



Burdi + Filek
= magic

Nobody does it
better than interior
designers Diego Burdi
and Paul Filek.

By Mark Curtis

Commercial interior designers Diego Burdi and Paul Filek, principals of Burdifilek, have a simple job – to make their clients look good. The execution of that work is not so straight-forward, of course, but whether its exotic, one-of-a-kind treatments for luxury goods retailers such as Holt Renfrew or comparatively understated designs for the likes of budget-conscious Loblaw fashion brand Joe Fresh Style, Burdi says he and partner Filek's work taps the essence of their clients' brand. "I think that what we've been able to give our clients is an aesthetic value that is uniquely them," Burdi says. "We've pulled out the hidden potential that's always been there."

Burdi, 45, is the main creative force behind a trusted staff of 40 in the firm that he and 44-year-old Filek, the managing partner, started in 1993 after working together at acclaimed Yabu Pushelberg in the early 1990s. They had common interests and backgrounds (both studied interior design at Ryerson in Toronto) and though Filek recalls the economy was in recession at the time, they felt they had something to offer as a team. "We had a similar desire to try to do this on our own, so we very naively did," Filek says with a smile. Burdi laughs at the recollection of their youthful chutzpah: "Why not? It's a recession. Let's go."

After three years of working by themselves on small local projects, Burdi and Filek got their first big break. In 1996, fashion retailer Joseph Mimran hired them to design his Club Monaco stores, first in Toronto and then nationally. Finding an affinity for retail design, Burdifilek added such new clients as Levi's and Telus. The firm's Club Monaco work culminated in designs for two flagship New York locations in 2003, the same year Burdifilek began working with Holt Renfrew. Today, Burdifilek's base is 8,000 square feet of office space in Toronto's Queen West neighbourhood, a tenfold increase of their original two-person downtown office.

The design partners have sought that fine balance of creating memorable environments that nevertheless do not overwhelm their client's brand. While in the main Burdi heads up the studio and



Above In Holt Renfrew's Toronto flagship, 40,000 pristine white rods hang in suspended animation in ceiling coves, creating an ethereal backdrop. **Left** Burdifilek's latest project for upscale Dublin retailer Brown Thomas is its Luxury Hall; the perimeter of the jewelry department is sheathed in subtly reflective, gold-hued dichroic glass. **Opposite** Principal rooms in Toronto's new Pink Tartan location feature pale oak herringbone floors, delicately panelled matte white walls, and brush-blackened display tables.



