



HAWORTH COLLECTION; COLLABORATE CHAIRS

## Felderman + Keatinge

by Brad Powell

Long ago and far away, there was once a trade event called **West Week** that included a contract furniture/commercial design element. officeinsight had just begun its publishing history. I was practicing law in New York City at the time, but was writing this publication on the weekend. I decided to take a couple of days off to visit West Week, but my first stop was an informal introduction to a design team practicing in Los Angeles, **Stanley Felderman** and **Nancy Keatinge**. At the time, their studio was in a space that, if my recollection

is correct, resembled a covered porch with an L-shaped hard wall on three sides and an insubstantial fabric ruffling in a light breeze on the fourth. Los Angeles in the Spring.

Their firm, now called **Felderman Keatinge Associates**, had just completed a local office for MTV, and I was invited for a tour. Putting together the FKA work area and the Airstream trailer in the MTV reception area suggested to me that my law-firm world, with its musty books and quiet intensity – this was a few decades ago, remember – may not



STANLEY FELDERMAN, NANCY KEATINGE



MTV RECEPTION WITH AIRSTREAM TRAILER

be completely representative of work spaces around the country. But what did I know? (Not much!) Regardless, Mr. Felderman and Ms. Keatinge were very gracious and considerate, and with this brief glimpse of their work, I inferred, on a tentative basis, that the officeinsight project may be more interesting and amusing than I had first expected.

More recently, Felderman Keatinge won an **Interiors Award** for its iCrete

project in the Small Office category. After the Interiors Breakfast, I snagged Mr. Felderman and Ms. Keatinge for a chat at the nearby **Haworth NYC** showroom, looking forward to enjoying a few minutes in that impressive and uplifting space and, perhaps, spending some more time in the FKA **Collaborate** chair, introduced by Haworth at NeoCon 2011. FKA is a small firm, but its ideas and designs are far from small or parochial, although a few currents of the Southern California fresh air are unmistakable.

**OI: I like your new Collaborate chair for Haworth, although I didn't fully appreciate its merits until I saw and sat in it in the Haworth showroom at NeoCon 2011. What a nice change of pace for the conference room, as well as its adaptability for other uses. Did Haworth come to you for the design?**

**NK:** We've worked with Haworth over the years, and we thought some of our designs would fit in their product line. We had several design suggestions, hopeful that they would select a cross-platform piece, suitable for schools, hospitality, residential and offices, and in various settings within these categories.

**SF:** There's a table line that goes with it, and the tables are scaled to move easily and have a sort of loungy, relaxed appearance, but function well as a work surface.

**OI: Those things are what I like about the line, but they are not readily apparent from a nicely posed art shot of the chair. Sometimes we need, not so much a static picture, but something that better suggests a dynamic context. What's your approach to product design?**

**SF:** We like to pare things down and use very simple fluid forms with a lot of utility and purpose, something that responds to a program without looking like it has a million components. Early on, when we were starting to address ergonomic needs, chairs had a considerable bundle of adjustment mechanisms in order to create the most comfortable chair, but very often, more is less.

In response to this issue, in the mid-1990s, we introduced a memory gel that offered support and actually formed to your body. Global and Haworth started using it in their seats and Haworth used it in their arms, and won an industrial design award for the Accolade arm.



ICRETE RECEPTION



HAWORTH COLLECTION; COLLABORATE CHAIR



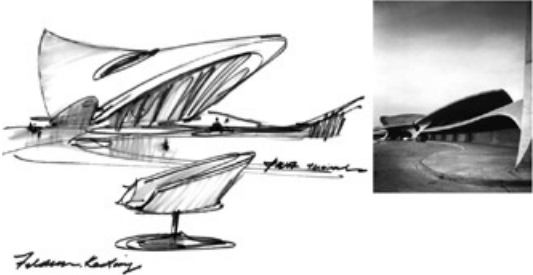
FABERGE JET



officeinsight

**OI:** Yes, I remember writing that this was a great arm looking for a chair. But, now, with Collaborate, what were your design ideas?

**SF:** We wanted a chair with a classic quality, which for me, suggests a product whose aesthetic is at least vaguely familiar and suggests longevity, or suitability through time. We have a history of working with Haworth and love working with **Franco Bianchi**, but at the time, we felt that Haworth could beneficially expand its seating. This was also when Haworth, just as Knoll and Herman Miller had done, was moving toward solutions for many environments in addition to the office, such as residential, commercial, hospitality and so on. We thought that Collaborate could add to Haworth’s momentum.



