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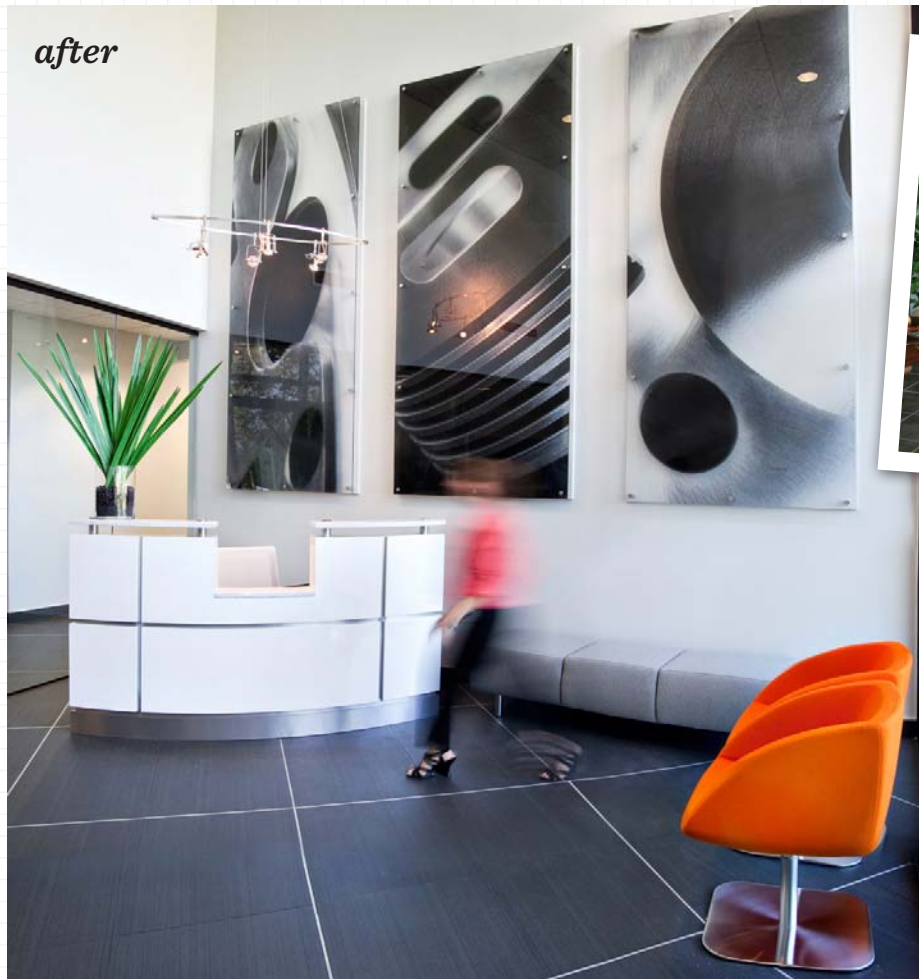
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after



before

Resources: Tile: Melcer Tile, Lighting: Charleston Lighting, Macro photography: R Lee Morris of Mt. Pleasant, Custom receptionist desk: Low Country Mill & Casework, Guest chairs: Sandler Seating, Guest bench: Wulbern Koval

breaking the mold

Local interior designer Lorraine Vale utilizes her background in metalworking to sculpt a stunning commercial space

When the owners of a tool and die manufacturing plant in Goose Creek recently entered retirement stage, a local company stepped in and purchased the business with aspirations of breathing new life into it. The building and its interior, although architecturally beautifully designed, needed a metamorphosis in order to take its place in the 21st century and compete in global commerce. The new owner knew he needn't look far to find the

perfect person for the job, starting with the reception area: designer Lorraine Vale of House Interiors, whom the owner and his wife had engaged for the design of their home's interior. Primarily a residential designer, Lorraine felt drawn to the unique commercial project. "I spent my first career in jewelry design," she explains. "Majoring in sculpture and light metals at the Rhode Island School of Design, I learned to fabricate bowls and vessels out of copper sheet

metal, and cast in precious metals. When presented with the challenge to re-design the reception area, I was able to pull from my background for inspiration."