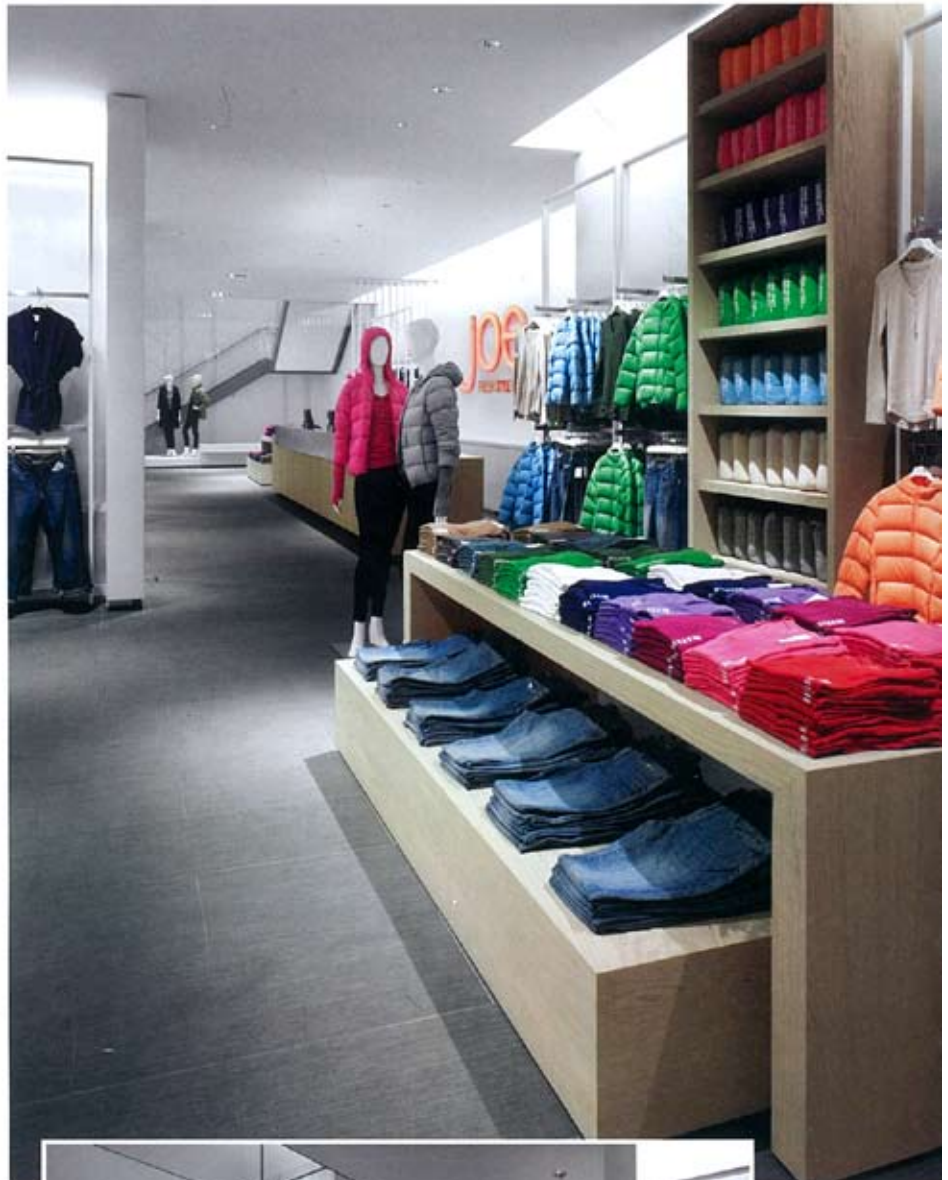
Filek develops and maintains client relationships, they say there's frequent crossover and both have significant input on both creative and business matters.

One of their most recent projects is a compact, two-level Toronto retail design for Pink Tartan, a modern womenswear fashion line that president and head designer Kimberley Newport-Mimran describes as "preppy chic." Noting the new Yorkville shop's corner location in a weathered brick 1867 heritage building – it was originally a Town of York jail – Burdi says, "We decided to create a modernist, cleaner envelope on the inside."

They did so with such features as herringbone-patterned bleached oak floors on both levels, minimalist Fronzoni-like glass and metal fixturing, and focal walls finished with a linen effect. To mix things up, there's a suggestion of Art Deco in an upstairs bureau and low-back chair. More generally, Burdi opened up the spaces that had been considerably darker in the shop's previous incarnation as an antiques store. "I'm ecstatic about the way it turned out," Newport-Mimran says. "Diego's sensibility for space and light is fabulous."

Newport-Mimran's husband, Joseph Mimran, is the driving force behind Joe Fresh Style, the Loblaw fashion brand that is rolling out its first stand-alone retail locations with Burdifilek as interior designer. The brand's flagship Vancouver store opened last fall. The downtown Granville Street location features two floors of style and price-driven Joe Fresh Style fashions with a Burdifilek backdrop of neutral tones to showcase the youthful, design-savvy product. Italian porcelain flooring, cerused oak display tables and white powdercoated metal wall systems create an environment "to make the product sing," Burdi says. Eight more Joe Fresh Style locations by Burdifilek are in the works.

In contrast to these fashion retailers, Burdifilek's design challenge with telecom giant Bell was, not surprisingly, technology-driven. Called in to design more than 100 Bell retail locations opening across Canada in the next 20 months, Filek says, "We made quite a large monumental shift off of what Bell's existing stores were by creating more of an interactive experi-





This page In Club Monaco's 57th Street flagship in New York, ebony-stained jatoba flooring provides a dramatic contrast to an overall white palette.

Opposite In Joe Fresh Style's Vancouver flagship, the clothing is the focal point, artfully framed by white powdercoated metal wall systems; fixtures and finishes are rendered in a unified palette of crisp whites and sandblasted acrylics.