COLLABORATE SKETCH WITH EERO SAARINEN TWA TERMINAL

One visual inspiration for Collaborate was the TWA terminal at JFK, NY, by **Eero Saarinen**. The forms are morphic; the arms have a relaxed flow, but a flat surface so that your arms feel very comfortable when resting on the edge.

**OI:** It’s interesting that, at least from my familiarity, that **Felderman Keatinge** work has not always been in the classical vein.

**SF:** True, some of our work pushes the envelope, but with Collaborate, we consciously created something that responded to a need in the Haworth product line; our intent was not to create a trendy, cutting-edge design that, at the end of the day, would be more window dressing than a useful and salable design. We wanted something that had broad appeal; we wanted it to have what we call “long legs.”

**NK:** We have been working with prominent national law firms such as Sheppard Mullin and Pillsbury Winthrop to the other extreme of internet companies and entertainment, and we wanted a piece that we could specify in the wide range of those environments. Part of the flexibility is the avail-

ability of both a four-legged version and a self-returning swivel. Of course, we are all so used to a swivel capability, but it is becoming even more useful as office spaces become smaller.

**OI:** I noticed that, on the Haworth website, Collaborate is part of the “Haworth Collection,” consistent with its fine design. But my understanding is that Collaborate is intended for mainstream use. Isn’t this a little confusing?

**SF:** The **Haworth Collection** is not intended to be a company boutique. You have probably noted the increased emphasis in the cross-border, commercial-residential look and feel of products, with importance placed on, for example, Knoll Studio products and Herman Miller’s mid-century products. In the same vein, the Haworth Collection and the **Castelli** brand are emerging as a parallel stream from Haworth. Notably, while Castelli is of Italian origin, by and large the Castelli products made and distributed by Haworth here are all made in the U.S. That was also part of our goal, that every part of Collaborate would be made in the U.S.



HAWORTH COLLECTION; COLLABORATE CHAIR ARM



FELDERMAN KEATINGE OFFICES IN CENTURY CITY, LOS ANGELES

**OI: Are you working on the other products for Haworth or others?**

**SF:** We are working on some lounge seating and a large-size desk table. We are also creating some lighting concepts that are, in a way, extensions of the architecture. The idea is that the lighting system becomes an integrated design element of the wall making it a part of the construction process. Instead of lights being placed into spaces, the wall becomes part of the lighting system and the light emanates through the wall.

**OI: I know that you have been users of Haworth's venerable, and unique, Race system. When we first met over 15 years ago, you had just put it in your MTV project in LA.**

**SF:** Race, although not originally a Haworth product, is a brilliant system. It was the best built system with the best technology but the design needed updating, so, for MTV Networks we worked with Haworth on the design and introduced glass panels, designed Carnegie Xorel fabric for the panels, and designed storage units. Recently we updated Race again, designing modesty panels, new translucent privacy panels and a customized shelving system. We used it in Oversee.net, an internet company. Race remains the system with the most utility of any system.

**OI: Let's talk about your approach to project design. It seems that furniture is often an after-thought to space design. Designing "from the inside out" suggests starting with individuals and groups, then furniture and space configuration, and so on. Then, the final design concept.**

**SF:** That's true. We think you are correct. But many in the industry have moved to designing spaces with generic specifications for furniture, furnishings and finishes. We don't do that, that is, heavily rely on typicals.

In many cases when a furniture system is specified, several systems are competitively bid, and at the end of the day, the choice is price-driven. Because the system wasn't integrated into the design cohesively, it feels like an add-on. How many spaces have you walked through and the public spaces and conference rooms look



OVERSEE; RACE SYSTEM



OVERSEE; D TANK WORKSTATIONS



MTV; HAWORTH RACE SYSTEM



great, but the working areas – the spaces that actually may affect company productivity and creativity – are generic: workstations, wall systems, and even lighting.

**OI: Why is that bad?**

**SF:** Because a space is a living organism, more than the sum of its parts. Look at our projects and you will not find one where the workstations and the furniture are not part of the architecture and design. Everything has an architectural element; a chair, the shape of the arm, the shape of the wall, they speak to each other.

