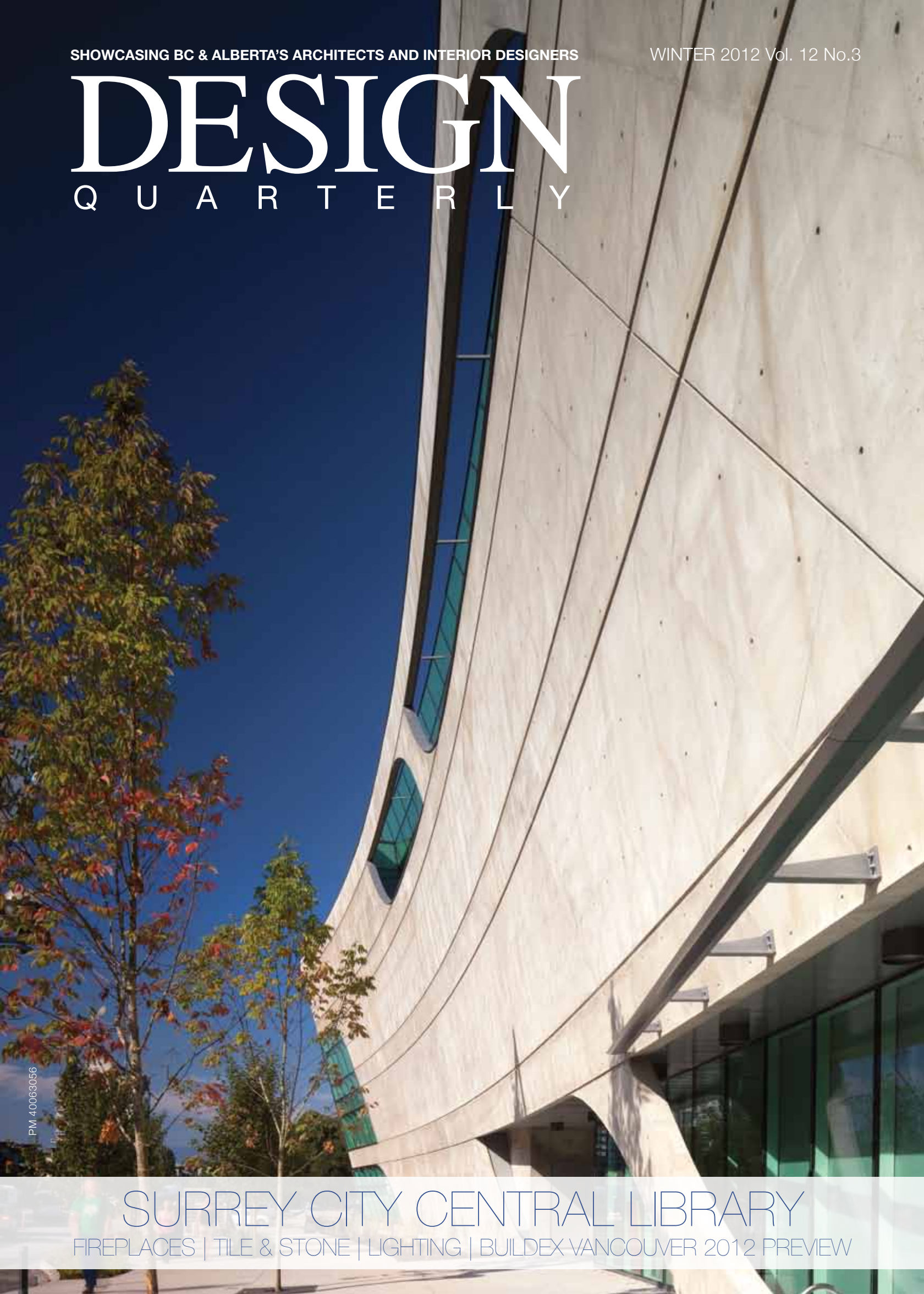


SHOWCASING BC & ALBERTA'S ARCHITECTS AND INTERIOR DESIGNERS

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DESIGN

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giving space a voice

BY CHERYL MAH



Terminal City Club

At SSDG Interiors, succession planning has been part of day to day business and part of its future strategy for more than a decade. The firm has been proactive about the eventual retirement of founding partners Keath Seeton and Gerry Shinkewski, identifying talent within to ensure the longevity of the firm.

