

Surf's Up

Valerio Dewalt Train plays off Internet Technology for the design of HGB New Media in Madison, Wisconsin.



Above: Meeting room /lounge space for the design group. Garden slugs inspired the sconces.

Opposite: View of the reception area. A portion of the steel-clad entry segment is visible at right. Behind the desk is a sandblasted panel depicting HGB's logo.

RECEPTION DESK, TEAM TABLE: **GEIGER BRICKEL**. SIDE CHAIRS AND FABRIC: **KEILHAUER**. SCONCES: **EUREKA**. PENDANT FIXTURES: **FLOS; LUCEPLAN**. SOFA: **NIENKAMPER/ICF**. FABRIC: **UNIKA VAEV/ICF**. TRACK LIGHTING: **JUNO**. HARDWARE: **IRONMONGER**.

PHOTOGRAPHY: BARBARA KARANT

HAPPY BOYS AND GIRLS – or HGB New Media when a corporate sounding name is called for – creates information technology and websites for clients engaged in B2B or B2C commerce on the Internet. Its business provided design cues to David Jennerjahn of the Chicago based firm Valerio Dewalt Train (VDT). So did the CEO's directive banning standard circulation corridors, walled offices, ceiling tiles and any other association with traditional corporate headquarters. "Do that and you're fired," Jennerjahn recalls his clients words during their first encounter.

Jennerjahn's take on web-surfing and its translation to three-dimensional design is intriguing. HGB's 8,600-sq.-ft. offices, housed within a new brick masonry structure also designed by VDT, suggest many of the random, ad-hoc qualities associated with surfing the Internet. "When you 'mount that board to surf,' you are never sure where you're going, what you will encounter along the way, or if you will even find what you are looking for," says Jennerjahn, describing typical adventures in cyberspace. "The journey creates a juxtaposition of disparate linked pages that is unexpected and often fascinating."

Similarly, a journey through HGB's headquarters follows a non-directional route running counter to the site's axial configuration. Public spaces, meeting and presentation rooms, and staff departments each have a corresponding lounge, metaphorically termed a "home page." These various spaces have been arranged in a somewhat irregular, free form manner, with



Below: The only similarity to a straightforward corridor occurs at the window wall

Opposite: Work areas within the large environment are defined by millwork whose cutout pattern was inspired by an old IBM computer punch card. Glass panels provide loose separation among the company's design, production, technical, and customer relations departments.

DESKS: **GEIGER BRICKEL**. AERON CHAIRS: **HERMAN MILLER**. TOLOMEO TASK LIGHTING: **ARTEMIDE**. LOUNGE CHAIR: **NIENKAMER/ICF**. UPHOLSTERY FABRIC: **KNOLL TEXTILES**. SIDE TABLE: **CHIASSO**. TRACK LIGHTING: **JUNO**. CINEMA CHAIR AND SOFA: **LAMMULTS/ICF**. LIGHTING CONSULTANT: **CHARTER SILLS & ASSOCIATES**. GENERAL CONTRACTOR: **FELDT CONSTRUCTION**.

divisions created by sandblasted glass panels on metal supports. Within departments, Jennerahn continues, "work desks are individual rather than clustered." This solution offers multiple pathways, flexibility, and, above all, a suggestively meandering quality. "Each space unfolds and you're not sure if you're going into a workspace or a lounge space," Jennerjahn comments on the spatial progression. In short, the space is anything but rigid.

Visually, the design of HBG employs the precise combination of elements connoting today's version of a creative, fast-forward firm. The 13 feet-high ceiling is exposed to its concrete grid. Segments of cherry or maple form a continuous floor, wall, and canopy within the larger environment, supplementing the glass dividing panels as articulating devices. Cable management is resolved through floor-to-ceiling ribbed plastic conduits. These elements offset the vastness of space, heightening the design's aesthetic qualities while still serving pragmatic functions. VDT's overall concept also encompasses concerns for the 40-person staff's comfort—for example, a living room-like lounge area, which includes a digital projection television system and even beer taps.

For all its similarities to a loft or converted warehouse, the client did not stipulate that the architects should emulate the building type. "Other than his original statement, the CEO gave us free reign," Jennerjahn recounts. "We actually had to edit ourselves. In a way, we ran the danger of overdoing it."

The project was completed in seven months. Christine McGrath collaborated with her VDT colleague. *—Edie Cohen*



