an office they designed. The couple complements each other well with Michelle focusing on design and Howard handling the business end. (Clarence Tabb, Jr./ The Detroit News)

BY KAREN DYBIS

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Most experts would advise would-be entrepreneurs to write up a detailed business plan before launching a new enterprise. Michelle and Howard Davis decided their marriage certificate would do just fine.

The couple met more than two decades ago at the University of Michigan's Design program. They complemented each other both personally and professionally -- Michelle Davis focused on design while Howard Davis had the head for business.

The result is Davis & Davis Interior Design Co., a Farmington Hills-based commercial design and space-planning firm. While they got their start in residential design, the firm has made its name through their classic work in everything from law firms to retail stores to casinos to religious facilities.

These days, Howard Davis said forward-thinking companies are coming to Davis & Davis with requests for clean, comfortable work spaces to both attract and retain employees in Michigan's tough economic climate.

Even a well-designed lobby or waiting

area can have a positive impact on business, Howard Davis said. And a pleasant, functional workplace can boost morale in the short and long term.

"People continue to want clean, efficient, well-thought out design," Howard Davis said. "Even in challenging environments, people think about space."

That means more employee-centered workspaces, informal meeting areas, lots of natural light and environmentally friendly spaces, Howard Davis said.

One innovative design element Davis & Davis is seeing more and more is a telephone room -- a smaller room adjacent to conference or meeting spaces where people can take cell phone calls or work on their laptops with wireless connections.

The firm's high-profile projects include the CB Ellis headquarters in Southfield, Greektown Casino gift shop in Detroit, the Mars building in Farmington Hills, Women's Health Consultants in Novi, and GalaxyPlus in Troy.

Besides interior design and space planning, other services from Davis & Davis include code and feasibility studies,

millwork design, ceiling and lighting design, construction documentation as well as furniture selection, layout and procurement.

Michelle Davis said the firm tries to be diverse in its service offerings. Their staff prides itself on being creative and efficient as well, she said.

For example, the design at Minacs -- a Farmington Hills-based call center -- is vastly different than what Davis & Davis has done at area law firms such as Detroit-based McKeen & Associates or retail stores like Zoe's Lace.

Minacs balances the sometimes tedious work its employees do with a light, refreshing and clean design. Meanwhile, McKeen has a more traditional look and feel with its darker wood tones. West Bloomfield-based Zoe's Lace is a high-end specialty store with a custom design, lots of built-in display space and an overall feminine characteristic.

"We want to create interiors that reflect a company's corporate identity," Howard Davis said.