



Gelled fluorescents pick up the fresh, clean colours of the H2O Plus product line. Wall washes and floor and counter display lighting support an overall impression of serenity.

# Water, water everywhere...

By Galina Zbrizher  
Photos By Roger Brooks

**H2O Plus draws in customers with a clean, calming design inspired by water.**

H2O Plus is a spa, skin product and fragrance store that recently opened on Robson Street, Vancouver's busiest, most fashionable retail thoroughfare. Vancouver was a natural choice, if you excuse the pun, to be the first Canadian location of a new prototype for this international retail chain. Its merchandise is targeted towards environmentally conscious customers who prefer natural-based products and a healthy lifestyle.

At the start of the design process, H2O Plus CEO Cindy Melk identified three design requirements to ensure that the store appealed to these customers. The design should:

- reflect the water-based, natural elements philosophy of the brand and slogan "It is Bliss, It is Energy, It is Life," by incorporating a clean, minimalist aesthetic
- integrate the clear blue colour of the client's primary product range, and
- develop a design that could adapt easily to a variety of leasing locations and conditions.

The project had many challenges, among them an aggressive schedule. Everything,

from the inception of the idea, imaging, and design to opening day, including nine weeks of construction, took only five months. To ensure delivery, most of the lighting was pre-ordered. To meet the schedule, we had to sacrifice some of the originally specified products and substitute with what was available.

One advantage of the compressed design period was the involvement of the lighting designer in the project early on. The approach was truly holistic. The team designed the store as a whole, rather than adding the lighting layer to an already designed architecture. All members of the team assessed architecture, interiors and lighting, and their interaction. The result was a creative synergy and integration of architecture and light.

To create a feeling of serenity, the team worked with a limited set of materials and colours. The lighting system — supportive and responsive to the architecture — was an important contributor in achieving the program goals.

The team created an experience that submerges the customers in the enchanting world of water.

## From the street

Brightly lit window displays and entrance draw customer attention.

- The window displays are high lighted with clusters of MR16s. Selected fixtures are fully adjustable to provide flexibility for ever-changing displays. Light is crisp, white and controlled.
- Four small aperture MR16 downlights at the door identify the entrance and invite people in.
- A custom-designed sign greets customers above the entrance doors. The sign is backlit with "bromo blue" neon and reflected in the metal building skin. The resulting halo bathes the sign in an ethereal blue light. The effect is simple, sophisticated and elegant.

## Through the doors

On entering the store customers are immersed in a cool, "watery" interior. Ceiling coves and wall recesses are lit with gelled fluorescents that match the colour of the product line. This effect contrasts with the purity of white walls and millwork. Combined with glassy textures and finishes, the colour creates interest and evokes a feel of the water elements, distinguishing H2O Plus on a streetscape with literally hundreds of high-end stores.

To light merchandise on the store perimeter, fluorescent strips with asymmetric reflectors are mounted in millwork cases above the product, and complemented by fluorescents mounted below frosted glass lower shelves. In addition, all perimeter walls are wallwashed with recessed, adjustable T5HO fixtures chosen for their small size and powerful delivery.

To light the curved corner, and to achieve consistency in light quality and quantity, rectangular 4"x 8" aperture 42W TRT wallwashers were used. Wallwashers oriented with the smaller 4" side towards the wall were selected for their better integration with the curvature.

Economical fluorescent strips mounted under displays and cash counter enhance the feeling of floating in water, adding to the ambiance and to ambient lighting levels.

The skin care products on the demonstration counter and the accompanying stainless steel sink sparkle in the light of MR16 downlights discreetly recessed in the ceiling above them. The internally lit

freestanding displays add another layer to the lighting, and balance brightness within the store.

Located behind the cash register, a feature glass wall is animated and attracts the attention of many customers. One of the store clerks stated, "Every day there are people trying to figure out where the light comes from." This wall is backlit with long life, low energy, compact RGB LEDs that are easily accessible from a storage area at the back of the store. The LEDs are programmed to change colour and scroll from turquoise into blue, the colours of the major product lines. This effect mimics the lapping of ocean waves, an element that is the basis of the client's products.

Accessibility, maintenance and energy considerations were addressed as well. Most of the light is provided with energy efficient, long life fluorescents. The life of halogen lamps was extended by dimming them to 95%. Lighting Power Density in the store is only 2.4 w/sf, and low voltage controls are simple, economical and easy to operate.

Design and construction of H2O Plus was completed in five months with a \$100,000. sav-

ings to the construction budget.

The effort of the design team and the overall quality of the H2O Plus design has been recognized by numerous awards. At the time of writing, this store has received a "Best in Retail" Award of Excellence from IDIBC, been awarded "10 Best Retail Stores" in North America in retail competition in Chicago, and received a Pacific Regional IIDA award, advancing to the International level with the final judging taking place at Lightfair.

But the best testimony to the success of this project is that, within two months of opening, the store had the #1 sales volume in the chain.

**Project location:** H2O Plus, 919 Robson Street, Vancouver.

**Design Team:** Brent North MAIBC, Susan Smallemberg IID, Philip Gowland, Architectura, Planning Architecture Interiors Inc.

**Lighting Designer:** Galina Zbrizher, Douglas Welch + Galina Zbrizher Associates, formerly with Earth Tech Canada. Tel: 604-874-0552, galina@d-w-d.com.



From outside, the window and interior lighting invites passers-by into a cool, blue pool of serenity.

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