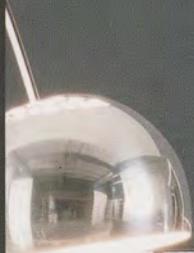


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When Ideas Design Construction & Management in Vancouver was asked to create new offices for Rare Indigo, a destination and event management company, the challenge was to design a space that works, is fun and that didn't cost very much.



FUNK fits the budget

By **Janet Collins** Photos by Ed White

The doors of Rare Indigo's 6,300-square-foot office (the elevator actually opens onto the company's full floor space at 1201 West Pender in the heart of Vancouver's downtown business core) open onto an unusual corporate culture. Bright yellow, orange, purple and lime green dominate the space. The atmosphere blends the energy of a carnival with the spunk of a kid's room.

"It's a far cry from the offices we designed for Rare five years prior," says Céline Pitre, principal of Ideas Design & Construction Management Inc. "That space was about half the size of this location, and we designed it around a Canadian folk art theme. Now it's more polished, but still fun."

Fun is what Rare Indigo Destination Marketing Inc. is all about. The destination and event management company pulls out all the stops for its Fortune 500 clients. "This environment inspires and keeps the energy up," says Carla Felicella, director of event production for Rare Indigo. "We're doing serious work for our clients, and we don't take our work lightly. But that doesn't mean we can't have some fun."

This is an office where the management gets the seating around the building core and the creative thinkers get the prime window space. Those windows look out onto some of the best mountain and ocean views in Western Canada, the backdrops to Rare's destination campaigns.

"It might sound cliché, but the biggest challenge of the project was the budget," says Pitre. The Ideas team had only \$20/square foot to spend on converting the 40-year-old building's multi-tenant space into the full-floor Rare offices. "There was lots of open space, so that helped spread out the budget," says Pitre. "At one point we even had to think about the number of coats of paint we were going to use."

Creativity took over where the budget left off. A pre-existing Knoll office system was pressed into service in the new space as was some other furniture and lighting fixtures the client already had on hand. Inexpensive additions came from Ikea, such as the boardroom table and chairs (the "Swiss cheese" chairs) with acrylic



mouse-shaped memo holders cum place card holders sporting photos of wedges of cheese all playing on the notion of a space for the Big Cheeses of the company and their Big Cheese clients.

Colourful three-dimensional artwork fashioned from foamcore adds another playful touch. "The artwork is by Insite Display, the same people who make the centerpieces for our events," says Felicella. "It's a great way to show off their work, too."

As with any reno project, the office conversion wasn't all fun and games. "The established core caused some real challenges," says Pitre. "The long angled wall near the freight elevator wasn't a planned design element, it was simply a cheap way to cover some very bad surfaces. We did the same thing with the ceilings. It was

so much cheaper to lower the ceiling and cover the wall than to rip them out and do them over. Our office manager [Renata Crowe] calls it 'bricking up the bodies.'" The angle of that wall ended up being a clever way to direct the visitor's view to the waterfront scene outside.

