

REAL ESTATE WEEKLY

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 23, 2010

CONSTRUCTION & DESIGN

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Little bit goes long way when updating public spaces

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With the competitive nature of the commercial office market and the hesitation by owners and managers to invest a large number of dollars to upgrade their commercial properties, public spaces and entrances, we investigated numerous ways to update and improve public spaces without totally renovating the space.

Many if not all commercial building lobbies in New York have stone clad walls and stone or terrazzo floors. Both stone and terrazzo easily allow for their reinvention. For instance, when you fill and hone old polished travertine, it transforms into a softer, low-luster limestone, aesthetically very different from what it used to be. An example of this may be seen at 80 Pine Street and One Battery Park Plaza. Refinishing existing stone surfaces can change the overall appearance of the public space.

Another approach to altering a stone or terrazzo floor is to remove sections of the existing floor and to replace these sections with contrasting alternative stone or terrazzo pavers. At 1221 Avenue of the Americas, we restored the existing lobby terrazzo floors in the lobby but replaced the terrazzo with limestone in the elevator lobbies. This allowed us to architecturally separate the elevator lobbies from the main lobby.

A similar approach can be taken with metal surfaces and finishes. Most metals can be oxidized to change their inherent color. Their texture can also be refinished to a polished, satin or brushed finish. Most metal restoration companies are capable of performing these methods of oxidization and refinishing. At 600 Lexington Avenue, we specified that the existing brass window frames be darkened to an almost black finish so that they would match the adjacent black granite.

A building's main entrance can also be updated without removing the entire existing entrance line. By replacing the entrance doors and address signage and restoring the existing entrance framework, you can create a building entrance that looks completely new. Our firm accomplished this successfully at all three 80 Pine Street lobby entrances.



80 Pine Street
photograph by: Hakan Topal



485 Madison Avenue
photograph by: Elliott Kaufman

One of the most overlooked aesthetic items in public spaces is the lighting. In the last ten years, many existing incandescent fixtures have been lamped with compact fluorescent lamps. Although noble in their desire to save energy and reduce costs, these fixtures now provide less desirable and possibly inadequate lighting compared to that of the original lamped fixtures. Most lighting fixtures are photometrically engineered based on the lamp originally specified for them.

Adding accent lighting can aesthetically improve a public space by emphasizing specific surfaces, planes or objects and thus orchestrate one's perception of the entire space. The use of lighting to enhance a design can be seen at our lobby design for 485 Madison Avenue.

The placement of art within a public space is another method of updating a space. By commissioning a work of art or purchasing a piece exclusively for the space, art can become the main focal point in the space. Examples of this can be seen at Rockefeller Center, the Chrysler Building and the American Express Tower at the World Financial Center. Installing the proper lighting to illuminate the art assists in establishing its presence and importance.

(See our website www.specterdesouza.com for more images of the projects mentioned).