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Interiors

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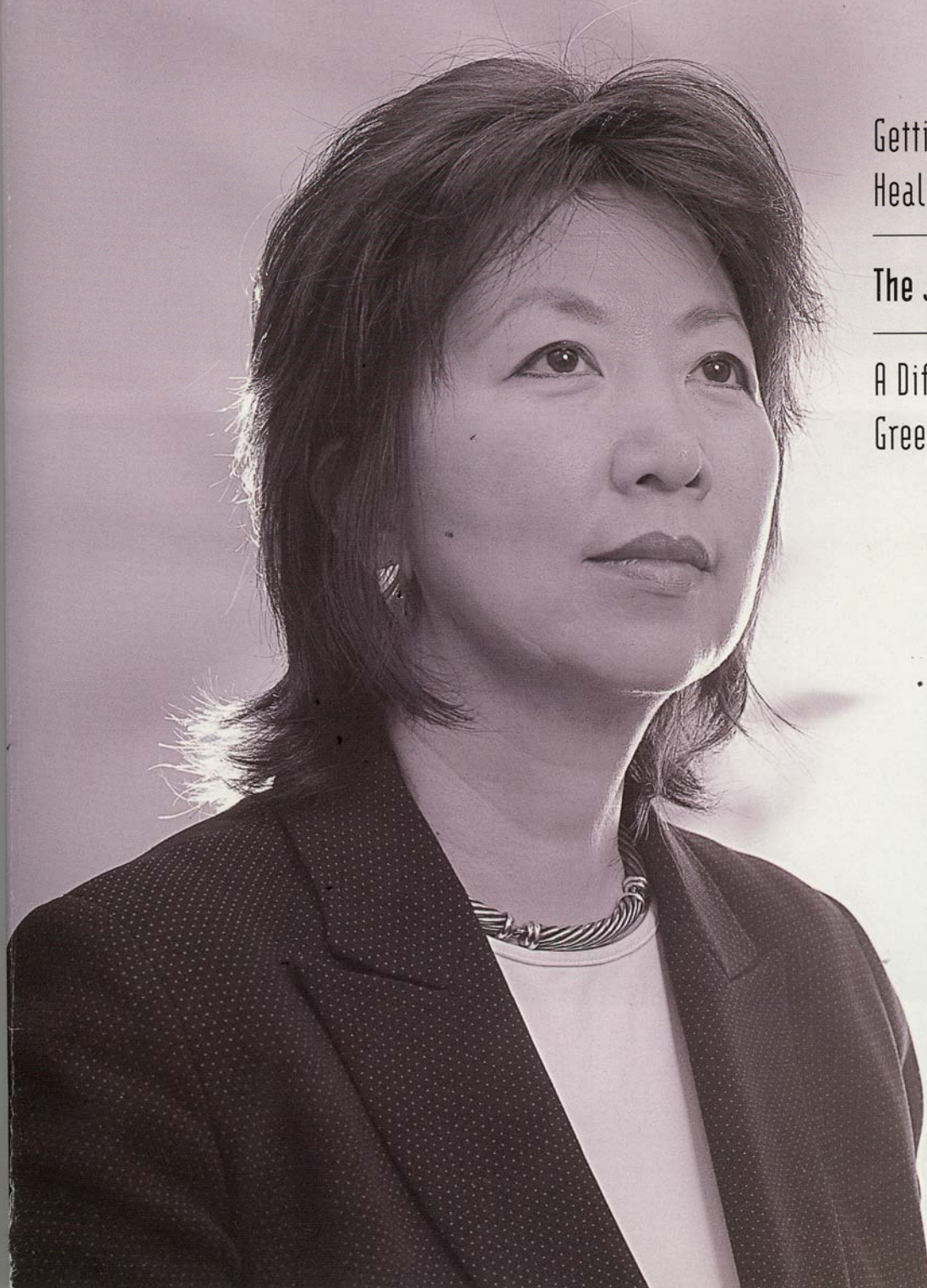
intelligent design strategies

Getting to the Heart of
Healing Spaces

The Journey to Great Design

A Different Kind of
Green Room

JJ FALK



Speaking with JJ Falk, you can sense not only the love she has for her chosen profession, but also her appreciation of the journey that led her there.

"In a friendship you spend time getting to know that person," Falk says. "I believe that the same is true when I work with a client. I must get to know them and their business goals, philosophy and aspirations in order to appreciate what I must deliver to them. Only then am I prepared to design a space that supports their needs."

