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+ Tijuana's vanguard designs
for the future

+ Julie Barqmann gets dirty

+ Predock Frane's New
Mexican Zen

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PHOTOGRAPHS ON COVER AND FACING PAGE: RHIZOMA; THIS PAGE, TOP LEFT: JIM BARGMANN; MIDDLE: TIMOTHY HURSLEY

TOTAL DESIGN, DOWN TO THE SOAPDISH AND THE SOAP

Richardson Sadeki | Bathhouse Spa | Las Vegas

by C.C. Sullivan

A long time ago, when people still smoked indoors, architects talked of “designing everything, down to the ashtrays,” a euphemism for total control of the built environment. We smoke less today, but we’re even more fixated on fully **integrated design**. In theme parks and retail, a marriage of merchandising and architecture infuses everything from décor to product packaging. Think Starbucks or the new Apple stores: places with a corporate “personality” where the signage matches the seat fabric. The totalizing “identi-kit” has also migrated into the travel and hospitality sectors, where the likes of JetBlue and W Hotels translate their work with advertising and **branding** agencies into interior designs and entire buildings.

A few architects challenge this paradigm, however, arguing that architecture—not advertising—should lead the charge. Ad agency **creative processes** are outdated and their fees are inflated, they say, and “the tradition of investigating and maintaining a concept and its relationships is strongest within the architectural pedagogy,” contends Heidar Sadeki, a principal of New York City’s Richardson Sadeki. “Also, the way architecture is being used is more and more iconic, so we see more simi-

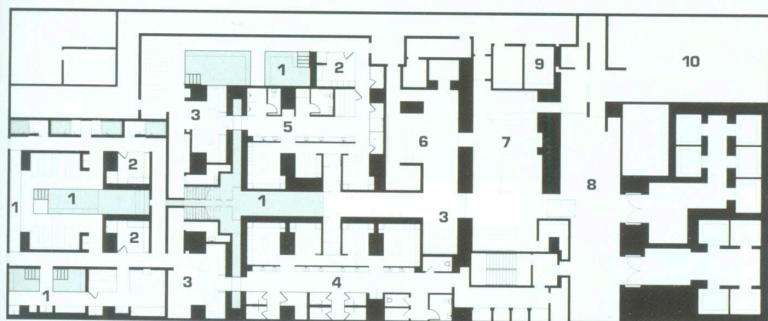
larities between architecture and **pack-age design**, because it creates a very strong identity,” he adds.

It’s a powerful idea: If your business is about *place*, why initiate your concept with a mere **logo** or slogan?



The logo, seen in the lobby, riffs on the spa’s bisected layout (top). Exuberant benches contrast with ultrasuede walls in lounge areas (above).

A growing number of clients apparently agree. For Sadeki and his partner, Clarissa Richardson, spas and salons are ideal patrons; these businesses seek potent ways to differentiate themselves that can be rendered in a



first-floor plan 18' ↙

- 1 pools/water
- 2 sauna/steam room
- 3 lounge
- 4 women’s lockers
- 5 men’s lockers
- 6 reception
- 7 retail
- 8 lobby
- 9 office
- 10 gym

refined palette. "A program like a spa lends itself to an overall immersive experience along different visual trajectories," says Richardson. "And our spa clients have strong ideas about the **customer experience** and **operational needs**. The circulation has to be well-planned, as do service stations and equipment in treatment rooms."

For a recent commission at the Mandalay Bay Resort in Las Vegas, the designers created Bathhouse Spa, a series of minimalist, black-slate-clad spaces that are clearly indebted to Peter Zumthor's Thermal Baths at Vals (1996). But while Zumthor created a "Bilbao effect" in Switzerland before Bilbao even happened, Richardson Sadeki creates an urban version of a destination spa and extends their architectural brand into **graphics, grooming products**, and even **staff uniforms**.

