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NANCY KEATINGE & STANLEY FELDERMAN

Leaps of Faith

Felderman + Keatinge ground their imaginative designs of corporate spaces with solid research to create environments that veer from the norm—and are unquestionably better because of it.

Change is not easy. In fact, making a major life change can be downright scary. It often requires a certain amount of daring and untold amounts of faith that “everything will be okay.” Of course, the upside is that after a change, things just may turn out better than okay.

That’s the scenario Stanley Felderman and Nancy Keatinge work toward on every project: convincing clients that a change won’t just be okay, it will actually be good for them. Felderman and Keatinge, partners in life and in the Santa Monica, CA, architectural firm of Felderman + Keatinge Associates, stand by the belief that *not* changing is the risk.

“As we see it, the risk in architecture and design is not in being different or innovative,” says Keatinge. “The risk is remaining static and predictable. Our goal is not to replicate the familiar—



by Diane Wintroub Calmenson

Cover and portrait photography by Jim Robinette

Because they are partners in life and in work, the creative process for Nancy Keatinge and Stanley Felderman is not limited to 9 to 5; at home and at the office, they work together to deliver design that is both functional and imaginative.





TOP AND RIGHT
Felderman + Keatinge's own offices are an example of how the two practice what they preach. Large sliding glass doors close the partners' offices for privacy, but most of the time they remain open. Comfortable work stations with tables and chairs and a fun red lips sofa provide "casual collision areas" for unscheduled meetings.

comforting as that may sometimes be. Our goal is to provide a bridge to the future. With one eye on today and the other on tomorrow, we create spaces that meet all of our clients' immediate needs in terms of creativity and functionality, but which will remain contemporary 10 or even 20 years down the road."

Despite the willingness to take a risk in their design ideas, Felderman and Keatinge only do so after exhaustive research that helps them understand whom a client really is. Thus, they are able to design spaces that are authentic and reflect a client's true culture. This adventurous attitude, combined with solid programming and business sense, makes a leap of faith seem less like a risk and more like a must-take opportunity for Felderman + Keatinge's clients.

Adventure has been the name of the game for Felderman since starting out on his own in the early 1970s with a degree in architecture from



the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. Stanley Felderman Ltd. opened in New York City, where he designed Faberge's unique corporate headquarters. In 1975, with his prediction of tellerless banking—a concept that at the time didn't exist in the banking industry—he developed one of the first ATMs for Mosler Corp. It wasn't long before word of his forward-thinking talent spread and he was jetting to the West Coast serving clients in the entertainment industry

including Columbia Pictures, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 20th Century Fox and United Artists. By 1980, he opened a Los Angeles office.

Keatinge began working with Felderman in 1984, after the two met at a political fund-raiser where, Felderman recalls, it was love at first sight. They were married in 1990 and formally became business partners in 1991. "Nancy first had to earn her stripes before she could become a partner in the firm," Felderman jokes.

Up until 1991, Keatinge handled most of the firm's marketing. However, once the partnership was established, she took a more active role in design. Both find that being life partners, as well as business partners, actually enhances their creativity.

"Being partners and being married means that our work definitely comes home with us," says Felderman. "So the creative process is not limited to 9 to 5. Ideas have a chance to germinate. We brainstorm, we disagree, and we work together as a sounding board for one another, so we can accurately translate what we know about a client into a design that is as imaginative as it is functional."

When it comes to using their imaginations, Felderman's and Keatinge's know no boundaries thanks, they say, to modern technology. In fact, they heed a new adage: function follows form. "We can envision an abstract form and technology can now bring that form to reality," says Felderman. "Years ago we were more restricted to our pre-conceived notions of what works, but not anymore. Now we are free to dream and re-make how people work."

Felderman + Keatinge has worked frequently with a number of manufacturers to modify an existing product to meet the exact needs of a project. According to Felderman, this has necessitated understanding a company's manufacturing abilities and

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working within those confines even while pushing the limit. So essentially, they have recreated products that are already in a manufacturer's line.

More recently, however, they have begun designing products on a clean slate, without the restrictions of "that's the way it has always been done." As an example, Felderman

and Keatinge point to the conceptual line they are designing for Steelcase, called "Office of the Future." One new idea lies in the line of a desk. No, not the long-standing idea of what a desk should look like. Nowadays, a desktop is on a computer screen. So do we really need what has always been called a desk? Maybe not.

Felderman has a notion of what a non-desk might look like: a system that works off of a universal ball joint from which moveable arms hold essentials like monitor, keyboard and PDA. Other products in the line are translucent panels that are lightweight and moveable and modular wall systems that carry voice and data distribution.

