"It's not on the scale of Newport or Biltmore, but in terms of quality, it ranks."

—DAVID BAGNALL, AUTHOR OF
AN AMERICAN PALACE: CHICAGO'S SAMUEL M. NICKERSON HOUSE

Its long history started in 1879, when banker Samuel Nickerson asked Burling and White-house, one of Chicago's earliest architecture firms, to design and build the 25,000-square-foot townhouse.

"It's not on the scale of Newport or Biltmore, but in terms of quality, it ranks," says David Bagnall, author of A*n American Palace: Chicago's Samuel M. Nickerson House*. Outside, it's an ode to classicism. But inside, it's an eclectic melting pot of Egyptian, Persian, and Chinese styles, with some English and Italian Renaissance thrown in just for good measure. "It's all about the blending of different styles and cultures," Bagnall says. "They were trying to define a particular American style representative of the culture."

Nickerson would live in the house for 17 years; another family would live there until 1920, and it would become office space until a total renovation was begun in 2003 by Richard H. Driehaus.

Today, the residence houses Driehaus's private collection of decorative arts from 1880 to 1920, consisting primarily of works by Louis Comfort Tiffany. Among the late 19th century furnishings are a number of original pieces from the home. "He has a passion for historic architecture and design, and he's a big supporter of the National Trust," Bagnall says. "A lot of money was poured into this project—after so many buildings of this period fell out of favor and into disrepair, only to be torn down."
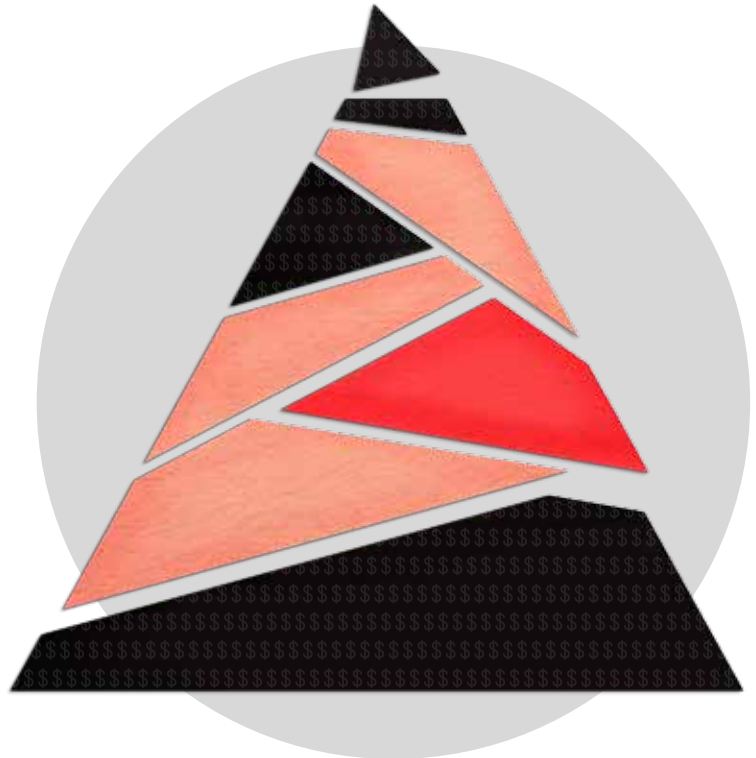
Thankfully, not this one. ❧

BY J. MICHAEL WELTON
PHOTOS BY ALEXANDER VERTIKOFF

Whither the Designer?

Can a brand survive if the management doesn't care about design?

In all creatively driven enterprises, the relationship between the designers and the management team is paramount. In the best cases, it's a mutually beneficial relationship, where both sides thrive off of one another. In the worst, it can spell disaster for the company as a whole.

A good example: Apple's introduction of the iMac in 1998. Behind its fun colors and cool shape was newly hired British designer Jonathan Ive. The partnership between Ive and Apple head honcho Steve Jobs resulted in many iconic (and profitable) products and systems that defined the decade, and the turn of the century.

