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Company of the Month: Phase Zero Design begins before the beginning: The essence of their practice and a differentiator

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Phase Zero Design's tag line of "we begin before the beginning" was featured in a recent edition of the Zweig Letter, a very popular newsletter for the A/E/C industry. "We follow the Zweig Letter on Twitter and I responded to a tweet asking for firms to share their motto or tag line with them," said Jim Kimball, principal-in-charge of the firm's Duxbury, Mass. office. "We begin before the beginning is the essence of our practice and we believe a differentiator. I was pleased when they responded to our tweet so quickly and interviewed us for their article."

"Our tag line may sound a little existential, but it's not," said Matt Wittmer, principal-in-charge of the firm's Simsbury, Conn. office. "Since we are experts in the markets we serve, we know the trends, the questions and answers and we possess the experience to help our clients achieve their goals quickly and efficiently without compromising quality," Wittmer said. "We give the term 'added value' new meaning," added Kimball.

Phase Zero Design is an award winning architecture, interior design and planning firm with locations in Simsbury, Conn.; Greenwich, Conn. and Duxbury, Mass. The firm's expertise includes the retail, corporate, residential and hospitality practice areas with a diverse base of local and national clients. The firm is enjoying unprecedented growth, adding 12 new staff in 2013 and 3 more since the beginning of the year. "We're growing to keep up with our clients and new opportunities. It's been fun for our whole team," said Wittmer.

The firm's numerous national clients include specialty retailers Ann Taylor, Foot Locker, Hair Cuttery, BCBGMAXAZRIA and Harry & David. "Our team has been together for a long time and they are truly retail store design and roll out experts," said Kimball. "I've been involved with a number of retail organizations in my career and I can say without prejudice that this is one of the best teams in the industry."

Phase Zero Design also has a long history with grocery retailers. The firm is currently working on several projects with Big Y, Save A Lot and Winn Dixie.

Restaurants are also a part of the firm's retail portfolio, having completed the design for Cheeburger Cheeburger's first location in New England and Muse Paint Bar, an exciting new concept expanding rapidly with locations in Connecticut, Maine and Rhode Island.

Ask any banker and they will tell you that they are a retailer too. Phase Zero Design is designing new branches for a number of banks including Greenfield Savings Bank, American Eagle Federal Credit Union, Torrington Savings Bank and Litchfield Bancorp.

Retail development is alive and well in New England as evidenced by Phase Zero Design's list of shopping center projects. This list includes the award winning Elmwood Plaza in West Hartford, CT and the repositioning of Norwichtown Mall in Norwich, CT and Rhode Island Mall in Warwick, RI with Winstanley Enterprises LLC and Lake Shore Marketplace in Gilford, NH with WS Development.

"We're very fortunate to be working with developers who are thoughtful in their development approach and let us contribute to their project's success in a meaningful way," said Wittmer. "We're looking forward to working with them for years to come."

Phase Zero Design's retail practice continues to grow with the recent addition of retailers Cumberland Farms, O'Reilly Auto Parts, Forever Flawless and Tedeschi Food Shops and several retail developers including Waterstone Retail, OPAL Real Estate Group and RPAI.

The award winning design firm may primarily focus on the retail sector, but a growing part of their portfolio includes the residential, corporate and hospitality market sectors. "Our team has a diverse background in sectors outside of retail," said Wittmer. "Our hospitality sector has been steadily growing and we are anticipating another busy year in 2014. And our corporate interiors business is not that far behind."

Other projects which add some diversity to the firm's practice include the master planning for a casino hopeful in Springfield, Mass., Red Thread's show room in East Hartford, Conn., numerous dental offices and the conversion of the former Clark School into luxury residences in Northampton, Mass.

Relationships are a key ingredient for the firm's success. Although the firm employs an aggressive social media marketing strategy, a number of their clients were developed through industry friendships and referrals. "The greatest endorsement that any business can receive is when they are recommended by a colleague or client," said Kimball. "Our core values of integrity, innovation and customer service are more than just marketing clichés. We take them very seriously and our clients recognize the value we bring to their projects."

Maintaining client relationships and cultivating new ones is the life blood of any organization. Phase Zero Design's team has a laser beam focus on their clients and their needs while still seeking new opportunities. It's a delicate balance, but the firm's recent success means that they are walking that tight rope well. "It's a running joke in my family that my answer to the question 'how was your day?' is 'just one more client!'" said Kimball.

"It's amazing when, in the midst of multiple deadlines, that someone on the team will stop me and say that they have a lead for a new client or they've been talking to one of our clients about a new project. This team is special. They get that marketing and business development is a team sport and we are very fortunate to have a bunch of All Stars playing for us," said Wittmer.

If you would like to meet this team of All Stars, see if you can gain an invitation to their Oktoberfest celebration or their golf outing at Pinehills in Plymouth, Mass., now both annual events. The Oktoberfest gathering is held at their Simsbury, Conn. office, a former restaurant and bar with multiple roof decks. "Our Simsbury office is a great space to bring people together," said Kimball. "We throw some great parties!"