Above The floor fixtures in Bell's new Toronto flagship were inspired, in form, by an actual mobility device; the store is cleanly designed, with a strategically limited palette. **Left** A blue-tinted Starfire glass screen provides a backdrop for window displays; the team introduced an oversized backlit Bell logo along the length of the space. **Opposite** In a compact Capezio in Toronto, walls, ceiling and floor merge, the store becoming a sculptural installation in itself; floor and seating are in dynamic Tokyo purple.



ence." Walking into Bell's new flagship store in Toronto's always bustling Yonge and Eglinton neighbourhood, customers are met with an oversized, glowing white Bell logo set against a lacquered wall finish of proprietary Bell blue. Company product is showcased on smart-phone-shaped floor fixtures and tall blue glass display towers. The 2,500-square-foot space is cleanly designed, organized, and bright with a strategically limited colour palette of blue, white, grey, and black.

But downtown Toronto is where Burdi and Filek first brought their expertise to a larger audience with all-custom interior redesigns at famed higher-end retailer Holt Renfrew's main location on the city's so-called Mink Mile on Bloor Street. Half a decade on, the retailer's power shoppers continue to navigate spaces with Burdifilek touches – such as an overhead gold-coloured flower sculpture, designed by the firm and made by local artisans Unit 5; and such upper-floor features as a transparent Lucite, South Pacific-style space divider and artful ceiling-suspended clusters of white powdercoated aluminum rods. The all-custom work at Holt Renfrew allowed Burdifilek to make "a grander brand statement," Filek says.

The award-winning work also led to several overseas projects, beginning in 2005, for luxury Dublin retailer Brown Thomas. Located in a series of heritage buildings, the Irish business got the full-on Burdifilek treatment in areas such as a 7,000-square-foot shoe department, where the Canadian design team finished walls in a combination of soft earth-coloured suede and bleached zebra wood. The firm's latest work for Brown Thomas, a revamp of its Luxury Hall, included honed marble flooring in beige tones, cantilevered fixtures anchored by champagne-coloured Starfire glass bases, and a gold-tinted dichroic glass perimeter wall.

Back in Toronto, one of Burdi and Filek's favourite past projects is a modest-sized redesign for trendy women's shoe retailer Capezio. Also on Mink Mile, the small space features a high ceiling composed of a sculptural white drywall that suggests the aluminum facade of the nearby Daniel Libeskind-designed Royal Ontario Museum addition. (Their design was first, though, and on budget, Burdi

says with another laugh.) The shoe store's upper white volume is contrasted by custom Burdifilek soft seating upholstered in Knoll Tokyo purple. The carpeting is also purple.

Burdifilek's work for Toronto-based office furniture manufacturer Teknion resulted in the firm's first winery interior design, completed in early 2006. Teknion president and CEO David Feldberg was branching out with his new Stratus Vineyards venture and had commissioned an environmentally sustainable retail and production building in Niagara-on-the-Lake. The Toronto designers were responsible for the building's retail and tasting area, as well as two private tasting rooms. In the public spaces, charcoal terrazzo flooring contrasts with a white marble and whitewashed oak bar.

Burdi says the firm's designs are guided by "a global approach" and that also translates into increasing international work, such as Burdifilek's recent designs for the W Hotel in downtown Atlanta. Inspired by the Georgia city's lush green spaces, the hotel lobby, or "living room," features Toronto artist Dennis Lin's space-filling mobile of hundreds of white gold-coloured aluminum leaves that gently sway like a canopy of trees. Along with custom-designed curved seating, the lobby also includes steamed and burnt bentwood screens and a tall water feature with an onyx reflecting pool. An extra-large Extreme Wow suite is designed in teal shades, while other suites feature indigo or mulberry colours; all suites feature detailing of macassar wood and glossy acrylics.

Seventeen years on, Burdi says he and Filek's working partnership is "like breathing," but the goal of their work is clearly closer to "breathtaking." ❧

Top For Niagara-on-the-Lake's Stratus Winery, Burdifilek created a "library of wine" around the perimeter of the space. **Bottom** In downtown Atlanta's W Hotel, undulating, hand-carved solid walnut walls provide a rich backdrop to the entrance and lobby; grace notes include an installation of metal spheres.

