



# L A Inside

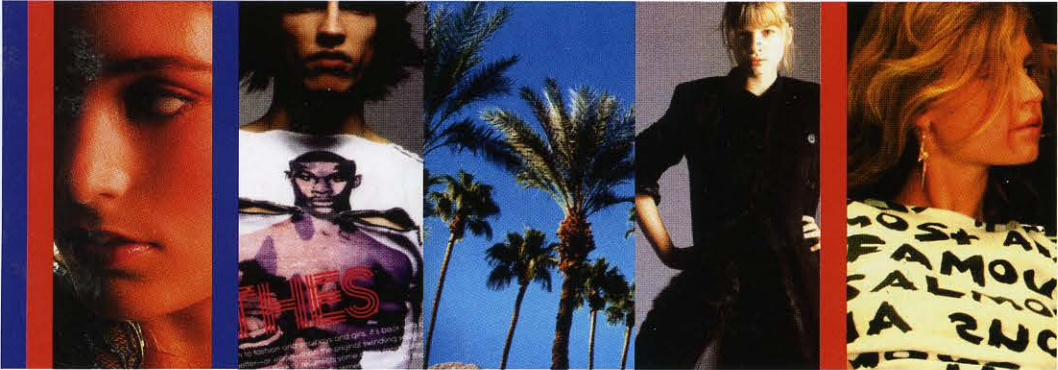
By Jesse Brink

## (M)Arch.

(M)Arch. is a small, five-year-old architecture and design firm with a unique structure: its staff is split nearly equally into one-half design and one-half marketing. Or, to put it more accurately, the marketing team is part of the design team. Instead of merely promoting the firm or hustling new work, they use their training in the art of identifying and communicating a client's "brand" to help develop project design. This business model, adapted from advertising and entertainment, helps produce distinctive spaces that truly unite the client's needs with the designers' creativity.

The marketing team digs deep into the client's process: This way design development is not adversarial, a conflict of visions. They capture their findings in a series of concept books that then inform the design. The method has worked equally well whether program is retail, commercial, domestic or educational. Key to its success is that the approach does not restrict the designers. Indeed, it saves many projects from client whim. "You establish an objective and it no longer becomes about the client's favorite color," explains Sherry. "You simply say, 'No, I'm sorry, that does not suit the brand.'"

**(M)Arch.** strategic architectures

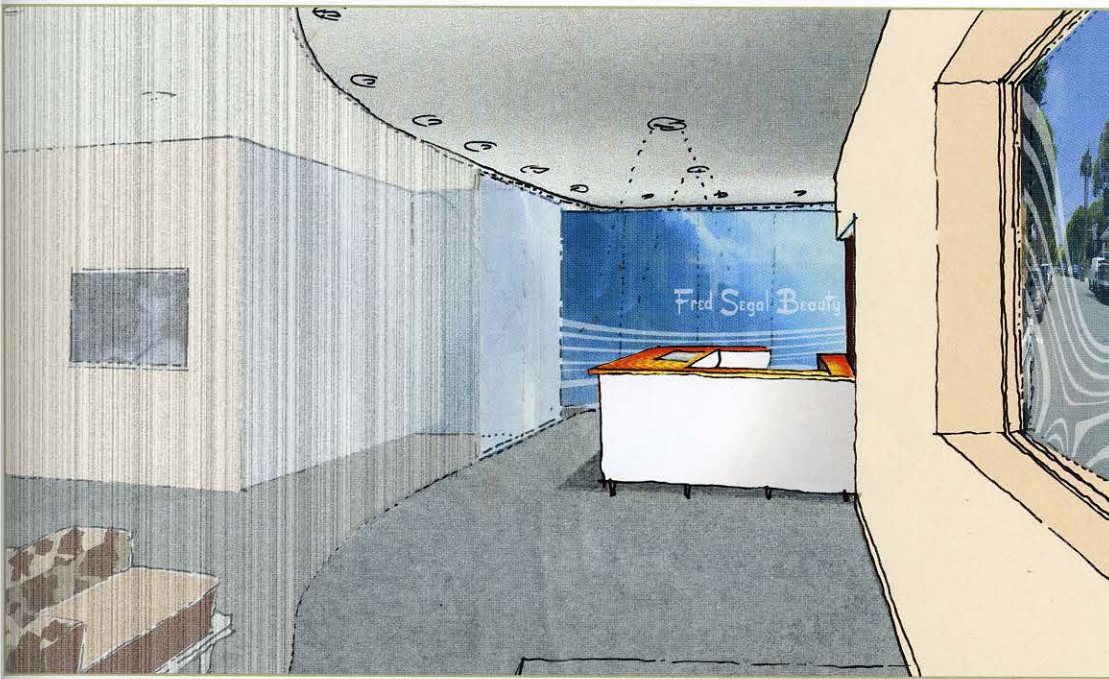


FSB defines hip . positive . energy . sexy . dynamic . lead . invent . create

Identity

**Fred Segal Beauty**  
420 Broadway  
Santa Monica, CA 90401

Sometimes clients have a clear idea of their vision, but more often the team at (M)Arch. has to help them find it. To do so, they develop a small book of images composed with text, called a concept book, meant to capture the essence of the client. The imagery in the book is fairly abstract, to prevent the client from taking it too literally and saying, "I want it to look like that." But at the same time, it is developed and discussed in precise detail. When studying the page shown here, the client at Fred Segal Beauty took care to edit out the word "hip." After discussions and revisions, the client signs off on the book, and it serves as a touchstone from then on.



Like all designers, (M)Arch. is always looking for visual tools to help the client understand the design process. Their concept books arose from this search. From the books, the next stage is usually an investigation of materials combined with a few 3D sketches like the one shown here. They are leery of more “precise” representations, such as form-Z renderings, which they feel don’t always captures the feel of space and materials. Here they show that nothing is behind closed doors, the energy of the beauty artists is the focal point of the space, which is subtly divided by the flowing curtain. To create a palette of materials, they typically bring in far more than is necessary, and then let elements filter out or find their place. Here, and always, they try to realize luxe styles with inexpensive and even industrial materials.



*Partners Todd Erlandson (design) and Sherry Hoffman (marketing) not only work together, but also teach together, this year sharing their vision and methods with students at Tulane University.*

**(M)Arch.**