

# LOOKING GOOD!

Never underestimate the impact of interior design on membership sales, satisfaction and retention.

by Barb Gormley

**L**ike it or not, most people judge us by how we look. Within the first few seconds of meeting, they have assessed us and made a judgment – positive or negative – that is not easily changed.

Jeff Woods was keenly aware of this during the planning phase of his personal training studio, Custom Fit, in Edmonton.

Walk into his funky 6,000 square foot space and you'll be immediately impressed as you're met by a glossy, multi-textured painted path that weaves its way to the change rooms. Glance over your shoulder and you'll spot a circular consultation room with walls of white corrugated plastic, lit up like a spaceship. Look again and you'll



**Kingswood Fitness  
Fredericton, New Brunswick**



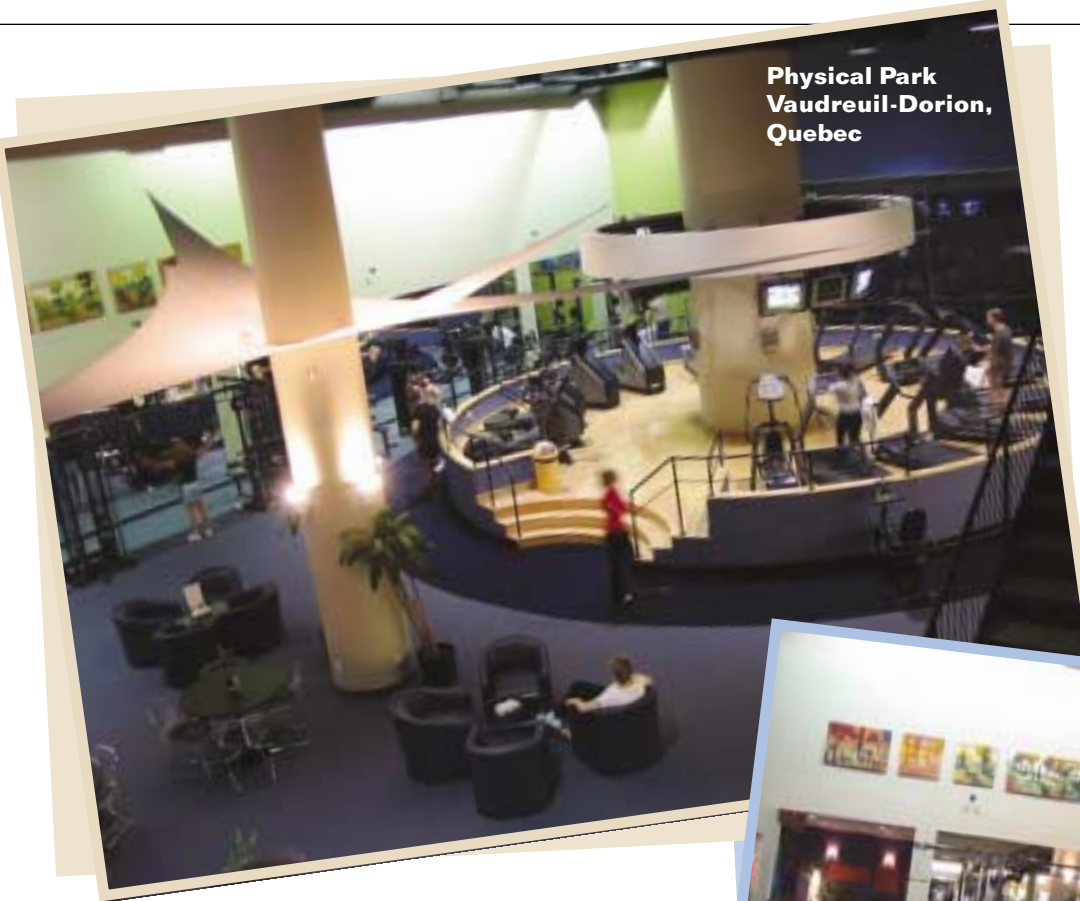
see a 15-foot climbing wall that doubles as an intriguing piece of art with its colourful holds and blood-red painted borders.

"I knew what I wanted right from the start," says Woods, who, with his partners, spent \$90,000 on equipment and \$160,000 on the renovation and design. "I traveled to New York City and San Francisco to look at their top studios. I wanted something different – a functional, contemporary industrial design."

And Woods wanted the design to immediately convey to members that his studio was offering something better than other exercise facilities.