Falk's approach to design began almost 30 years ago, and has been evolving ever since. A native of Korea, Falk came to the United States in 1980 with a master's degree in architecture (termed



Appreciating *the* JOURNEY

architectural engineering in Korea). "I received excellent training in my native country based on both my education and work with one of the country's largest design firms," she says. "Unfortunately, my English wasn't very good and I quickly realized that fact was hampering my ability to secure a job in this country."

At this point, Falk was in Denver, and she decided to enroll at the University of Colorado-Denver to pursue another master's degree, this time in interior architectural design. "I made wonderful friends at the university, and received great support from the faculty," Falk remembers. "I was asked and worked as a teaching assistant for two years, and that experience allowed me to work on my English a lot since I was interacting with students so much. It also enhanced my presentation skills. I made good contacts with visiting professionals, such as individuals from Gensler and other national design firms, who came to lecture at the school, which paved the way for my future work."

Upon earning her degree, Falk went to work for WC Muchow & Partners in Denver. She says the time she spent working as an architectural designer for the firm was excellent, and that it furthered

Thoughtful design, exceptional client service and a focus on sustainability are the cornerstones of JJ Falk's business approach. Combined with her support of and passion for the profession, Falk has developed an abiding appreciation for the opportunities she's been given throughout her extensive career.

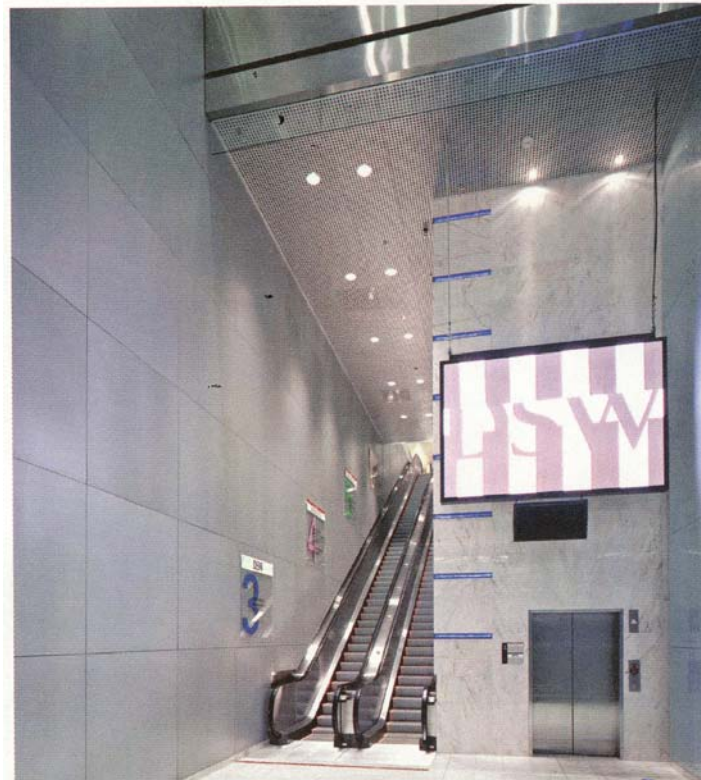


LEFT The new DSW/Filene's Basement in Union Square opened to rave reviews in October 2003. JJFD has done multiple projects for DSW.

CENTER The existing vertical transportation was used to connect the floors of the DSW/Filene's Basement retail operation.

BOTTOM The sheet aluminum panels in the atrium look like stainless steel but cost less and are lighter—good from an economic and sustainability perspective.

OPPOSITE Varied light sources, including this translucent column, accentuate features in the DSW/Filene's atrium.



her appreciation of the value of design. During her time at Muchow, she had the opportunity to design offices for IBM and a headquarters for Blue Cross & Blue Shield.

The next stop on her journey involved a move to another firm, and relocating to the city she now calls home. "It was time for a change, and the relationships I had previously made with personnel from Gensler benefited me," Falk says. "Gensler was looking for a designer in their New York City office, and I was fortunate to be selected for the position."

At Gensler, she gained hands-on practical experience on high-profile projects. "I was given broad project responsibilities, ranging from space planning to coordination of presentations and production work," she says. "This role strengthened my production skills and enhanced my appreciation for how projects must come together and be detailed. As a designer I continue to believe that I must be involved in some measure throughout production. It best serves both our firm and our clients."

The desire for even greater challenges ultimately lead Falk to the doors of Phillips & Jensen—now The Phillips Group—where she took on the role of lead designer. She credits her work at Philips with furthering her career. "I was given wonderful challenges and had great project diversity during my tenure as the firm's top designer. I had lots of freedom and was encouraged and allowed to be very innovative."