"The office of the future needs to be like a 'kit of parts' that allows for flexibility," says Keatinge. "With a flexible work environment, employees can alter a space to meet their individual needs. They can choose the type and placement of storage, a personal computer or a laptop, a desk or a conference table. Essentially, what



LEFT
When is a desk not a desk? When it's a function follows form idea of Stanley Felderman. This desk of the future is part of a conceptual line for Steelcase.





TOP A red boat form and galvanized steel panels, suggestive of an ocean liner, boldly announce the arrival of MTV Networks in Santa Monica.

OPPOSITE In MTV's lobby, a polished aluminum Airstream trailer serves as a playful waiting area or meeting room.

Two talking heads showcase MTV's products.

Photos by Toshi Yoshimi

they are creating is a home away from home."

Felderman + Keatinge's innovation has been formally recognized. The firm's designs were included in the Museum of Modern Art "Workspheres" exhibition in New York, the Whitney Museum exhibition, "Eight Decades of High Style Design," also in New York, and two special exhibitions at the Newport Art Museum in Southern California.

The project that established Felderman + Keatinge as reliable, but gutsy guides on the architectural road of adventure was MTV's headquarters in Santa Monica. According to Felderman,

“ We believe in building a brand from the foundation up, both literally and figuratively. Our clients turn to us because **we can help them create their entire public persona**, not simply the physical environment in which they work.”

— Stanley Felderman

the five-story, two-block-long building was once “the biggest building in Santa Monica that nobody knew about.” Not anymore. Felderman + Keatinge gave the building strong architectural imagery inside and out in order to connect MTV to the Santa Monica beachside community and create a home away from home atmosphere for employees.

The first image connecting MTV to this ocean community is the 30-foot form of a large red boat with the name MTV Networks in rough-hewn carbon steel along the side. Actually, the form conceals a power generator, but that's just a perk. The sailing metaphor gets bigger with the soaring three- and five-story galvanized steel planes that are affixed to the building's entry façade, suggesting an imposing ocean liner. Each plane projects away from the building at an angle and has a bullnose edge.

As visitors enter the oval-shaped lobby, they are greeted by a 17-foot-long, polished aluminum, 1957 Airstream trailer, which serves as a waiting area and meeting room. Next to the Airstream are two 14-foot “talking heads,” from which interactive television monitors peek out of “mouths” and “eyes.” Combining work and play, the talking heads demonstrate the company's televised products.

On the office floors, Felderman + Keatinge strove to meet their clients' desire to work in a home away from home ambiance. And although each floor has a different feel, a cohesive atmosphere pervades throughout the building, with bright paint and carpet colors, '50's-style fabric panels on furniture systems and exposed ceilings and ductwork. To create a neighborhood feel, the outside walls of offices are like street side façades of houses. Some are fronted with wood-lathe siding and casement windows, while other walls become a metaphor for low, green hedges to create a friendly, interactive environment.

Interactivity is not usually the first word that comes to mind when someone mentions a law firm. But nevertheless, that is exactly what another Felderman + Keatinge client wanted. White, O'Connor, Curry & Avanzado is one of Los Angeles' leading litigation



and utilizing lots of glass. Private offices line the perimeter and vary in size and shape in order to blur the traditional connection between office size and seniority. A raised ceiling along the offices' exterior walls creates a sense of greater space. Each office is fronted with a glass wall to allow more natural light into the core and to support the firm's move toward openness. Shades can be lowered when privacy is truly necessary.

Conference rooms are strategically located to precipitate casual encounters, as well as scheduled meetings. The law library is a mix of professionalism and comfort; an abundant collection of reference works and reading materials can be studied in the library's casual atmosphere of lounge seating and coffee tables.

The reception area is a wide, open space that includes the elevator lobby and stretches to the window wall. Conference rooms adjacent to the reception area are enclosed in glass to maintain the space's transparency. Hard wood flooring and white- and cream-colored upholstered furnishings create a feeling of calm confidence. And speaking of calm, Felderman designed an indoor Zen rock garden for the reception area—not a typical law firm attraction, but one that fits well here.

The result of this firm's willingness to change from the traditional law office design to something more innovative has been tremendous growth.

"As with most of our clients, we encouraged White, O'Connor to take more space than they actually needed at the moment and lease it out," says Felderman. "And like most of our clients, their business has grown such that they've had to take back the space. This

law firms. One would expect to find a traditional legal environment of closed offices, closed conference rooms, long hallways and serious, dark woods. And that is what clients usually found until the firm hired Felderman + Keatinge to redesign their headquarters in Century City, CA.