"Our client base is pretty discriminating, paying a premium \$60 per hour," he notes. "Members tell us that they've never seen

Physical Park  
Vaudreuil-Dorion,  
Quebec



## Tips from Interior Designer John Smale

**1. DON'T** have a security zone, door buzzer or other negative barrier at the entrance. Instead, create a friendly space where people can mix and feel positive about their visit.

**2. DO** offer beautiful locker rooms and relaxation areas. Baby boomers spend considerable time in clubs and expect upgraded and comfortable facilities.

**3. DON'T** line things up! Rows of equipment, mirrors or overhead lights will make your facility look like a dance studio or fat-burning factory instead of a comfortable, no-punishment lifestyle club.

**4. DO** tour other fitness facilities in your area. Don't try to emulate them – create something better.

**5. DO** install durable, easy-to-clean surfaces – no carpeted walls! Seamless shower floors are grout-free leaving fewer places for mold and germs to grow.

**6. DON'T** light up the floor. Mix-up and diffuse the lighting – bounce it off the ceiling or create dramatic pools of light.

**7. DO** it right and hire a pro to design your club. The expense will be more than paid for by the increase you see in sales.

another studio that offers what we offer aesthetically. We also pride ourselves on our professional service and highly-motivated team.”

Despite his own passion for abstract art and industrial design, Woods would never have tackled the design aspect of the job on his own.

“Our designer had innovative ideas and knew ways of saving money. She was also tapped into the latest wall materials, carpets and finishes. Because she works on multiple projects, she got us some high-density carpet for one-sixth of the cost because it was the wrong colour for another job. We wouldn't have been able to afford it otherwise.”

Across the country, at Physical Park in Vaudreuil-Dorion, Quebec, a huge kite suspended just inside the main doors and the pleasant scent in the air make it clear that first impressions have been carefully considered here too.

“Many clubs in this area are cafeteria-like with fluorescent lighting and high ceilings. I wanted a design that

Custom Fit  
Edmonton, Alberta



## Look to Clients to Curb Costs

Jeff Woods, co-owner of Custom Fit in Edmonton, recommends getting creative to save money. “To manage costs, we looked at our client base to see who would have a vested interest in this being a beautiful and functional space. When we realized that one of our clients owned a construction company, we gave him the opportunity to showcase his work. As part of the arrangement, his company had a large sign posted during the construction process – and six months later the sign is still up. I estimate that we saved \$25,000 to \$50,000 in construction costs because of this arrangement.”

created an atmosphere with ambiance,” says co-owner Alexander von Huene. “We try to hit all the senses – with design, sound, lighting, finishes and smell – so that being here is an experience to remember.”

Members enjoy a beautiful visual environment of natural colours punctuated with bright artworks and much more.

For example, in yoga classes, a pre-programmed lighting system adjusts lights throughout the hour. During power yoga, the lights change to a deep red as the class becomes more intense.

In key areas of the 32,500 square foot club – the entrance, hallways leading to the locker rooms, and the spa area – the faint

## Paintings versus painting

Instead of focusing on paint colour, the owners of Physical Park decorate with colourful paintings, says Alexander von Huene, co-owner of the Vaudreuil-Dorion, Quebec, fitness club. “We change the paintings the same way some restaurants do,” explains von Huene. “I have an artist who does large, energetic, abstract paintings. I rent them from him and eventually sell them to members. Because the artist and I share the profits, it’s more cost-effective than decorating with paint. They really cost me nothing.”

## PROFESSIONAL ADVICE

According to John Smale of PACE Design in Belleville, Ontario, club owners don't need to be knowledgeable about design. As the designer of more than 10 spa and fitness facilities, he recommends leaving the creative and layout aspects of the job to a qualified interior designer. "Owners can best contribute with a solid business plan, a vision for long term development and commitment to update the design about every five years."

smell of essential oils greets you. Because the oils are expensive, the mild fragrance is released automatically only during the club's busiest times. It's a refreshing alternative to the typical gym smells of rubber and sweat.

In all, Von Huene estimates that \$150,000 was spent on design. He firmly believes that scrimping during the design phase of any building project can spell disaster.

"You need the designer on the job working with you to get the product you want," he explains. "The designer helps you understand how the design will affect your payroll, flow patterns and maintenance costs. After 2½ years, there are only a few little things I'd change about the design of this club." **FBC**



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