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SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2010

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Nature a critical boost

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Reich+Petch helped create the Schad Gallery of Biodiversity at the Royal Ontario Museum

REICH+PETCH DESIGN INTERNATIONAL

A boutique Toronto firm goes global with a surging reputation in exhibition design

BY JAMES ASKEW

AT A GLANCE

LOCATION:
TORONTO, ON

FOUNDED:
1987

EMPLOYEES:
28

AREA OF SPECIALTY:
INTERNATIONAL
EXHIBITION DESIGN

IF PASSION IS THE MEASURE OF TRUE SUCCESS, then Tony Reich has undoubtedly made his mark. Reich is the founder of both Reich+Petch Architects, Inc. and Reich+Petch Design International in Toronto, Ontario. His enthusiasm for the work of his firms is abundant. "We have some very exciting projects happening at the moment," Reich explains. "We are always very excited, because the work we do is often in the public realm and launched to [the] public, which is always very interesting." Reich and Whit Petch founded the firm in 1987. Six years later the pair founded Design International. The original intent of the second firm was a practical one, though, according to Reich, it has since become considerably more.

In the early '90s, Canada was in a recession, and the firm recognized the importance of maintaining a diversified client base, including in other countries. For architects, however, work in other countries often is complicated by licensing and other restrictions—restrictions not regularly imposed on interior and exhibition designers. The founding of Design International effectively delineated its design services from those of Reich+Petch Architects and broadened the firm's market.

With just 28 employees between the two firms, Reich+Petch's exhibition work now spans 22 countries and composes 75 percent of its workload; the firm is considered a global expert in the area, boasting exhibi-

tions in such renowned institutions as the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, DC, and the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto.

For the Smithsonian Institute, Reich+Petch completed the David H. Koch Hall of Human Origins this year, detailing the extensive scientific understanding of human evolution. Plans for the exhibition have been on the museum's books for nearly 20 years, Reich says, and its opening on March 2010 marked the 100-year anniversary of the museum's official opening on the National Mall in Washington DC.

At the Royal Ontario Museum, Reich+Petch also recently completed gallery work for an exhibition detailing the rapid extinction of species around the globe. The Schad Gallery of Biodiversity's Life in Crisis exhibit leads visitors through 9,000 square feet of exhibition space filled with approximately 2,500 species of flora and fauna—many of which are either extinct or threatened.

"The tricky thing with that gallery was to not make it a downer, but also get the profound message through that we are causing a lot of destruction out there," Reich says. "People don't want to take their kids to a depressing experience. So we tried to get that message through, but still make it a very exciting, upbeat, and enjoyable experience, and I think it strikes that balance very well."

The firm designed the CentrePlace Manitoba pavilion at Vancouver's "LiveCity Downtown," one of two city-sponsored locations that provided visitors a place to congregate during the Olympic and Paralympic games. Each province was invited to set up a pavilion that would showcase its distinct qualities. Reich+Petch was asked by provincial entity Travel Manitoba to design the province's Pavilion.

The theme of the pavilion captured the centrality of Manitoba as the geographic centre of the country. It highlighted the province's austere, natural beauty and its appeal to outdoor enthusiasts. Using touch screen as a centre point of information, four overhead spokes rotated around the pavilion's circular design while illuminated murals on the static, outside walls represented activities from Manitoba's four seasons. To add further to the sense of a centre point and motion, each of the four quadrants defined by the spokes contained nine plasma screens showing a different reel, with each reel's action moving from one screen to the next.

Reich says that this vast diversity of content is a primary reason that the work remains exciting. "You might have human evolution on one project and the War of 1812 on another," he says. "Exhibition design is very different from other kinds of design, in that you have to really understand the content to convey it to the public... And that's what makes it so much fun." CRQ

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—Tony Reich, Founding Principal

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Over 25 years, we have evolved our viewpoint about design to create extraordinary moments and opportunities for people to have experiences that change their understanding and perspective of the world they live in.

REICH+PETCH

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