Choosing to honor the steel fabrication at the company's core, Lorraine sought to interject the space with spun, fabricated, and extruded metals. Although relatively small in square footage, the reception area of the building seems spacious, largely due to two expansive glass walls and soaring height. Realizing this, Lorraine decided she would make broad, bold statements in the space and keep the furnishings to a minimum...a decision that aligned well with the vision of the company's owner. "At our first meeting, in the existing reception area," says Lorraine, "the client shared with me what he expected from the redesign. Basically, he wanted potential customers, who would be executives from companies around the world, to step into this space and their first impression would be that of a welcome area that is 'world class and cutting edge,' reflecting the direction of the new company." Her wheels began turning and she immediately knew the potential the space held and what it could become.

To achieve that dramatic first impression the client was looking for, Lorraine conceived the 10' x 4' laminated photographs that would fill the enormous wall, then began to infuse the room with a combination of aluminum and stainless steel elements.

“For starters, we had aluminum rods installed to create a 4’ x 4’ grid between the floor tiles, befitting to the scale of the space. Lorraine developed this idea on a routine visit to Melcer Tile. “As soon as I told Phyllis Kaplowitz at Melcer Tile my concept for the space, she said, ‘You have to see this brand new tile that came in!’ It was perfect.” Lorraine goes on to describe the space, stating, “The custom light fixture and most of the furniture has some brushed metal accent. In addition, the aluminum ‘stand-off’ is an element that is repeated throughout the space—lifting the quartz counter top off the custom desk, and the photos a few inches away from the wall. In presenting the design concept boards to the client, he was able to see the all the elements - tile, aluminum rods, furniture, fabrics, ex cetera. However, it was such a departure from what was currently there it was difficult to imagine it all coming together; “He needed to trust me,” remembers Lorraine.

In the space, the client gave Lorraine full creative ability to do what she thought needed to be done. Originally, the receptionist desk was cut off from the reception area; the desk was in the next room with a cutout in the wall and a granite ledge, standard to this kind of area. The client wanted to move the receptionist out front to greet visitors, using the under-utilized space. To meet the client’s needs, Lorraine designed a glossy white desk with a stainless steel grid mimicking the pattern in the floor; the desk was then manufactured locally at Low Country Mill and Casework in Ladson, SC.

For impact, Lorraine chose a combination of a few - but bold - design elements. Three massive photography panels, which was the designer’s concept, fill one large wall. The close-up images are actual metal parts manufactured at the plant, with each piece featured being no larger than 5-inch by 5-inches. The images were shot by Lee Morris of R Lee Morris Photography in Mount Pleasant, using digital macrophotography. To maximize the art’s impact, the enterprising designer sent digital copies to a company in Seattle, who produced black and white images on transparent film, en-

larged to 10-foot by 4-foot panels and set behind Plexiglas. Track lighting in an oblong shape from Charleston Lighting and Interiors complements the chic, industrial appeal of the mounted macrophotography. Lorraine kept colors to a minimum, working in charcoal, grey, black and white; contemporary, Italian visitors’ chairs upholstered in bold orange wool provide the only jolt of color.

Upon completion of the reception area, Lorraine was anxious to hear the client’s impression of her creative take on the space. “Magnificent’ was his word,” she says. “He is reserved, so I knew he was more than pleased with his new reception area. Lesson learned...trust your designer. If you hire an expert, trust them to carry out your vision using their knowledge and creativity. In mutual respect, you’ll discover confidence. A professional will listen to you and processes everything you have told him or her, and the result will be a space that reflects just what you wanted.” It was this trust which played a pivotal role in the Lorraine’s seamless transition from residential to commercial work, giving her the freedom to work in the broad strokes it required to create the bold statement she envisioned. ❖

For more information, contact House Interiors at (843) 216-2002 or visit houseint.com.

VIDEO EXCLUSIVE

Check out our full interview with Lorraine at charlestonhomeanddesign.com/videos or take a photo of the QR code below using an application on your mobile phone or computer. For more information on QR codes, visit page 26.



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