They worked together successfully to mesh design and business. But a good working chemistry like theirs is rare. In many cases, there is tension between the design talent and the management team, and it can result in a deep divide within the brand, like it did with Jimmy Choo.

According to *The Towering World of Jimmy Choo*, the namesake owner himself did not grasp the importance of business. Chief creative officer Tamara Mellon did. After Choo left in 2001, she successfully led the brand to become one of the most profitable and highly-valued luxury companies of the past decade, valued at nearly £525.5 million in 2011.

(CONTINUED)

But shortly after selling Jimmy Choo to privately-owned luxury good firm Labelux in 2011, the behind-the-scenes tensions were revealed as Mellon came out in the *Financial Times* strongly criticizing the short-term mindset of most private equity firms looking to quickly turn a profit by selling yet again. Mellon was quoted in the *FT*: "The day after signing, they talked about selling the business."

Mellon's criticism harks to a larger point that many investment firms and management teams had been pondering: Is a leading design voice needed to drive a brand? Or has the role of management and the brand at large become more important than the voice of the designer?

It's a question without an easy answer. Would Apple have risen to be the giant that it is today without Jonathan Ive championing the design along the way, or without the strong support and partnership of Steve Jobs?

Amidst these continuing troubled economic times, the natural urge among many management teams is to exert as much control over the process as possible. Unfortunately, that could spell disaster for a brand if the creative force is replaced by a filler team that fails to ignite passion and excitement among its consumers. It is the emotional connection that the designer crafts with the end user that is so important for any designed object, service or environment.

The good news is that there are many great companies out there acting as a beacon for a healthy management/designer relationship. Bottega Veneta's Tomas Maier enjoys a close partnership with BV president and CEO Marco Bizzarri. It's a partnership that has resulted in Bottega delivering some of the strongest financial returns of any luxury house over the past few years, not to mention inspiring designs. To be a true partnership, one cannot speed along the process; it requires a practice of mutual respect. ❧

BY STEVEN FISCHER

Cleveland Goes Green

A renovated park brings a bright patch to the city's downtown

Cleveland has many nicknames, "The Mistake on the Lake" being its most notorious. But a more fitting moniker is "The Forest City," and anybody who has ever seen Cleveland's mature tree groves and green spaces can understand why. Thomas Balsley, the New York landscape architect who helmed the city's Perk Park renovation, discusses how the newly revamped area combines arboreal tranquility with plaza-like pizzazz to help Cleveland undertake its latest urban renaissance.

DB: Perk Park first opened in the 1970s, so why redesign now?
TB: It never lived up to people's expectations. I'm not anti-preservation at all, but when something doesn't work, it doesn't work, especially in the public sector. Everything was overgrown. It interrupted clear site lines and travel across the park. There were depressions from the sidewalk. It didn't require a little tweaking, but a major retooling.

What inspired the new design?
We came up with a strategy we call "the meadow and the forest;" We'd preserve half the trees, but have a subtle rounding of the forms. That required the loss of trees, but created a lot of sunlight, openness, and lawn for the public to use in any number of ways, from lunch hours, to summer movie night, to kids playing. The intent was that it was a social stage, [and] it let us keep a forested portion of the park intact.

The park's two halves are completely different spaces but somehow they work together. How did you balance the two?
There's a dialogue between order and chaos. I like to rub those two things together, and it creates a compelling, provocative experience. With Perk, we imposed a grid over the site, defined in the light poles. There are little pavement slots that are lined up with the light poles as well. So there's this sense of order in the space, even when you go into the forest. It gives a certain calmness. ❧

BY BRIAN LIBBY

Safety First
At the old Perk Park, sunken spaces and heavy tree canopies provided dark cover for dark deeds. "In fact, while funding was being secured, a violent crime occurred in the old park," says James McKnight, Perk's project architect. "Tom's suggestion to raise the level of the park closer to sidewalk level allowed the park to immediately become more inviting." And the more inviting it became, the more Clevelanders have started to use it for good gatherings. "It's definitely the most populated and energized urban park in downtown, especially at lunch hour when the food trucks pull up," McKnight says.