

Underwood & Moore Interior Designers

Small Firm, Big Credentials

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Kelly Moore and Fran Underwood both began their careers as independent interior designers, and have furthered their success through a longtime professional friendship. Both designers began interior design businesses in the 1980s, though four provinces apart. In 2001, the two companies decided to merge offices, advertising and expenses to establish the Underwood & Moore Interior Designers partnership in Chester, Nova Scotia.

Moore and Underwood are the sole employees of the partnership, working on projects worth up to \$5 million annually and subcontracting consultants on larger projects. Their office is located on Moore's property in Chester. The duo works in commercial, institutional and residential sectors. The partnership is one of over 30 officially registered members of Interior Designers of Nova Scotia, and Moore is a LEED Accredited Professional.

"Registered interior designers in Nova Scotia are legally able to stamp nonstructural construction drawings for building department permits in Nova Scotia; we are well-versed in building safety and fire codes," Moore explains.

Redefining Space

Moore and Underwood meet with clients throughout the conceptualization process and follow the design through to its completion. In addition to applying their knowledge of industry regulations and codes to projects they have perfected the art of defining a space exactly to the client's specification.

But Moore does more than just design the space; she also facilitates the company's gradual relocation to a center. "We work with the company's internal team to install data and phone lines, have all their systems and furniture, and we coordinate the staff's move," she continues. "It's a full package!"

Intimacy of a Small Firm

Underwood and Moore agree their one-on-one customer service is their edge in every project. Moore says that many of her clients like working with owners because they've got their heart in it. "Good people skills are essential in this industry," she explains, "because you're working so closely



with the owner or main stakeholder to coordinate the whole project.” Underwood says, “We’re big-picture planners who know that design is in the details.”

Both Underwood and Moore have been working in the industry for over 25 years. Each got their start in a large corporation. As such they have experienced the difficulties of managing projects within a large company; instead, they opt to remain a modest size. The two know they could be bigger, but they don’t want the management of the business to take away from the design they both love doing.

Staying Ahead of the Economy

The firm’s size hasn’t affected volume, however. “Actually, we’ve been very steady, it’s been quite good,” Moore says, reflecting on the economic downturn’s impact on the partnership. Underwood adds that “we’ve noticed things slowing down a bit in the last month, but up ‘til then things have been very steady for us.”

“We do so many different types of design,” Underwood continues. “In a two-week period we can go from an in-home colour consultation to a kitchen, bath or home office redesign, all the way to a complete retail pharmacy and medical clinic. Variety is definitely the spice of our designer lives,” she emphasizes.

In any economy, the Underwood and Moore team bids on large and small contracts through government, municipal offices and private tenders. They keep a steady stream of commercial and residential projects underway to ensure there is constant work. “We have a couple of regular contracts that keep a small amount of work coming in every month,” Moore says.

Both designers believe that their nine years of partnership has made involvement in the design industry more professionally and personally rewarding. They look forward to their next year, as well as another decade of success and professional contentment. “I love what I do,” says Moore, and Underwood nods agreement. “We’re very happy with the path that interior design and the company partnership have taken. Here’s to 10 years in 2010!” ■