**NK:** Too often a client or other furniture specifier thinks they will get the best price by pricing out three or four manufacturers, bidding one against another. We, however, have had great success going to a manufacturer with our design concepts and with the idea that one or more of its products fits. We then work with that manufacturer get what is, in our experience, the same price that we would have gotten in a cruder bidding environment. Of course, we develop the relationship and, all else being equal, the project will be that manufacturer's.

**OI: How is it that you take one approach and many, if not most, take another? What are the barriers to adopting your approach?**

**SF:** In addition to a degree in architecture, I have an industrial design background, which leads to a high degree of respect for furnishings, and I have never understood that the furniture and furnishings are separate from the authorship of the space design. They are part of a unity.

My first project out of school was the offices of Fabergé. I did some drawings and the ideas were, perhaps, a little out there, organic furniture and so on. When they asked, "Can it be built?" I said, "Oh absolutely," and we did it.

**OI: I suppose your artistic capabilities have something to do with it. Rectilinear concepts are one thing, especially with CAD, but the ability to sketch and give full range to your ideas is another.**

**SF:** We think of architecture and interior design as professions, but given the state of knowledge, it is also an art, in a couple of meanings of the word.

**NK:** Yes, but these professions also work as a business, and, especially in the economies of the past decade, many professionals – and their clients – have had to struggle to survive. This drives a need for some pretty sophisticated business thinking to set the stage for the application of the art.



SHEPPARD MULLIN LA, CONFERENCE ROOM



HOLHOUSE CARLIN AND VAN TRIGT, CONFERENCE ROOM



HOLHOUSE CARLIN AND VAN TRIGT, CONFERENCE ROOM

**OI: Why should a space be about design, whatever that means? What is the role of art in the build environment and space creation?**

**NK:** When we speak of design, we are talking about the impact our designs will have on the people who are within the space. A perfect example is a recent large project for an accounting firm. They interviewed over a dozen design firms, but didn't have a definite idea of where they wanted to go. In the end, they chose us and said, "We think you can lead us to where we need to go."

**SF:** They weren't design-driven, and there was no apparent interest in art. They knew that they wanted to do something different, and I think they hired us because they felt our passion.

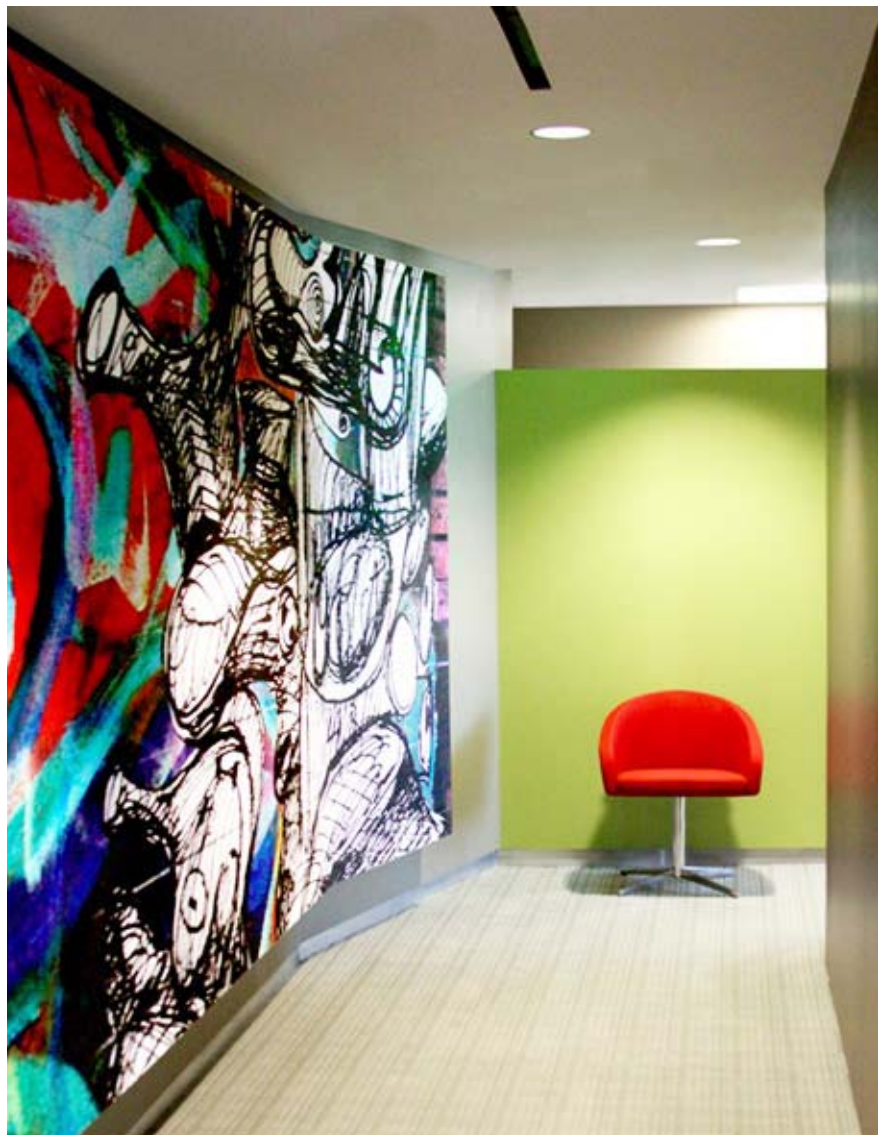
We took them on some field trips and they spoke to our clients, who acquainted them with the journey they were about to take. Viewing images is helpful, but it is much more meaningful to visit spaces we have done and speak to clients and hear how our design affects their lives and their corporate cultures. They were really blown away as we walked through spaces and secretaries would say "Thank you, thank you; we love working here." Organization leaders would say that their people love to come to work, they perform better, and that the design' has changed their lives.

