

INTERIOR DESIGN[®]

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keep on truckin'



walkthrough

a grand entrance firm: design collaboratives site: chicago

From top: There are 81 pullout panels in the custom display at the Maya Romanoff Corporation's first showroom. LED fixtures backlight the high-density foam letters in the corridor at the Merchandise Mart. A 1985 photo of the company founder yielded the Beadazzled mural wrapping the pullout system's end panel.

After more than 40 years in the business of making glorious surfacing materials, then merchandising them through various distributors, Maya Romanoff decided it was high time for a place of his own. So he and his wife, Joyce, president of the Maya Romanoff Corporation, hired Design Collaboratives to transform a 3,200-square-foot space at Chicago's Merchandise Mart into a showroom where nearly every surface is sheathed in product. "Branded environments should be experiential, not just graphics applied to a build-out," principal Tom Marquardt says.

The moment that visitors step off the elevator and turn the corner, they're lured toward the showroom by a sweep of shimmering taupe wall covering that backdrops the Maya Romanoff name, rendered in 3-foot-tall backlit letters. A graduated ceiling soffit reinforces the message by angling toward the entrance's sliding glass doors. ➤



walkthrough

Through them, almost all of the vaguely triangular space is on view, thanks to a radial plan eschewing the rat-maze layout too common for showrooms.

"The way the space unfolds creates a mood of reverence that's perfect for this client," principal Mary Beth Ram-polla notes. Marquardt explains: "Maya is a metaphysical man, influenced by Buddhist philosophy. At the same time, though, he's always brought a playful, irreverent approach to the business—ever since the 1960's, when he started making tie-dyed fabrics inspired by the hippies of Woodstock." To embody the balance of rarefied and earthy, Design Collaboratives looked to ancient temples and other holy spaces. Large, chunky forms give a sense of solidity and timelessness.

"We increased the vertical scale whenever we could, for obvious reasons," Marquardt says. And no vertical surface was overlooked. Design Collaboratives applied shimmering wall coverings everywhere from a chandelier's multiple drum shades to the structural columns' enclosures. As a gritty foil to the polished elegance, most of the ceiling deck remains exposed, and the engineered-cement floor was troweled on and allowed to show imperfections.



Clockwise from top left: Maya Romanoff's lotus logo appears in vinyl applied to the sliding glass doors. The pullout system features custom bronze handles. A wall covering made from paulownia wood surfaces the reception desk, while the expanse behind is capiz shell. Flooring of self-leveling engineered cement was hand-troweled and polished.



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"Cold, uniform illumination would have destroyed the subtlety and depth of these surfaces," Marquardt adds—which explains why Design Collaboratives took the light level down by 40 percent. Lighting dapples seductively, giving the showroom a noirish drama.

The rear lounge is anchored by a coffee table with a massive round ruby-red top almost entirely covered by an intricate bas-relief of Maya Romanoff's entwined lotus logo—rendered in the hand-applied glass beads of the company's Beadazzled line. Around the table, armchairs offer comfortable vantage points for examining a wall displaying movable magnetized rectangles of every product and colorway in the Maya Romanoff arsenal. No flipping through sample books here.

If a 7-by-8-inch rectangle doesn't suffice, product also appears as 5-by-9-foot double-sided panels. Developing a pullout rack system to showcase them was one of the project's most challenging aspects. "We had millworkers build a box to scale, so we could experiment with the mechanics of looking at surface materials and perfect the hands-on experience," Marquardt says. Design Collaboratives tested substrates to maximize size, without warping or ▶



Clockwise from top left: In the lounge, the company logo is rendered in custom Beadazzled wall covering on the top of a low table. Standard versions of Beadazzled wrap the shades of a custom chandelier near the magnetized sample wall. New products are showcased on pivoting panels in front of the windows. Doug Levine designed the chairs in the lounge and at the nearby workstation.



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vibration, and to make sure that the 81 racks would slide out with ease and return to their slots with a satisfying click.

While the pullout system commands the majority of real estate on one side of the showroom, 13 of the latest introductions get special treatment along the window wall opposite. Most of these panels are suspended from bronze fabric hangers that pivot to manipulate the amount of sunlight shining through. Both types of displays feature custom bronze handles that Rampolla describes as “an homage to Maya as a pioneer of artisanal products. There’s not a piece of off-the-shelf hardware to be found in this project. We really put our hearts into it.” And the first time that Joyce Romanoff walked into the completed space, she actually cried tears of joy. —Bradley Lincoln

FROM FRONT MAYA ROMANOFF CORPORATION: WALL COVERING, MIRROR (SHOWROOM), ENVIRONMENTAL LIGHTS: LED FIXTURES (ENTRY), LIGHTOLIER: TRACK LIGHTING (SHOWROOM), UTTERMOST: PENDANT FIXTURES, ACCURIDE: CUSTOM PULLS, BRIGHT CHAIR COMPANY: CHAIRS, ALAN'S DRAPERIES: CUSTOM CURTAIN, HALLMARK COLLECTIVE: CUSTOM CHANDELIER, LOZIER CORPORATION: SHELVING (STORAGE), THROUGHOUT N'DIO; SIGN A RAMA: CUSTOM SIGNAGE, ARDEX GROUP: FLOORING, SHERWIN-WILLIAMS COMPANY: PAINT, RUP SIS ASSOCIATES ARCHITECTS: ARCHITECT OF RECORD, KORNAS CORPORATION: AUDIOVISUAL CONSULTANT, AVENUE METAL CO.: METALWORK, GLASS SOLUTIONS: GLASSWORK, HIRE-NELSON: MILLWORK, TITAN ELECTRIC: ELECTRICAL CONTRACTOR, ASHLAND PLUMBING & HEATING CO.: PLUMBING CONTRACTOR, MR. DAVID'S FLOORING INTERNATIONAL: FLOORING CONTRACTOR, TRIANGLE DECORATING COMPANY: PAINTING CONTRACTOR, BEAR CONSTRUCTION COMPANY: GENERAL CONTRACTOR.

From top: Maya Romanoff started selling a signature line of accessories, such as this mirror, last year. Steel shelving handles back-of-house storage.

