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Annual Young Designers
Pierre Michel Haute Coiffure and Beauté
by Robert D. Henry Architects
SHO CHO restaurant by HITM
Furniture Systems
Annual Design Business Outlooks

Patrons are wowed by the enormous, intricately detailed reception desk and the awesome double-height space of Pierre Michel salon.

Aromatic Architecture

Now Manhattan's elite are impressed not only by the talent of two hair styling veterans, but by the exquisite design of the Pierre Michel salon by Robert D. Henry Architects

By Danine Alati

"God is in the details." When Mies van der Rohe made that assertion over 30 years ago, he could not have possibly known how appropriate his observation would be in describing a high-end salon in New York City. But the duplex salon of Pierre Michel Haute Coiffure and Beauté, a new collaboration for hair styling experts Pierre Ouaknine and Michel Obadia that has been carefully designed by New York-based Robert D. Henry Architects, stands as an exemplary illustration of van der Rohe's words.

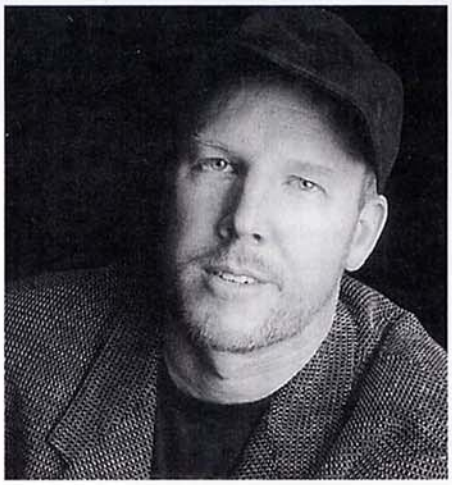
Attention to detail has certainly made this chic salon more than just a meeting place for ladies who lunch; it enhances the holistic experience of a day at the salon for patrons clad in diamonds and fur as well as those in jeans and sneakers. Amongst the hustle and bustle of Manhattan's Lexington Avenue, exquisite design details and a spacious layout create an atmosphere unlike the traditional beauty shop. "We wanted to engage all the senses in the design," explains Bob Henry, principal of Robert D. Henry Architects, "more than just visual, but the tactile and what one smells. We like to say that if you can smell our architecture, we've done a good job with the interiors."

The dramatic double-height entrance for the street-level salon creates vertical interest, and sheer drapery falling from the ceiling accentuates the volume. "We want to push the maximum condition further by fully integrating that second story into the space," says Henry. Instead of becoming bogged down with budgetary constraints or space limitations, the designers focused on resolving issues of functionality while attending to delicate details.

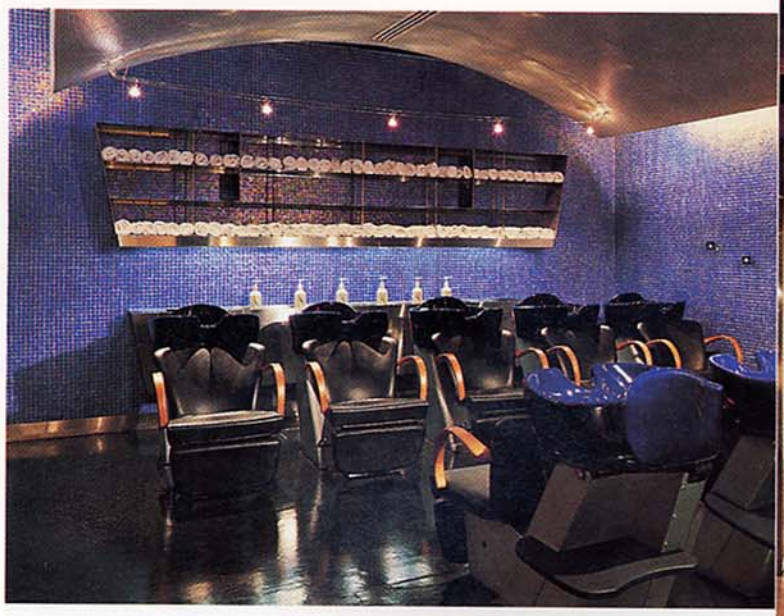
The elegant, finely detailed reception desk, designed by project manager Nancy Wu, was painstakingly crafted from cut plywood stacked vertically to form a rigid slope, like tiny inverted steps extending up and outward from the floor. "It is not easy to achieve these lines," Wu says of the enormous desk occupied by six receptionists. She evaluated how the space would be used and provided this piece to accommodate working conditions. "Nancy is a details person," Ouaknine says. "I told her all my worries and she took care of them."

In designing the workstations, Wu also accounted for functionality by creating a place for everything—no stray brushes or hairdryer cords hanging here. Down to the most intricate detail such as cabinet hinges and waste baskets, the designer addressed all concerns, however minute, while imparting an essence of simple elegance.