These enduring relationships with clients are very important. In the past couple of years, for example, many clients came back to us wanting to downsize or add space, asking for our help. We've become part of their solution on every level because they know that, as their economic environment changes, positive or negative, the environments we create for them are going to affect their culture and their bottom line.

**SF:** Holthouse Carlin and Van Trigt LLP is a creative space; you would never think it is an accounting firm. Sitting in a conference room, you can see a 75-foot mural with my artwork. The company says that its clients are very struck by their energy and aggressive appearance. Even the receptionist wrote to say that she loves where she works. People who know nothing about design are moved by the project

**OI: How do you market the uplifting power of good design? It's easy enough to say, but you have to feel it to believe it.**

**SF:** You are right: you have to experience it. Our clients have, and that's why they come back to us with new projects. We have clients we've done four projects for. At the same time, other firms taking tours of our projects sometimes ask, "How did you get a client to allow you to do that? How did you have the fees to create that?"



HCTV MURAL



**OI: One of the problems in this industry is that clients are not able to distinguish among firms, thus creating a bidding situations. How do you handle that?**

**NK:** Unfortunately we have become a fee-driven industry. We have to create value and have found that the fees will be there if we can communicate the value of good design. Because of the economy, firms have been underbidding each other and cutting off their ability to spend the time to create spaces. As a smaller firm, we don't have as much pressure to take on projects with insufficient fees just to feed the beast.

We often get projects with adequate fees because the clients know they will get our full attention. They know we will be there throughout the design and construction process. They've talked to our clients and they see that they're going to get value for the money they will spend. For similar reasons, much of our work comes through recommendations.

**OI: How big is your firm?**

**NK:** For many years we have kept our office at 15 people. At one time, we had a much larger staff and it wasn't our vision.

**SF:** I didn't like it because I was marketing and traveling and doing everything but design. Now, with fewer people we get more interesting work and make better profits, both of which make our lives more enjoyable. As a result, we have made a decision to keep our firm small, but we compete against all the big firms. We have done large projects over 200,000 sq. ft., with ease.

Small has really worked for us and our clients.

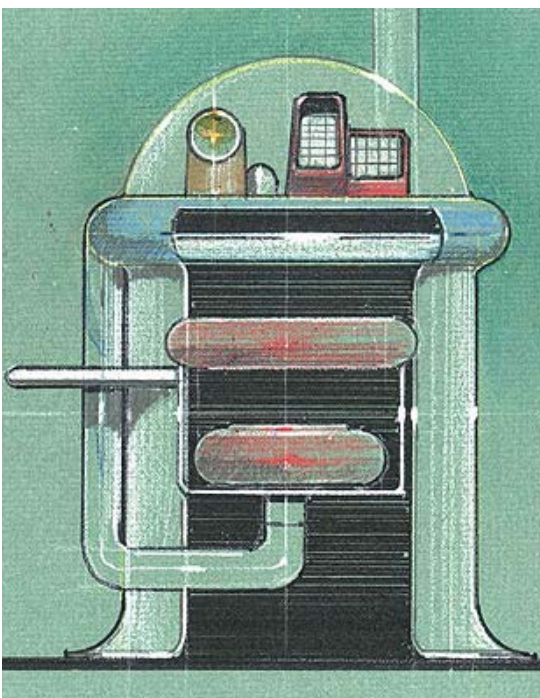
**OI: So you've designed your business in a way that you find best for yourselves?**