Besides needing more space for growth, the firm also wanted an environment that encouraged openness and interaction.

"At the time, White, O'Connor was going through an important transitional phase in its growth," says Felderman. "So we couldn't give them a space that was too far out. It still had to inspire a sense of trust and demonstrate to their clients that this was a law firm doing things professionally, but a little bit differently."

Thus, Felderman + Keatinge designed an intriguing plan of jigsaw spaces, changing ceiling heights



ABOVE The law library offers volumes of resource books in the comfort of a living room atmosphere.

RIGHT Felderman + Keatinge custom designed support staff work stations. Like the rest of the space, this work area is white, open and transparent.

Photos by Marvin Rand

proves our point that you cannot separate a business from the way its offices are designed.”

This intrinsic connection between business and the space a company occupies has led Felderman + Keatinge to build not only offices, but unique brands, too. MTV headquarters showcases the seamless connection attainable between architecture and branding. Every aspect of the design for the MTV building was conceived with the company’s unique, attitude-driven, brand identity in mind. The result is a corporate environment perfectly attuned to a corporate culture.

Felderman + Keatinge is currently designing a prototype for Japan’s fast-growing Café Croissant, which eventually will debut globally. Not only did the designers provide their client with the prototype design concept for the new café, but also extended their branding vision to the design of Café Croissant’s menus, packaging, coffee cups, uniforms and merchandising.

“We believe in building a brand from the founda-



tion up, both literally and figuratively,” says Felderman. “Our clients turn to us because we can help them create their entire public persona, not simply the physical environment in which they work.”

In addition to designing public personas and working environments, the couple has recently been busy building a new home for themselves and their two-year-old twins, Kate and Sara. The 4,100-square-foot home is located in Los Angeles’ Pacific Palisades, only two blocks from the ocean.

“We are always so careful when it comes to making sure our design for a client reflects the program,” says Felderman. “I can hardly believe that we almost fell into the trap of designing our own home without doing a program at all. But when we did stop and think about the home that would be a reflection of the way we live, it all came down to what’s important to us—family and friends.”

With this programmatic direction, the husband and wife team came up with a design revolving

around community spaces. The front doorway opens to a two-story entry. A few steps up or down from the entry and there is access to all of the home's sections: the girls' bedrooms, the community living spaces including kitchen, dining room, living room and den; and the master suite and studio, which will serve as a place for the family to paint, work or watch TV. Breaking away from smaller separated rooms and small windows, the house is filled with open areas and large sliding glass doors. "The girls will be able to ride their bikes from the front of the house right through to the back," laughs Keatinge.

The exterior of the house has a pigmented plaster finish with galvanized aluminum and glass. Inside, the space is almost entirely white except for the wood floors and cabinetry that are quarter-sawn oak for a traditional accent in an otherwise thoroughly modern home. The family plans to move in during the first part of 2003.

Whether they are foregoing traditional home design or law office design, Felderman and Keatinge embrace change in order to encourage growth. Yes, they know that more than likely such change requires an initial leap of faith—they had to make that same jump before designing their unusual concept for a home. Nevertheless, after taking many such leaps with a variety of clients, they are certain that the landing place is better. In fact, the two have made the jump so many times that they have developed an equation for the process: Intelligent programming + good design + a willingness to change = growth. ¶



The New York City law firm of Brown, Raysman, Millstein, Felder & Steiner wanted a West Coast feel for its very East Coast offices. Felderman + Keatinge chose bright colors, an abundance of glass, highly contemporary furniture and natural light to bring the ambiance of L.A. to N.Y.C.

Photo by Andrew Bordwin



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Imagination in Cyberspace

You don't have to travel far to experience first-hand the imagination and adventurous attitude displayed by Felderman + Keatinge. A visit to its entertaining Web site (www.fkadesign.com) is both enjoyable and informative—and, like the spaces they create, sure to leave a lasting impression.

The site features original drawings by Stanley Felderman that are anything but static and predictable. Slightly futuristic in nature, animation and sound combine to

create such things as flying saucers, talking heads, flashing television screens, wind-up stick figures and bubbles rising in the ocean. These illustrations serve to draw the visitor into the site and accompany them throughout their stay. Sections within the site provide the requisite information (firm philosophy, portfolio, awards, works in progress, press releases, commentary, etc.), but do so in a most amusing fashion.

Animation and design for the site was provided by Guidance Solutions.

