



In Halifax, the central feature of the reception area is a stone fireplace wall. Sitting in front of the fireplace is Krug's oval Napa table in Appalachian cherry and Griffen lounge chairs, upholstered in Spinneybeck leather, with legs finished in matching Appalachian cherry. The Oriental rug was purchased locally. The space was designed by Susan Troup Design.

Think nationally,

By Kelly Rude

local

When it's time to redo a number of branch offices, should one design work for all or can a corporate aesthetic be interpreted in a regional manner? That was the question facing Canadian wealth management company RBC Dominion Securities. Its answer was to choose transitional as the design aesthetic reflecting the firm's corporate image, while assigning local designers to interpret that image with regard to their regional culture.

From its first small office in 1901 at 26 King Street East in Toronto to the opening of branch offices in Montreal, Vancouver and Winnipeg, through a variety of mergers and acquisitions, Dominion Securities, now RBC Dominion Securities (wholly owned by the Royal Bank since 1996), has grown to become Canada's largest full-service investment firm.

When it came time to renovate offices across the country, it was decided to present RBCDS' corporate identity reinterpreted to reflect the local business culture as well. Completed projects to date include those in Halifax, Toronto and Vancouver.

"RBCDS is focused on meeting the wealth management needs of affluent Canadians and is recognized and associated with trust, confidence and stability," explains company national director David Agnew. "So a transitional design [between traditional and contemporary] was needed to incorporate a specific look and feel that reflects this particular segment of clients, says Scott Fischer, RBCDS senior manager real estate, who together with Tina De Luca, assistant manager spearheaded the national branch design program.

"This transitional concept is at the core of every design created in the branch environments, inviting both to clients and advisors," adds De Luca. Natural materials such as stone and wood

Photos by Andrew Ross and Ed White



Toronto's reception area includes two Cumberland classic lounge chairs in black Elmosoft leather with satin stainless steel legs, a square table with clear glass and double bar satin chrome base from Prismatic Designs, and a cantilevered reception bench of high density foam upholstered in black Elmosoft leather, custom designed by Smith Grimley Harris Design Partners.

reinforced the company's strong tradition and created inviting spaces, while ergonomic and environmental concepts resulted in comfortable places to do business.

"Since the nature of the business requires investment advisors to develop close collaborative relationships with their clients, they had specific ideas for design elements, particularly in branch meeting areas," De Luca continues. Haworth office products, through Toronto's Brigholme Interiors Group, were specified throughout the three branches and local interior design firms were assigned the task of incorporating the needs of the local business culture into the regional installations.

Halifax

When the landlord of the branch office in Halifax needed to take over existing RBCDS office space, the company saw this "as an opportunity to redefine the corporate image, streamline the function and upgrade furniture solutions," explains Dawn MacLachlan, senior designer at Susan Troup Design, Halifax, which was commissioned to create the new RBCDS east coast environment.

The chosen regional aesthetic is one of maritime traditionalism with the new offices designated for top producers overlooking Halifax Harbour. Local artists are featured throughout the interior, including a model ship of the HMCS Victory, crafted by a client and housed in a custom built-in glass enclosure, straddling the boardroom wall.

A focus on smart space planning and new workstations for investment advisors and their assistants maximize communication and help define work teams. "Traditional finishes were maintained yet (the requisite) transitional design was achieved by the use of striking colours on walls and furnishings whenever possible," says MacLachlan. An inti-

mately scaled, casual welcoming reception area, complete with fireplace and featuring work by Peter Dykhuis, winner of the RBCDS annual art competition, appears more like a private club than corporate lobby, taking pride of place in the new office.

Toronto

The Toronto location, on the 23rd floor of the Bay Wellington Tower in the BCE Place complex, also needed to provide an inspiring space for investment advisors and their teams. "The requirement was for a cohesive look to attract and retain the very best people (in this market)," says Susan Jefferson, creative director of Toronto's Smith Grimley Harris Design Partners, assigned to design the new Toronto branch/company headquarters.

Access to the grand view and natural daylight was important. The reception area needed to appear expansive and yet provide a dual function of housing the private "cage" space to meet security compliance requirements. This was achieved through the use of large spans of glass, floating architectural elements and rich materials. The end result is an approachable open reception area that offers the necessary security.

Large shared offices were developed where teams could work closely with one another or break out to individually tailored workplaces. Lounge areas in each team office facilitate spontaneous and relaxed interaction while private client rooms offer confidential or quiet spaces to meet and work. All office walls are a combination of clear glass and full height doors, frames, and panelling. The use of a higher baseboard in lieu of floor to ceiling glass "gives the space a slightly traditional feel with a modern edginess. And sliding doors and clean architectural detailing give the space a contemporary sensibility," Jefferson explains.

Values like strength, security, and longevity played an important role



The reception in the Vancouver project includes the Brandon series of soft seating, and coffee and side tables by Keilhauer; Xilo white porcelain tile; custom area carpet by the Toronto studio Creative Matters, and the reception desk, fabricated by Ace Construction, was custom designed by Kasian Architects.

in the selection of finishes. A strong reference to nature and the Canadian landscape: natural stone, polished limestone floors, rich cherry wood, and textured wall coverings; and a dramatic colour palette provide an inviting, relaxed environment yet with enough corporate presence to mean business.

Vancouver

The Vancouver branch, designed by Kasian Architecture Interior Design and Planning, is located in the Park Palace building in the city's downtown core. The 34,000-square-foot project involved consolidating several office areas into two floors with an integrating stair and a common, unifying design. The objective was a space that would portray the company's success, traditional values, leadership and innovation, and promote staff pride in the environment. Maximizing planning efficiencies to accommodate

existing and future staff growth and re-using existing furniture where possible also was part of the design process.

After visioning sessions with the client, Kasian decided on a theme of "understated elegance whereby the company's traditional values were reflected in contemporary designs and finishes rather than relying on a traditional design vocabulary," explains Kasian principal Carol Jones. The result is clean lines, minimalist detailing, a warm, neutral palette, dark wood and light flooring slabs.

Design adjectives like traditional, contemporary and transitional are relative terms. Less tension in the warm spirit of the relaxed environment in Halifax, more corporate influence in the sleek interior of the Toronto office/company headquarters and in the dark pristine beauty of the Vancouver office renders each installation unique. Yet each environment speaks about the bigger values of the corporation, namely clarity and stability.

To achieve a unified corporate statement yet express regional culture was no small feat for the client and designers. And the very nature of the exercise and the final results speaks not only to the culture of RBCDS but also to Canada's national traditional values, contemporary vision and transitional ethos. □