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New York Next: Faces of the Future

Splurging on Details: Stephan Jaklitsch Design (1998)

In practice on his own for fewer than six years, architect Stephan Jaklitsch has been inundated with work – much of it designing stores for clothing designer Marc Jacobs. “Fashion cycles every six months, while the architecture has to have a more enduring aesthetic,” says Jaklitsch, “I love that contradiction, but it’s a challenge.”

The constant, however, is his unwavering focus on details. But, even then, he is always thinking about the larger context of each project and how it will contribute to the overall brand of his client.

After graduating from Princeton with a Master’s in Architecture in 1992, Jaklitsch worked for Steven Harris and B Five Studio. He started his own practice in 1998, when he landed the commission to design a 10,000-square-foot office for an investment banking firm. Subsequently, he began working for Jacobs’ business partner, Robert Duffy, through a recommendation to design his Manhattan apartment, and has been busy ever since designing stores throughout the U.S. and Asia. Four stores in Los Angeles, one in Boston, and one in Shanghai will open this August. The practice, Stephan

Jaklitsch Design Inc., has grown to nine employees, and Jaklitsch has just expanded his West 27th Street office space.

His earlier retail experience on smaller, more modest projects taught him how to splurge on select details. Resources are spent on surfaces at eye-level, as well as those that will be touched. As an example, he points out the optical clear glass used for the countertops in all of the Marc Jacobs stores. “We also typically use a mitered corner,” he says. “These are expensive and difficult details to achieve, but we feel they are important because the countertops are what customers will see up close.” Working abroad means less control on-site, so provisions for that are built into the design. “In the Asian stores,” Jaklitsch explains, “where we can’t have the same type of construction oversight that we do in the States, we might use a butted-joint detail throughout.”

The different types of stores – the Collection, the Marc by Marc Jacobs, men’s, women’s, and accessories – present different design challenges, and are often set adjacent to or across from each other, giving Jaklitsch the opportunity to engage with the street. This is especially evident in the series of three glass-fronted stores sited in 19th-century buildings on far west Bleecker Street, an area not traditionally associated with upscale retail. Jaklitsch’s designs have been credited with bringing new life to that end of Bleecker Street.

Jaklitsch hopes to play out this interest in the urban aspects of architecture through other project types in the near future. His firm was selected as a finalist in the 2003 Chicago Prize Competition for its design of The Interchange, a transportation gateway building that would be part of the new master plan for the Loop. It includes 1,200 parking spaces, open spaces, and retail intended to make the daily grind of commuting more pleasant for thousands of people. “I imagine doing increasingly larger projects – freestanding buildings and projects with a cultural component,” says Jaklitsch. But no matter what the size, he argues, always remember that every project is connected to a larger context. www.sjaklitsch.com

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Stephan Jaklitsch



Above: Marc Jacobs Accessories store, 305 Bleecker Street

Below: Chicago Prize Competition entry: The Interchange transportation gateway