“Succession planning is the most important way of keeping a company strong and intact and keeping the values and design philosophies intact moving forward into the future,” says SSDG principal Julie Campbell. “[Our succession planning] speaks volumes to our clients and gives them a comfort level that we’re not going anywhere — we’re here for the long haul.”

A long standing associate with SSDG, Campbell recently became a principal with the retirement of Seeton. She bought out his share of the partnership and assumed her new role in October 2011, joining Shinkewski and Susan Steeves on the leadership team.

“I was thrilled at the opportunity and I’m very excited to become a full partner of the company,” says Campbell, who has always aspired to become a partner one day.

During her tenure at SSDG, Campbell has emerged as a leader in business, design and marketing making her a natural fit as Seeton’s successor.

“Julie is a phenomenal fit as Keath’s successor. She shares our vision for a strong, sustainable firm, and has the unique combination of bringing both a fresh perspective, as well as, continuity for our employees, clients and collaborators,” says Steeves, who became a partner in 1996 as part of the succession strategy.

Adds Shinkewski, “Julie brings immense energy and opportunity to our clients and to our work. Her natural leadership revolves around the sharing of ideas.”

The firm was formed in 1980 as Seeton Shinkewski Design Group with a focus on corporate design before diversifying into hospitality and retail. Known for working with



Julie Campbell



their clients to create memorable experiences through good, thoughtful design, SSDG has built up an impressive portfolio and a loyal client base over the last 31 years.

“SSDG has a great reputation and I’m proud to be part of it. I want to keep building on the firm’s legacy of collaboration and unique spaces — I want to keep Keath’s legacy strong,” says Campbell.

Born and raised in Vancouver, Campbell always had an interest in design (enjoying art and geography in school) but never thought of it as a career. Instead she attended BCIT to obtain her marketing and real estate diploma.

“I thought that would be a good tie in into the industry and be involved in interiors that way. I did my practicum for Colliers commercial. It was intimidating... and a great experience but I knew it was not for me,” recalls Campbell.

After taking a couple of years off to travel, she returned to pursue her dream and went back to BCIT to study interior design. While studying at BCIT, she began working for a residential designer and then a corporate design firm. She joined SSDG in December 2000.

Her first project with SSDG was Canada Life. “I remember being given a lot of freedom and it was an experience that I was not familiar with. I had come from another cor-

porate design firm where I did what I was told — under strong guidance,” says Campbell, who became an associate in 2005. “Coming to SSDG, I was able to really get my feet wet.”

And her marketing background has proven to be helpful. The firm is not only committed to good design but strong business principles. She is involved with the firm’s business

As one of Vancouver’s largest interior design firms, SSDG specializes in corporate, retail and hospitality spaces.

development as well as providing leadership in design development.

“I love the creative side of design. I think that’s where I excel as well,” she says. “I love the details. First you’re inspired by the room and then inspired by maybe the touch and feel of it. Now I’m always looking for details where one finish meets another, where one element stops and another starts.”

As one of Vancouver’s largest interior design firms, SSDG specializes in corporate, retail and hospitality spaces. The team of 22 including the three principals

all work together to deliver successful outcomes for clients.

“It’s such a collaborative environment so that I’m inspired by who I work with every day,” says Campbell. “I’m also inspired by our clients because when clients have energy and are excited about change — great things happen when everybody is focused on one outcome.”

That collaborative work environment has also been a key to the firm’s success. “By being so open, it really creates ownership in the projects from the whole design team. We use a team based design approach,” notes Campbell.

SSDG’s design philosophy or motto is “giving space a voice.”