**NK:** Yes. I don't think I would ever want our firm to be on a scale where we weren't heavily involved. We're good at delegating responsibility, but we are a flat organization. When we are hired, we go to project meetings and we are with a project to the end. The person that's involved in the design actually meets with the client does the presentation, does the revisions, meets

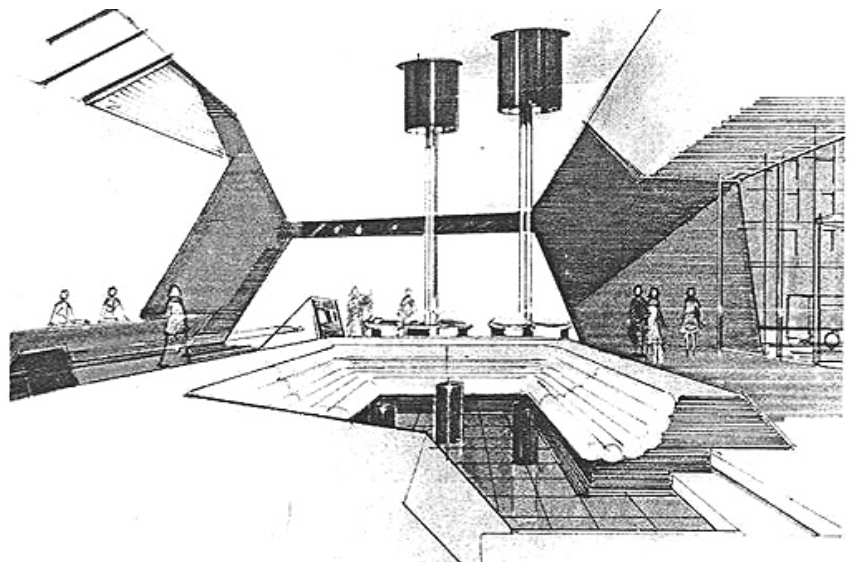
with the consultants, and is responsible for keeping that project on track, on budget, and on the mark as far as intended function and design.

**OI: That's a big advantage, but a large firm may have an advantage in keeping up with developments in the field, simply because of its size and number of projects and greater range of clientele. How do you handle that aspect?**

**SF:** With today's technology, the ability to access information and to easily collaborate creates more of a level playing field between large and small firms. We have always gone to non-industry events, such as technology conferences, and we spend a lot of time considering changes in the world that are not, strictly speaking, directly concerned with design. Our design thinking is part of how we view the world, and the best or most inspiring or valuable ideas don't necessarily come from the latest things being done by other design firms. Being a progressive thinker in this industry really requires spending much of our time looking beyond our own areas of knowledge, although we do attend industry events and participate in industry round tables.



ATM DESIGN, 1972



ATM, BURROUGHS

**NK:** The foundation of any firm is innovation and we are always questioning the norm. There is much more variety outside this industry than there is in it, and keeping in touch with some of that helps us approach each project with a fresh look and a larger vocabulary of ideas that we might use to address a situation.

We have done strategic planning with Steelcase and Interface helping them to look outside their own

industries. For Steelcase we designed the “Office of the Future” and with Interface we looked at new directions they could pursue. In the mid 90’s we were part of Interface’s team that developed the early initiatives for environmentally responsible design that included raised flooring and the concept of the “integrated office.”

When your practice is not one of dropping some design templates into a new project and adjusting them,

you are better prepared to tackle new types of projects. We are working on a 300,000 sq.-ft. federal courthouse, that will include raised flooring and we are pushing GSA to use demountable wall systems that provide acoustics and flexibility. We are very comfortable taking on a project like this, being able to understand where this new audience, if you will, is coming from and what their needs and expectations are. That’s what a “fresh look” and an “open mind” bring to a job.

**SF:** Often firms create large atriums and grand design intent. In some ways, this is monumentalism carried inward. But it’s important to look beyond at the way people are working and at their working conditions, where not much has changed. So there remains a lot of re-imagining to be done. We’re interested working with smaller spaces in class A buildings and enriching those environments. Part of that is ensuring that workstations are an integral part of the space design, and that secretaries and assistants feel a part of and as important as anything else within that space.

