

For family-law firm J.K. Hannaford, Barristers, Taylor Smyth Architects creates an oasis of calm – more art gallery than lawyer's office.

—By Leslie C. Smith

Law & order & art





Above The reception desk – in blonde recycled wood fibre and white back-painted glass – was custom made by Taylor Smyth. A white-leather bench by Teknion invites visitors to sit for a moment and view the surrounding art. **Opposite top** Old pipes and other mechanical bits lie like flotsam close to the surface of the highly polished concrete floor. **Opposite bottom** Clients may prefer the complete privacy of the waiting room tucked behind reception. Clerestory windows, along with a folded resin fixture from 3-Form, keep it bright.



Nervous, bewildered, angry, panic-stricken – the predominantly female clients who require the family law services of J.K. Hannaford, Barristers, are stressed out enough. The last thing they need is added intimidation, in the form of traditional lawyer's rooms with their dark wood panelling, imposing black-leather chairs and shelves full of thick-spined books. Such male-centric gravitas just wouldn't do for Julie Hannaford's new office space, her clientele, nor, for that matter, her all-female staff of 10.

"I think it's very important to be in a more comfortable atmosphere, a more empowering one," Hannaford says, adding that in her brief to Michael Taylor, of Toronto's Taylor Smyth Architects, she asked for "colours and shapes more associated with an aesthetic than an ethos."

And Hannaford knows aesthetics. A prolific collector of postmodern, mostly Canadian, art, her office at the corner of Bay and Bloor streets also acts as a quasi-gallery for her collection's overflow.





Left The office's airy sensibility continues through semi-transparent sliding doors into individual lawyer's workspaces.

Below The sensation of walking through an art gallery that just happens to house lawyers carries on down the tributary corridor branching off the main hallway; here, track spots highlight a found-art installation by Canadian Clint Griffin. Sliding translucent glass doors subtly indicate the presence of private offices.

Opposite Ciot river-stone-and-resin flooring, faux-limestone porcelain tiles and trough sinks give the washroom (affectionately known as "The Folly") an elegant, spa-like atmosphere. But it's the Jeff Goodman vessel in soft grass green that provides the space with an indelible finishing touch.



Indeed, the reception area, all white walls and hints of blonde wood, its floor a glistening sheen of highly polished concrete, features track halogens spotlighting a series of arresting installations with a blurb about the individual artist affixed neatly beside each frame. So easily could this quiet, contemplative spot be mistaken for a real gallery that it's somewhat of a blessing to be located on the 17th floor, far above the heads of curious passersby.

According to Michael Taylor, the high view overlooking the Windsor Arms Hotel's tastefully finished rooftop became in itself a generating piece of the design, as did the amount of sunlight that pours in from the unobstructed west-facing windows. This light glints and dances across the reflective floor, making it appear like a gentle river flowing down the hallway – another

calming component, although one that came about almost by accident.

The office formerly played home to the German Consulate and the leftover flooring was a showpiece of intricately laid marble and granite tile. Although it bothered Taylor to destroy such workmanship and grind

down to imperfectly pockmarked concrete, he felt the extravagant tiling worked against the light, airy feeling he wanted to create. "I liked the final result," he recalls, "but I thought, 'Oh God! What's Julie going to say?'" Thank heaven she loved it."

For her part, Hannaford finds pleasure in the embedded "urban fossils" of pipes and other mechanical bits cut flush to the grey-tinted floor, and the darker areas here and there where the epoxy coating pooled deep into stray divots.

The rest of the 7,000-square-foot space, however, did run according to careful plan. Client privacy is of primary concern to Hannaford. The waiting room therefore sits screened off from front reception behind a half-wall panel. High clerestory windows allow natural light into this small space, the brightness abetted by an intriguing overhead fixture of twisted translucent resin by 3-Form. The room's blonde-wood credenza, circular table and swivel barrel chairs were all bought straight off the Teknion showroom floor as, indeed, was the Interface carpet, a tactile mix of industrial felt and boars' bristles that Hannaford says reminds her of the stereotypical lawyer's grey-flannel suit.

More Teknion furniture, 3-Form lighting fixtures, Interface carpeting and, of course, artwork adorn the compact boardroom

behind the waiting room, as well as the work stations and personal offices lining either side of the corridor that branches to the right off the main hallway. The sense of calm, established so brilliantly at the entrance, continues throughout this space. But there is yet a higher level to come.

Most people, including the German consul, would refer to it simply as an executive bathroom. Julie Hannaford calls it "The Folly," and it has been repurposed for her entire staff as well as her clientele. The rectangular washroom, which features a glass-partitioned toilet and separate shower stall for lawyers who put in long hours, is kitted out in faux-limestone porcelain tile and über-cool Ciot flooring made from resin-encased river stones. It, too, has a view – of a stunning Jeff Goodman glass vasiform islanded in its own display niche set into the far wall.

Clean, soft, beautiful, serene – a spa-like enclosure that acts like a cherry topping the cake, designed specifically to engage the feminine temperament. A perfect marriage of Hannaford's proposed tranquil aesthetic as interpreted through Taylor's professional artistry. □