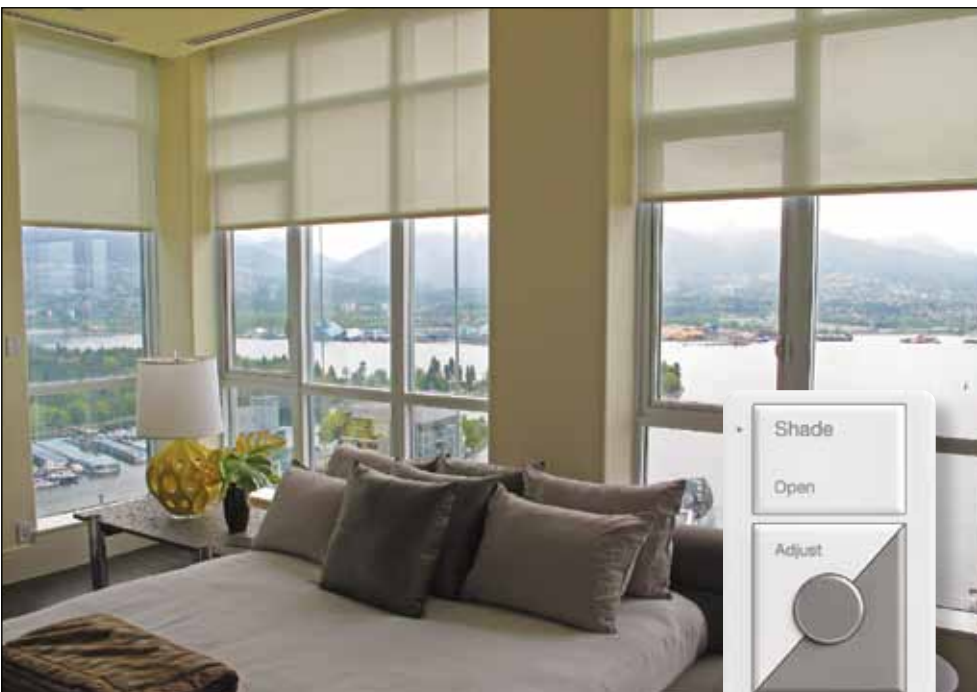
“Working with our client early on through a visioning process to really learn what their expectations are and the measures of success for the project is important to deliver a space that really speaks to who they are,” explains Campbell, noting 70 per cent of the firm’s work are from repeat clients.

Current projects include 110,000 square feet for Fraser Health and 170,000 square feet for Fortis BC (a long time client). The firm also recently completed Sparkling Hill Resort, Terminal City Club, Fulcrum and iQmetrix.

iQmetrix is the firm’s most recent award winning project, having earned an IDIBC



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gold award of excellence. The 5,900 square foot office for the retail software company was cited for outstanding workplace design.

“The people were so much fun to work with [at iQmetrix]. Good energy, lots of good ideas,” says Campbell.

The majority of the firm’s projects are located in B.C. and the Lower Mainland with the odd project outside of the province. Campbell is currently working on mining company BHP Biliton’s office in Saskatoon, after having done their Vancouver office.

“We’re one of the few design only firms of our size in Vancouver. We take a lot of pride in design and in our abilities to design. Clients come to us for something special for them. We design for the client,” she says. “We really focus on customer service. We want the design team and key member to be with the project from beginning to end — the continuity is very important.”

The firm’s diversity and a number of large projects (like Sparkling Hill Resort) helped to sustain volume during the recent market downturn.

“Hospitality and retail projects kept us going during 2008-2010,” says Campbell.

“It’s important for young designers to feel confident in their decisions and to make decisions...”

Environmental considerations are a part of all their projects and environmentally friendly design is introduced where it’s practical and feasible for each client.

“It’s definitely something that we offer to our clients,” says Campbell. “The no cost, low cost solutions — we’re quite upfront about it to see if there’s any interest and there always is.”

Campbell adds most of the designers are LEED APs, including herself: “SSDG promotes design continuing education and qualifications.”

Her advice to young designers?

“It’s important for young designers to feel confident in their decisions and to make decisions,” says Campbell. “Young designers I find are nervous about making decisions or they want to run it past another designer which is great. But I always say to them if you have reason for making your decision, have confidence in your decision and go for it.”

Balancing work life and home life is a priority for Campbell. A 4-year-old son keeps her “life very busy” outside of work. The family enjoys travelling and hiking in Lynn Valley near their home. □