Her time at the firm advanced Falk's commitment to the designer's responsibility to the client. "We must have a purpose for our clients," she asserts. "As designers we must respect their needs and reflect those in our work. Successful projects are designed well and serve the client." Another career commitment that Falk made while at the firm may be one of her most important—her focus on sustainable design. "I realized that sustainable design had to be part of my work," she says. "I wanted the spaces that I designed to be aesthetically pleasing, functional and humane. You can and should have all three on a project."

Certainly, having an increasing number of environmentally responsible products coming on the market helped. "Companies were starting to do more, like recycling tires into floor tiles, and different woods were becoming available," she notes. "I made my commitment when the industry was in

[APPRECIATING THE JOURNEY]

BELOW LEFT JJFD has provided planning and design services for numerous projects for Horizon Media, including the company's offices in New York.

BELOW RIGHT Executive offices at Horizon provide plenty of space to work, and are bright and open.



many ways doing the same, so it was an easy transition for me."

Falk says that her attitude to design is the same whether she's designing a 20-square-foot kiosk or a one-million-square-foot office building. She contends that designers must add value to human life while helping to meet business goals. That, she says, requires showing clients the benefit that sustainable design brings to the organization and its employees. "I don't give my clients a hard sell regarding sustainable design," she explains. "We use sustainable design processes, products and systems as a natural part of what we do. We advocate this to our clients when presenting our designs. Sustainable design shouldn't be presented as something unique."

Falk likens designing a project to the human body, a perspective she formed while studying in Korea. "My first two architecture degrees, which I obtained in Korea, are somewhat different in terms of program versus what is done in many U.S. colleges and universities. They're more architecture engineering-oriented with more emphasis on the engineering part, and that gave me a good perspective regarding a building's infrastructure or its skeleton," Falk says. "I fully understand building systems and their impact on the overall environment. My work as an interior designer builds upon the skeleton, adding the muscles that make things work and the exterior beauty—the visible design elements—that finish the product. I believe I had a great sensitivity to all the pieces from the start."

Sustainable design is incorporated as fully as possible into every project undertaken by JJ Falk Design LLC, the firm that Falk established in 1998. "I really started my own firm without much planning," she says with a laugh. "I always wanted my own studio, and it turned out that my timing, even though I hadn't been very strategic, was good. It was pure luck."

The firm's portfolio is diverse, and includes projects for law firms, advertising and media agencies, and telecommunications, residential, financial and corporate clients. Projects have been completed throughout the United States and internationally. JJFD's offices include a library with extensive material devoted to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED™) information, which helps the firm to use materials and procedures that will be acceptable as part of the The U.S. Green Building Council's (USGBC) certification program. The firm is a member of the USGBC, and Dale Peterson, AIA, principal, is a LEED-certified professional.

One project in particular, the 75,000-square-foot headquarters for Horizon Media, Inc.—one of the firm's long-term clients—showcases both Falk's design savvy and environmental commitment. "The company occupied two existing floors, which were renovated, and also assumed space on an additional floor," she says. "We were challenged to create a new image while being economical and using sustainable products, processes and

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a good decision from both a sustainability and economic perspective. Maintenance requirements for the panels are minimal.

The store's walls look like one piece of product rather than several five-foot modules joined together; this was done to allow DSW/Filene's to use the walls for another purpose. A projector located in the center of the atrium's ceiling projects advertising material onto the walls—a cost-effective advertising solution since the projector is easy to reprogram. Many other features reflect Falk's sustainability and business focus. The carpet tiles, manufactured by Shaw, bear The Green Label from The Carpet and Rug Institute. The carpet is designed for high traffic, is a sustainable product and is easy to maintain. Plexiglas rather than glass was used where possible, such as for the dividers between the cashiers and the vertical transportation. Indirect light sources were used extensively, especially in the product areas. The team was able to use lower-wattage lights in the atrium because they used the volume of the ceiling as a reflector.

Falk's passion for sustainable design impacts not only her firm's work but her professional activities as well. She is leading a facility forum as part of the IIDA-New York chapter's education efforts regarding the LEED certification process. The three-pronged event, which manufacturers are sponsoring, will bring together firm principals to hear lectures and participate in product presentations related to LEED. She views her willingness to participate in such efforts as part of her responsibility as a design professional.

Falk's journey has a long way to go, and it is certain to be filled with more challenging design assignments for herself and her firm. Her advocacy of sustainable design has and will continue to influence her clients, design team and the profession that she credits with giving her such a wonderful journey. "I've been fortunate to have many special design assignments during my career and have been able to partner on these with wonderful clients. The journey to date has been very good." ●

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ABOVE A stairway connects two of Horizon's floors in the New York office. Chairs in various colors add interest to the lobby.