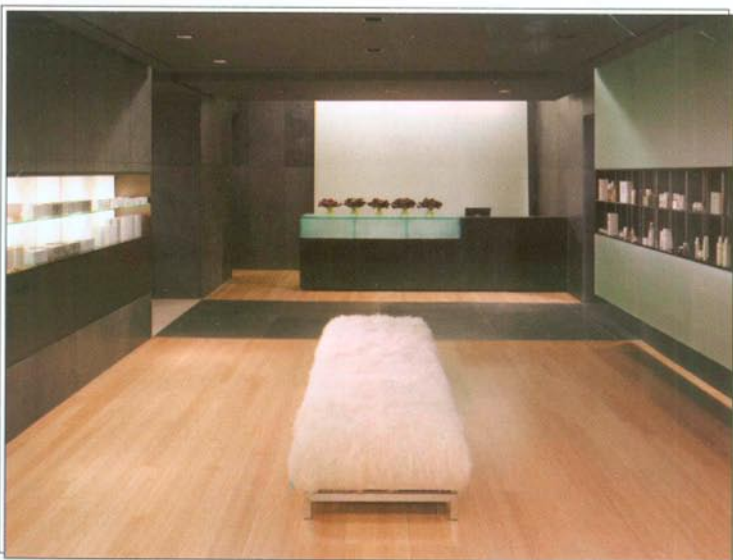
"We were very lucky with this client," Sadeki recalls. "After only one presentation, we had complete control. Our only constraint was time." ■

WITH TOTAL DESIGNS, BETTER TOTAL BILLINGS

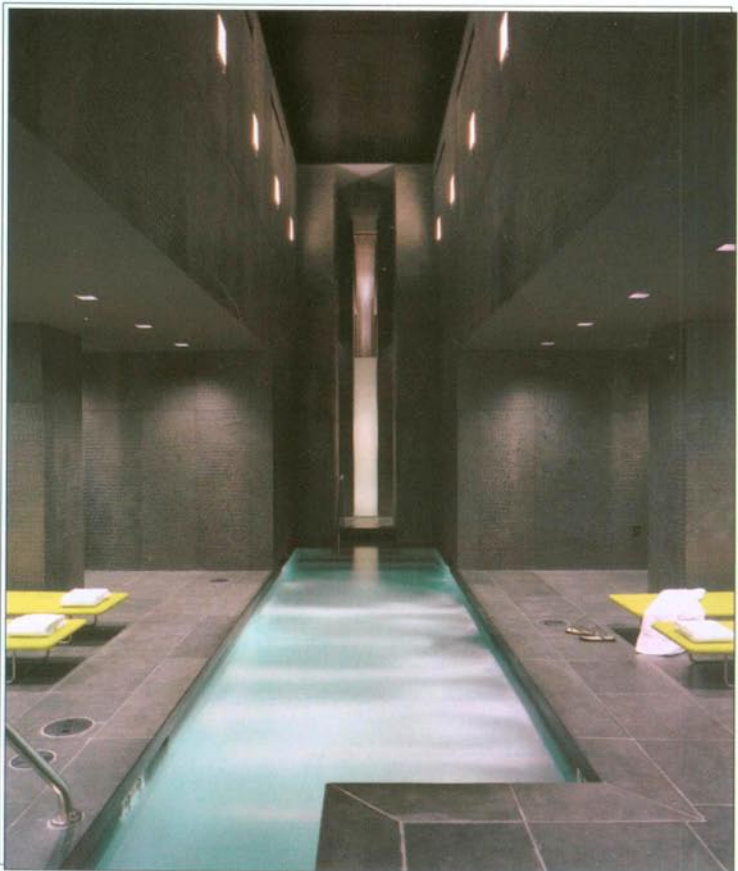
While **creative control** is the allure of design projects encompassing identity, graphic, and product tasks in addition to architecture, a less noticeable advantage is their better fees. In fact, some multidisciplinary studios say they subsidize architectural work with other billings. Plus, the practices incur less overall liability per billable hour.

