

CONTACT: Carolyn Izzo-Feldman  
Carolyn Izzo Integrated Communications  
845/358-3920 (ph) • 845/358-3927 (fax)  
[cizzo-feldman@ciicnews.com](mailto:cizzo-feldman@ciicnews.com)

## WHAT YOUR OFFICE SAYS ABOUT YOU

*One of New York City's Most Influential Interior Designers Explains The Value of a "Space" Lift*

Carol Tobin is a principal at Tobin+Parnes Design Enterprises, a full-service architectural and interior design firm dedicated to providing outstanding design solutions for a broad range of clients on an a highly individualized basis. Examples of properties that have benefited from Tobin+Parnes' one-of-a-kind designs include Floris of London, Directors' Guild of America, Lancôme, Episode International, Mothers Work, Hebrew Home for the Aged at Riverdale, The Riese Restaurant Organization, the Parker-Meridien Hotel and more. Tobin+Parnes has also restored numerous NYC landmark locations, including New York City's famed Paramount Building (with a focus on the minute details of its clock, globe and cherished marquee).

*Does the interior design of one's office effect the message that visiting clients receive?*

Design has a profound effect -- both consciously and subconsciously -- as to what potential clients see and feel about the company they are being introduced to. The messages being sent are both hidden and overt. The company's value system, history, solidity and stability are all being communicated. This is true for any organization, but it is especially important for companies that invest or otherwise handle large sums of money for their clients. If you're going into an office suite with a nest egg to invest, you want to know that you can trust the company in whose care you intend to leave it.

*Can trust be communicated to a potential client?*

Yes. For trust to be communicated, the client must be comfortable with your decision-making ability. The environment must reflect your company's investment "smarts" -- and that gets played out very clearly in how the office is designed. So much of investment strategy is dependent on technological communication; the client wants to know that you have a genuine respect for technology, for speed. Potential clients are seeking not only an environment that communicates status and success but one that suggests that the company's executives like people, that they know how to manage, and that they are in control of their staff.

*How does color figure into the message a company sends?*

The experience of perceiving color is an emotional one. Color perception can depend on one's cultural history or background or age -- which is to say that certain colors trigger certain responses from certain people. A young person, for example, may perceive a red wall as exciting and titillating whereas an older person may perceive it as an indication of some inherent danger. Some colors, on the other hand, have more or less stock associations. Blue is associated with either royalty or sadness; green is associated with either nature or money, and so on. A company needs to know its market to determine a color scheme and the associations

it is most likely to suggest. But unless we are talking about extremes -- such as the red walls -- materials may be more important than colors. The more precious the materials the better. Fine woods that are beautifully detailed, different kinds of inlay details, stone, glass, etc., can go very far in suggesting status and inspiring trust.

For better or worse, people make judgements based on what they see. Whether your company's "good taste" emanates from the artwork, the furnishings or the colors, as long as it is present, your company will be perceived as having elevated sensibilities. Elevated sensibilities are something most people relate to or at least like to think they relate to. Design is one way of reaching out to make your potential clients identify with you. You've got to make them feel that the company is composed of intelligent sensible people who have their finger on the pulse of what is going on in the investment/financial market. If you're going to offer state-of-the-art technological communications among your services, you'll want "state-of-the-art" to resonate in your furniture and furnishings and design scheme generally.

*How does the use of space effect client perception?*

Space perceptions have to do with movement and flow. A client wants to see a controlled environment where the principals and staff have space to work well, to think, and to provide privacy for the clients they service. If someone were to walk into an office space where employees were jammed on top of one other, they would have a subliminal understanding that the office was too crowded for anyone to be able to properly ponder their financial future. Is a cluttered office going to make you feel good about taking your \$10 million and giving it to this company? No! You want to know that the office is well planned, reflecting a well-managed firm, and that the professionals have enough space and solitude around them to ensure that they can really do their job and that you can have a private conversation with them without distractions.

*How do you determine what your clients need out of their office spaces?*

We start our conversations with our clients by getting them to talk about who *their* potential clients are. I have some clients with whom you cannot invest or start an account unless you have at least \$1million. That sets up certain parameters. A company like that would want to communicate solidity, stability, quality and a strong value system. They would want to create an environment that generates trust and reflects on-going success.