**NK:** It is not uncommon for a firm, perhaps a law firm, to say that its budget is probably just enough to do the public spaces and conference rooms. Whenever possible, we’ll push back, “Look; your secretaries are still working on something that was made for typewriters. With your budget, we can create a space that addressed the lobbies and your conference rooms, but also the work areas.” We do that because we care about the spaces we create and how they affect the people that use them. That’s our job, as we see it.

Our clients appreciate that, and have been pleased with the results, and so we are brought back when the next need arises, and again.



SHEPPARD MULLIN LA, WORKSTATIONS



SHEPPARD MULLIN LA, RECEPTION



**OI: So, you cost more but you deliver the value?**

**NK:** We do create the value, but while our initial contract price may be somewhat higher, the final project costs may be pretty much the same. We rarely hit a client for change orders and add-on costs, and we are always there until the project is complete.



ICRETE

**OI: Well, you've been in this business for quite a while. I've seen the house you designed and built, and I've been in the nice L.A cars you drive. Your approach seems to have worked very nicely for you. You have seen the economics and the business models in this profession change. Is yours still a viable one?**

**NK:** Absolutely. For example, we get great prices from manufacturers because, as they have told us, "We've worked with your firm and we know we're not going to lose money because of a million changes." They know that we produce an amazing set of drawings. Our design development drawings are like a construction set and we often co-create projects with a manufacturer, so they are part of the process. We are very viable.

I think the profession, generally, would be better off taking a more holistic approach to projects, as opposed to trying to toss off various aspects to others such as dealerships. Some of us are chasing our tails. A fee won't cover certain tasks, so these tasks are put

on someone else's back, and then we complain that our work-scope is being eroded, our projects are not reaching their potential, and we are not exceeding client expectations. This is a slippery slope and the profession is sliding down it. Thankfully, we've been able to seize control of our own destiny.

**OI: We have been doing a little exploration concerning art as an interior design element. As an artist, Stanley, what have you been doing?**

**SF:** We've talked about the 75-foot mural for **Holthouse Carlin and Van Trigt**. This is iCrete, the project that won, a 2012 Interiors Award. The space, it's all about movement. The space itself is a sculpture, even the lighting is part of the architecture, not an add-on. We use art in many levels, not just by including art pieces.

**SF:** At Fabergé, my first project out of school, we made a stairway into an art statement. Clients are very taken by drawings. My drawing ability has enabled me to achieve things that, otherwise, I would not have been able



FELDERMAN KEATINGE, KITCHEN PHOTO BY JULIUS SCHULMAN



FELDERMAN KEATINGE, BACKYARD

officeinsight

to achieve, such as expressing my new concept for the banking of the future in 1972 which included the development of one of the first ATMs for Burroughs, Diebolt and Mosler Corporation. Sure, we use computer renderings, but some clients prefer our hand-drawings.

**SF:** This is Pillsbury Winthrop. The reception desk is a piece of sculpture; this is a wall of water with the firm name embedded.

When we design spaces, the way-finding is not always along a direct route. Here, the conference room imposes itself in the space and you have to walk around along the window to enter; the journey is part of it. Here's a lunchroom that you can walk through to get to the other side of the space, providing an opportunity for occasional conversations. Our design of the wood surrounds for the file cabinets at Pillsbury Winthrop was incorporated into the design of the Haworth Compose product.



PILLSBURY WINTHROP, RECEPTION STATION



FABERGE STAIRS WITH STANLEY FELDERMAN



PILLSBURY WINTHROP, ENTRANCE PAST CONFERENCE ROOM





TOP CLOUD, SEOUL KOREA, ORIGINAL SKETCH



TOP CLOUD, SEOUL KOREA, RENDERING

**OI:** What's the geographic reach of your firm?

**SF:** We are LA-based, but we've done work in many locations, such as for Samsung in Seoul, South Korea. At one time, we had an office in Tokyo and we've done a lot of work there. We did a convention center in Dalian, China, for diplomats and government officials. We've had projects in Murano, Italy, for Venini, a federal courthouse in Toledo, Ohio, work for Interface in Atlanta, Georgia, and for Disney at Epcot Center in Orlando, Florida. We take interesting projects wherever they are located. ■

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STUDIO

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