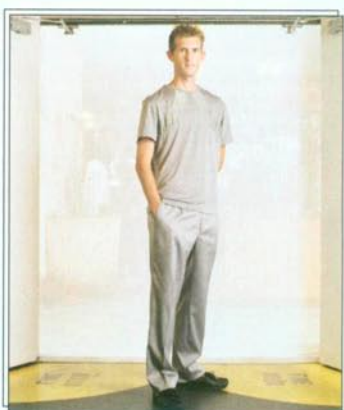
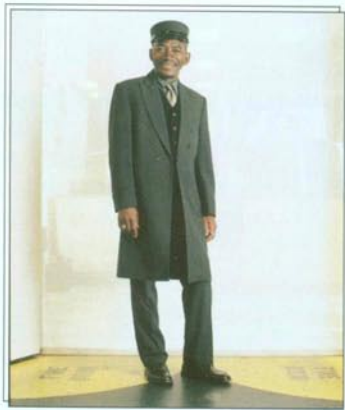
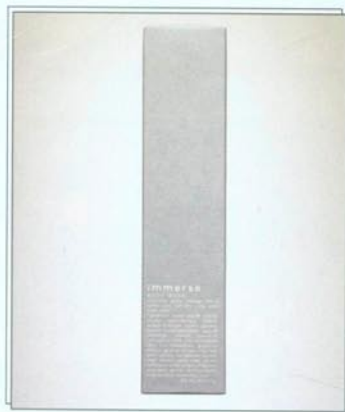
While architect compensation is typically based on a percentage of construction costs, advertising agencies and graphic designers increasingly work for flat fees, so that much of the nonarchitectural design work is paid in lump sums. But while building designs often suffer profit-killing downstream changes, other disciplines are less susceptible to such major revisions. Also, designers may negotiate royalties from the sales of consumer products they help create.

Another secret: The perceived value of a logo—which travels easily—may be inordinately high as compared to that for a building.



Architecture and merchandise unite in the spa store (above). The architects also designed house grooming products and staff uniforms (facing page). Textured slate walls and cascading water mark the pool areas (below).





THE INTEGRATED ASSEMBLY LINE

To create Bathhouse Spa, the design firm Richardson Sadeki employed a process honed with other spa and salon clients. Before schematic design, the client completed a five-page questionnaire on everything from programmatic needs to phrases that encapsulate the spa's mission. Similar to a branding or identity exercise, the designers then compiled images for idea boards. Design development mirrored that for a typical architectural project, but the production phase required coordination with numerous specialized suppliers and consultants.

Branding and graphics. The firm created the identity of the Bathhouse Spa, as well as its logo, which echoes the facility's bisected floor plan. In the production phase, the architects selected paper stock and printing techniques for service "menus," appointment cards, and shopping bags.

Products. Richardson Sadeki developed three "house lines" of grooming products, their brand names—Infuse, Immerse, and Submerge—inspired by the amount of time a guest's body would be in contact with the spa's water. Working with chemists (to achieve desired colors and scents) and package manufacturers (to produce container formats and print secondary packaging) the firm navigated a concept-to-product timeline that took about one year.

Uniforms. The architects worked with a consultant—in this case, Iceland's minimalist fashion designer, Steinunn Sigurd—to produce outfits for 11 unique employee types, from aestheticians to manicurists. The firm selected fabrics and approved samples for the works.

Of course, Richardson Sadeki specified building materials and detailed the construction, and they designed most of the furniture, too—focusing closely on fabrication methods, such as creating the texture of the slate walls.

Bathhouse Spa, Las Vegas

client: Mandalay Bay Resort **architect, interior designer, and designer of furniture, graphics, packaging, and uniforms:** Richardson Sadeki, New York City—Clarissa Richardson, Heidar Sadeki (creative directors); Guillermo Garita, Alex Grossman, Vanessa Ah-Chuen, Damian Webster, Luis Diego Quiros, Natalie Cheng, Mauricio Carey (project team) **architect of record:** Klai Juba Architects, Las Vegas—Dan Juba (principal) **consultants:** Lochsa Engineering (engineering); Patdo Lighting Studio (lighting); CP Strategy (merchandise) **general contractor:** Mandalay Bay Development **area:** 15,000 square feet **cost:** withheld