Working with the very enthusiastic, energetic, and admittedly opinionated salon owners Ouaknine and Obadia, Henry and Wu interpreted suggestions and incorporated them into this design concept that contrasts Oriental furnishings with a European feel. "I thought I knew everything about design, but I realize that I knew nothing except what I liked and didn't like," says Ouaknine. "I am a hair cutter not a designer." He acknowledges that in the nearly 20 salons he has built he has made mistakes in every one, and the biggest was cutting corners in terms of furnishings. Henry and Wu convinced him that quality furniture would endure wear and tear, and now almost two years after the salon opened, Ouaknine knows that they were right.



After graduating from the University of Illinois and receiving his M. of Science and Arch. from Columbia University, Bob Henry became a design partner of Riley, Henry, Foster and worked with Kohn Pederson Fox before founding Robert D. Henry Architects in New York City. During the past decade, his firm has produced such notable projects as the Pasquale Salon and Spa in Fort Lee, N.J., and the Mar-A-Lago Club and Spa in Palm Beach, Fla., for Donald Trump. Henry has taught and lectured at several U.S. universities and one in Italy, and is now working on a book featuring the world's most prominent spas.

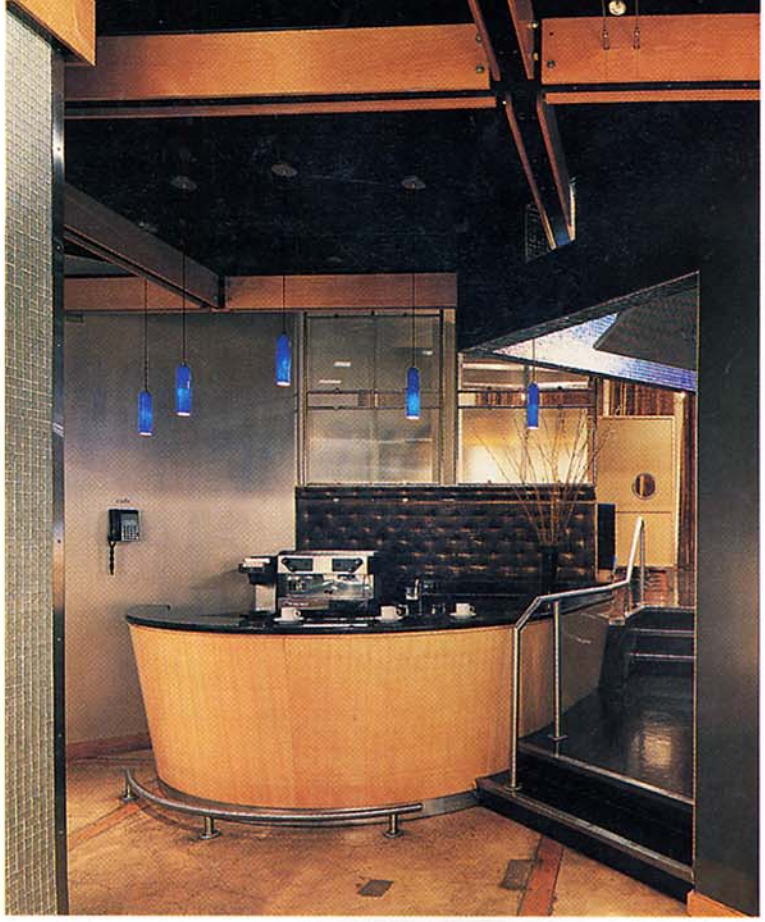


Although the project exceeded the original budget, Ouaknine observes, "If I didn't spend the money, I would have gotten a mediocre salon. I wanted the best and I got the best." Henry and Wu cut costs where possible by retaining some existing architecture, salvaging the floor, ceiling beams, skylight, and the highly irregular floor plan. "Instead of attempting to normalize the floor plan, we accentuated its eccentricities," Henry notes. More than a simple L-shaped configuration, the space includes irregularities like a boxy room poking into one side, which was transformed into the shampoo lounge, and an angular room at the bend of the L-shape, used for the changing areas. All floor space was strategically apportioned.

The clean aesthetic of the first level, with the rough floors, stacked plywood workstations mimicking the style of the reception desk, and well-lit work areas, conveys a palpable excitement level. Lighting concepts were specially designed by Henry and Wu to complement clients' appearances. Custom spun dishes hang over stylist stations balanced by four wires, two of which import electricity. Light shoots up and reflects off the metal ceilings, back down onto the work areas. Other custom fixtures around stylist mirrors deliver color corrected illumination, free of ugly shadows, while a warm glow emanates from the delicate paper cylinders that hang from the ceiling in the double-height entrance.

Beyond the stylists, circulation is directed around the soft curves of the café. Constructed of Asian granite, the highly figured, arc-shaped cappuccino bar creates a flow, guiding people around this epicenter into the shampoo lounge or back to the coloring area, appropriately located under the skylights for optimum lighting conditions.

