

Immaculate receptions: The art of greeting

Reception areas unite old and new to make good first impression

By
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Lew Meltzer, managing partner at Meltzer, Lippe, Goldstein & Breitstone, knows the value of a warm welcome.

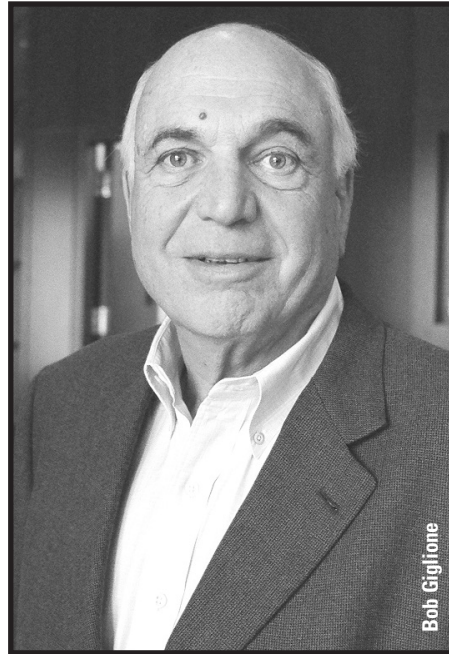
A proper greeting, the law firm chief will tell you, isn't just about a friendly face, but an appealing surrounding. So Meltzer, Lippe earlier this year opened a new 1,000-square-foot reception area in its Mineola office building nice enough to make the waiting game – as long as it's not too long a wait – downright uplifting.

The high-tech, high-comfort space – part of the building's lobby, away from Meltzer, Lippe's main offices, which are on other floors – sports a smart granite floor and walls lined with novels and other reading materials that are not legal tomes. Visitors are welcome to take books when they leave, in fact, and are offered cappuccino and espresso to further ease their wait. Plasma screens showcase a presentation about the firm and financial news reports, and if you need to check your e-mail while you're waiting, there's even an Internet station standing by.

"We wanted to make a statement to clients and visitors about how technologically up-to-date our firm is, and be a nice place to spend some time waiting," said Meltzer. "It's quite beautiful and modern."

While reception areas may evoke images of nightmarish boredom in utilitarian rooms (think DMV waiting areas, and some doctors' offices), more companies and architects are devoting efforts – and money – to create reception areas that win over waiters.

"Reception areas should be specialized and tailor-made to the business they sup-



MEET AND GREET: Meltzer, Lippe, Goldstein & Breitstone converted part of a building lobby into an all-new reception suite, and managing partner Lew Meltzer likes it.

port," noted Steven Saraniero, a partner at Setauket's William F. Collins AIA Architects. "You want the space to reflect the company that it serves."

Law firms often opt for more reserved looks with traditional materials such as wood, although metal and glass are working their way in. But a dot-com entrepreneur, Saraniero suggested, might want to reflect a younger, more energetic image.

"It's your first reaction to any firm," said Michael Spector, managing partner of Spector Group in North Hills. "Whether it be minimalist or technology oriented or color, that would be the place to exemplify what they're all about."

Reception areas have become an integral part of a company's identity, weaving

design of desks, lighting and overall look to convey an image. "We try to listen to the client," said Tom Stack, design director for TPG Architecture's Melville office. "We've almost been rebranding them, helping them find their own identity."

TPG recently designed a new space (including a reception area) for Aer Lingus in Melville, designed to embody that firm's image. "The goal was to set the tone for what Aer Lingus is – a traditional company, based in Ireland, that uses technology," said Stack. "We meshed the old world and new technology."

TPG used a traditional oak reception desk with metal detailing, mixing the old-fashioned and reliable with the modern and sleek.

William F. Collins AIA recently redesigned a new reception area for Verizon's top executives in Verizon's 80-year-old, landmarked Lower Manhattan headquarters.

"It goes along with the style of the space," Saraniero said. "We combined the historical nature of the space with some new, fresh, modern interpretations of the materials."

"A lot of people are integrating materials that weren't in the past used throughout," he added, noting corrugated metals and polished-and-brushed steel can give older, established firms more high-tech looks.

"Now the desk might itself be almost a piece of sculpture using a design theme," Saraniero said.

Some reception suites – such as Meltzer, Lippe's – contain their own conference room, so visitors don't need to walk through an entire office to get to a meeting. This is both a tip of the hat to convenience and a time-saver.

"Obviously, you want people waiting as little as possible," Saraniero said, "or to have them feel they haven't waited a long time."