So how do you communicate success? If a woman wants to communicate success she might buy a mink coat or wear a large diamond ring. A man might have a flashy watch or a well-designed BMW. If you go into some of the larger Wall Street firms, more often than not you will find yourself in an environment that reeks of the tradition and the sexiness of money: Upholstered walls, oriental carpeting, lots of leather furniture, natural stone -- the best quality materials that can possibly be selected in spaces that are not only well designed but also well maintained. Immediately, potential clients know this is an organization where rational thinking -- forward thinking, forward planning -- is going on, that day-to-day operations are being taken care of and they will be well taken care of too.

If you're planning a special dinner with a special someone at an elegant restaurant, you will dress in a certain way. You will not dress the way you do for lesser occasions. That's what we try to do in offices. We encourage our clientele to put that best face forward -- with technology, communications systems, lighting, furniture, furnishings, materials, textures -- to ensure that they appeal to the clients they want to appeal to. We encourage them to select the best that can be purchased within the limitations of their design budget.

You want to communicate that you are operating at a certain level and that you're comfortable operating at that level. You wouldn't say to a client, "Gee, this is so exciting! You're my first \$6 million client!" You want to appear to be someone who is used to taking checks that size. You want to communicate that you've been there, you've done that and you've done it well. And you are still doing it and doing it well.

Depending on the nature of the institution, your successes can be communicated quite overtly. If you have taken part in some public offering or in various mergers and/or acquisitions, don't be afraid to demonstrate that. Plaques and photographs commemorating successful transactions have a place in office environments. They are little bells and whistles that go a long way in saying, "We've arrived; you can trust us. We're not going out of business tomorrow." Likewise, the smaller appointments -- clocks, paperweights, vases, frames -- deserve a high level of attention to detail as well. Ask yourself where your clients shop, and you will know where to go to purchase such items. The differences in the selection of materials and colors and lighting may give one Park Avenue law firm a youthful aspect and another the feel that it has been around since the beginning of time.

#### *When is it necessary to consult an interior designer?*

As soon as you can. If you are a business owner who is looking at space, it's never a bad idea to bring your architect and interior designer with you. These professionals will see more in raw space and will understand more about how the space needs to lay out -- based on the building area, mechanical systems, window fenestration -- and how those spaces will relate to the building core elements like the elevator banks and restrooms. It's never too soon to bring the professionals on board. In the end, it will save time and money. We try to sit down with our clients before they even start looking for space so that we can develop what's called a program.

#### *How does a client develop a program?*

We ask clients to give us a list -- or we help them to develop a list -- of who their senior people are, who their junior people are, who the staff are, who needs to be where, who needs to work next to so and so, whose secretary needs to be nearby -- what the internal relationships are and, frankly, the internal politics of the company. We also ascertain how many conference rooms they will need, how many people they will want to seat in each of them, whether the conference rooms should open up into each other with some kind of flexible wall system, whether there will be very large press conferences, board of directors meetings or other events, etc.

We also work with them to determine the space required for the mail room, the server room, the kitchen and any spaces particular to their business activities. Once we have all that information, we can ascribe square footage numbers to each of the function areas. Then the transition spaces -- hallways and corridors that lead from one function area to another -- must be taken into account. (We try to keep transition space to a minimum to keep waste down.) At that point we can generate program development and feasibility studies. When we have the opportunity to look at space with our clients, we can do preliminary space layouts for them so that they can really see how a particular space works and why one space has the advantage over another.

This is all part of the service we provide. We listen to our clients very carefully, even if they are only able to tell us what *doesn't* work for them, and we translate what we hear into a projection of what their needs are. Then, based on our experience with particular types of office environments, we take these projections and create a master list which provides us with a more detailed projection of how much space they really need. And then, within a given range, we look at spaces with them that fit into that category.

Some spaces lay out differently than others, obviously. You can be looking at 10,000 square feet of office space but because of the configuration, it may not be suitable for the client. Sometimes a smaller space with a "programmatic" layout may actually work better because of the building's perimeter footprint, the layout of windows, and the general relationship of the space to core elements such as elevators, stairs, and public toilets.

It's a very satisfying experience to see it all come together for a client, to see that our success with them helps to generate their success with their clientele.