Acting as the space's nucleus, the coffee bar (opposite) provides a transition from the high energy of the workstation area, illuminated with custom fixtures (above right), to the soothing aura of the wash room (above left).

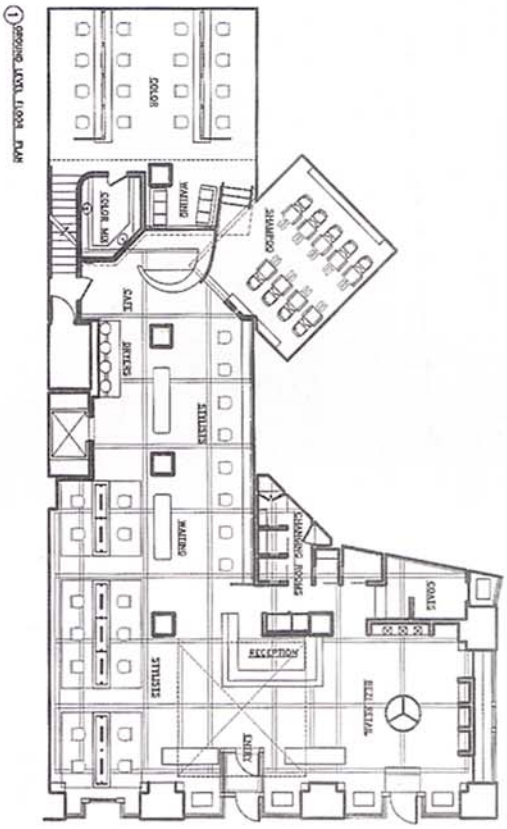


With recycled blue-glass tiled walls the dim shampoo lounge appears "like a geode," according to Wu. Contrasting with the high energy of the rest of the space, this wash room soothes clients reclining in lounge chairs, as they receive Shiatsu scalp massages amidst soft flickering candles. The luster of the wash room is maintained by pearlescent tiled columns centrally lining the styling area, the slightly iridescent paint on the walls, and the shimmering drapes of the changing rooms, made of Zuzka fabric. "These details seem like a lot of little things," Wu recognizes, "but they all matter."

The upper level repeats services from the ground floor, with manicuring stations and VIP rooms added. Celebrity clients may be inconspicuously whisked upstairs to private rooms via the elevator, but Ouaknine says many high-profile clients feel comfortable out in the open. With the cheapest hair cut costing over $100, Pierre Michel stylists snip the locks of many of Manhattan's elite in a space that feels equally as warm and inviting to passersby off the street.

Thrilled with the results of this collaboration with Henry and Wu, Ouaknine and Obadia plan to give the space "a little face lift" in 2001 with the help of this young husband and wife design team. "A salon is like a woman," Ouaknine says. "Even the best dressed woman in the world needs the right accessories. And we are ready to change these accessories to make this salon even better,"—so Manhattan's best-dressed women will continue tending to their tresses at Pierre Michel for generations to come.

Project Summary



Who

Project: Pierre Michel Haute Coiffure and Beauté. **Clients:** Pierre Ouaknine and Michel Obadia. **Architect:** Robert D. Henry Architects. **Project designer:** Nancy S. Wu. **Interior consultant:** Yvette Attar. **Mechanical/electrical engineer:** Laszlo Bodak Engineers. **General contractor:** Tricon. **Construction manager:** George B. Miller. **Project manager:** Kenneth N. DeFilippo. **Lighting designer:** Robert D. Henry Architects. **Photographer:** David Joseph.

What

Wallcoverings: Oceanside Glasstile. **Paint:** Ralph Lauren Duchesse Satin. **Laminate:** The Interiors Group (TIG). **Dry wall:** Tricon. **Flooring:** Tricon and Michael Hallabian, NJ Inc. **Ceiling:** Ceilings Plus. **Lighting:** Custom by TIG, GL Lites-on, Bruck, Global, Proxima, Juno. **Glass, railings:** TIG. **Window treatments:** Interiors by Royale. **Doors:** UAD Group, Tricon. **Door hardware:** Rixson, Schlage, Glynne Johnson, Fusital. **Seating:** Mr. Beauty, Norman Litfen. **Drapes:** Zuzka for Fabricology. **Architectural woodworking, display fixtures, cabinetmaking:** TIG. **Planters, accessories:** Spazio Architettonico. **Signage:** Karen Muir Design. **HVAC:** Astoria Mechanical. **Plumbing fixtures:** Takara Belmont, Norman Litfen.

Where

Location: New York, NY. **Total floor area:** 7,300 sq. ft. **No. of floors:** 3. **Floor size:** ground floor: 3,800 sq. ft.; second: 3,000 sq. ft.; cellar: 500 sq. ft. **Cost/sq. ft.:** $165.