

Gifts of the Raven

A Work of Art

by Susanna Chu

A child runs his pudgy fingers along the curves of Bill Reid's Haida Gwaii sculpture at the Vancouver International Airport. The smoothness and roundness of the mythical creatures in the jade canoe fascinate him. His mother rests nearby on the steps encircling the statue. The Wave Wall, an undulating pattern of blue glazing, provides a dramatic backdrop for the scene. Silhouetted against the glass, travellers emerge from an escalator into a semi-circular space framed by a curved balustrade. Set against the balustrade is the Gifts of the Raven, winner of a 2002 IDIBC gold award for retail design. Its elliptical structure, resting on minimal vertical supports, echoes the flowing lines and curves of the surrounding space.

"The amorphous shape complemented the airport's architecture, and yet gave the store its own identity," says Henry Stone, director of design and facility development for HMS Host.

HMS Host owns Gifts of the Raven, a retail outlet for authentic aboriginal art. When the Vancouver International Airport Authority issued a request for proposals, the Maryland-based retailer seized the opportunity to design an award-winning store in the prime airport location next to the Haida Gwaii sculpture in the international terminal.

After Stone developed the initial concept, the task of translating it into reality fell to David Hanson, RID, of DH Designs.

"All I had was the concept renderings and the lease line of the footprint," he says.

Working closely with Stone and the rest of the project team, Hanson met the challenge in record time. After receiving the concept renderings in April 2002, he developed a design that, after many iterations, finally received the Airport Authority's design review approval. Heron Construction and Millwork, the general contractor retained by Stone, completed the project in eight weeks and the 775-square-foot outlet opened on July 1, 2002, in time for the tourist season.

Among other requirements, the Authority demanded the proposed design preserve sightlines from all main approaches and appeal to travellers even when the store is closed.

Forming an almost-transparent shell, the elliptical structure and its columns do not block views to the Haida Gwaii sculpture or the Wave Wall, nor do they define the space in a conventional way.

"It's right out in the middle of the terminal. There are no walls. There's no confinement to the space," says Hanson.



Photos by Michael Carpenter



Owner:	HMS Host
Location:	Vancouver International Airport
Concept Designer:	HMS Host (Henry Stone)
Interior Designer:	DH Designs (David Hanson, RID)
Lighting Design:	Total Lighting Solutions Inc. (Galina Zbrizher, LC IALD)
Native Art Panels:	Larry Rosso
General Contractor:	Heron Construction and Millwork
Square Footage:	775

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The slender forms, made from structural steel bent to a tight profile, had to be engineered to meet seismic requirements. Heron then clad the structure in indigenous fir and cedar with a natural, rough texture. The custom millwork also includes maple display cases and art panels strategically placed throughout the store. Aboriginal artist Larry Rosso painted the custom panels, which reflect Raven folklore and tell the stories of items on display. With Rosso's artwork, the wood-clad columns evoke the image of the support columns in a lighthouse.

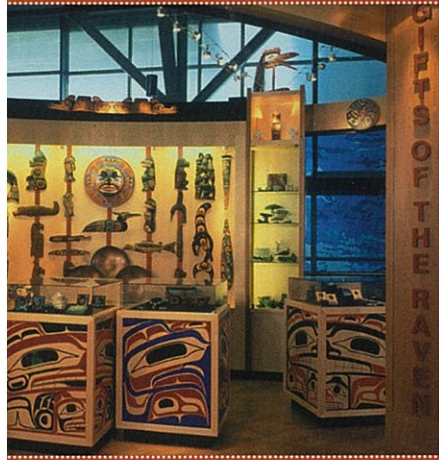
"Because of its museum-like nature, the design really was made to fit around the product," says Hanson.

The light, natural colours of the millwork provide a neutral backdrop for the colourful First Nations art. Portable display cases, which allow the store to expand beyond the ellipse, add to the museum effect. A metal security grille runs behind the totem columns so that the merchandise in the mounted display cases creates visual interest even when the store is closed. To improve security, fibre-optic lighting units were placed inside the cases.

"The only part [of the unit] that needs maintaining is in a secure location at the base of the column, inside the store," explains Galina Zbrizher of Total Lighting Solutions Inc.

The openness of the structure posed other challenges. With a skylight above and the Wave Wall behind the store, strong daylight made it difficult to establish the contrast necessary for the displays to stand out. The solution included placing lighting

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fixtures with narrow-beam lamps as close to the merchandise as possible. To prevent heat and UV damage to the organic art pieces, Zbrizher used low-energy MR16IR lamps in the open areas. In the enclosed displays, where trapped heat is even more of an issue, remote light sources and fibre-optic cables with remote adjustable heads are used.

To best integrate all the components, under tight timelines, the interior, millwork and lighting all had to be designed concurrently. The close collaboration has resulted in a winning project. It has netted

a North West Regional Illumination Design Award and a National Association of Store Fixture Manufacturers outstanding merit award. It was also named Chainstore Age's 2002 Store of the Year (hard lines under 3,000 square feet). And, of course, this year's IDIBC judges were impressed by the strong integration of the design elements with the design objective, and the well-resolved solutions.

"I'm very honoured to receive [the IDIBC award] from my own peers," says Hanson. "Having run the competition in previous years, it's neat to enter and finally win." ■



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Honourable Mention



Photo by Ed White Photographics

UpCountry, West 4 Avenue

This store's contemporary new look reflects the client's objective. The simplicity and beauty of the millwork complement the merchandise, while the lighting and crisp, clean space provide a neutral setting to showcase product.

Client: Upcountry Canada B.C. Ltd.

Location: Vancouver

Interior Designers: Chelsey Hornsby, RID; Rock Paper Scissors (Stephen Lunney); and UpCountry Canada B.C. Ltd. (Stephen Sutch)

Architect: Formwerks Architectural Inc.

General Contractor: Quigg Construction (Canada) Inc.

Square Footage: 8,500