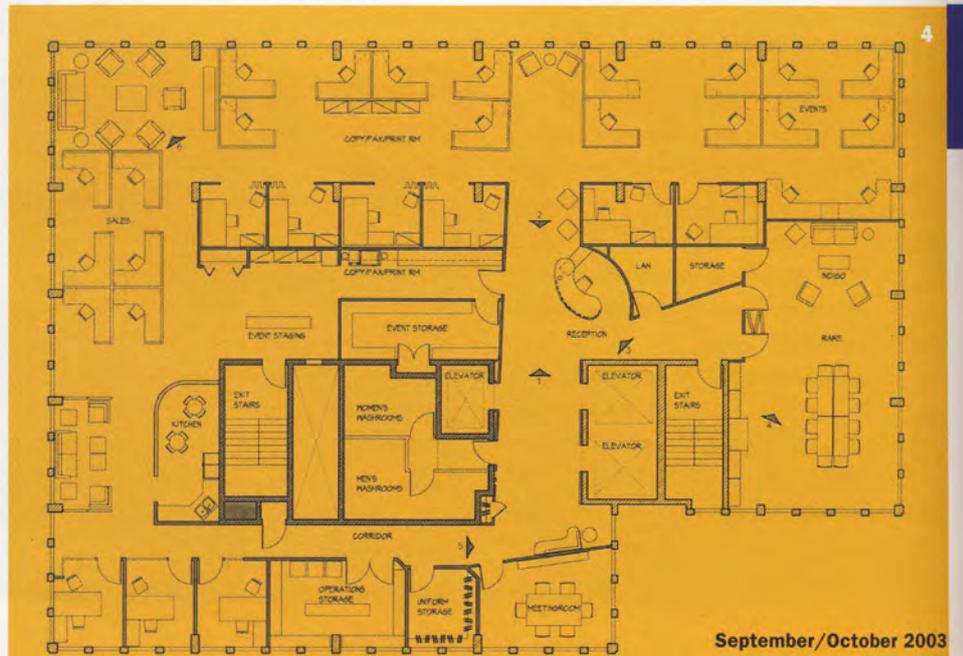
Ideas expertise with design/build projects made the job easier. With clients as diverse as crisp/clean conservative Anderson Consulting (for which Ideas created a "hotelling" office in the real sense of the word) and the Heenan Blaikie law offices to more traditional spaces recalling ethnicity such as the five Kirin restaurants and Placer Dome's corporate headquarters, Ideas has seen and done just about every type of design/build interior design project you can think of - and then some.

1. The spacious reception area can be converted into space for a cocktail party or sit-down dinner when needed.

2. The boardroom includes a playful sitting area for more relaxed meetings.

3. The "portholes" in the hallway doors are some of the subtle decor references to the travel and destination side of Rare's business.

4. Note the slight angle to the long wall along the elevator corridor - it hides a lot of problems the building's previous tenant left behind.





5. The funky waiting area occupies one end of the elevator corridor. A window that looks out onto the coastal mountains and surrounding waterfront form the opposite terminus point.

6. Office doors took a bath in this design. While the solution may not have pleased everyone, it projects the sense of fun that underlies Rare's business.

"You need tight control over the budget on a job like this from the very beginning of the design stage," says Pitre. "You have to know how to juggle things in order to keep on track."

Pitre likens her approach to work to an early passion for algebra. "I remember the amount of creativity needed to solve algebraic equations," she says. "Algebra gets you to look at stuff objectively, to see how you can get the different balls to fall in line. It's like trying different design solutions until you hit on one that works for the client and stays in line with the budget restrictions." (Now in her spare time Pitre likes to sculpt colourful birds and other creatures from papier-mâché – another activity that hones problem-solving skills to make limited materials and colours into a beautiful design.)

Of course, it helped with the Rare Indigo offices to have a client that was willing to be a bit funky and loud. "It helped a cheap budget have more oomph," says Pitre.

"Essentially the greatest punch comes from the paint." That painted punch is enhanced in the reception area by a polished concrete floor. Rare's corporate logo and graphic icons of the industry were acid-etched and painted onto the floor before the high gloss finish was applied. Other industry references can be seen in the "porthole" windows found in many of the doors that line the reception area hallway.

The spacious reception area is one of the most versatile spaces in the office. When needed, it can be converted into use for client receptions or other events.

An event staging area and storage area are strategically located nearby to aid setup for such occasions.

Still wondering just how tight the budget was? Look at the "doors" of the individual workers' offices. Look like shower curtains? That's because they are! "It's an on-going joke," admits Felicella. "It would be good to have a proper door so everyone could have more privacy, but the budget was way too low. Thankfully our offices are always changing, evolving, so one day our real doors might come. At least we have a psychological 'door' for now. That helps a bit."

Felicella is also hoping a future budget will be able to accommodate some sort of presentation system or product display "like a continuous slide show or video" in the waiting area near the reception desk. 

Sources

Carpet: Centura Carpets

Custom concrete floor: Aka Beton

Custom reception desk: Straight Line Designs

Design team: Céline Pitre, Deanna Hayko and Aida Siple

Foamcore artwork: Insite Display

Furnishings: Ikea, Knoll (Reff office systems)

Interior design and design/build: Ideas Design & Construction Management Inc.

Paint: General Paint

