

FRAME

THE NEXT SPACE

ISSUE 142

SEP — OCT 2021

RETAIL — TAINMENT

HYBRID WORK
WUTOPIA LAB

SELF-COOLING
SPACE

ALGAE
ARCHITECTURE

RENOVATION
RENAISSANCE

BX €22.95 DE €22.95 IT €24.90 CHF 33.00
UK £19.95 JP ¥3,570 KR ₩40,000



INTRODUCING

IVY

Matters of Identity

STU
DIO

The partners of Ivy Studio (left to right):
David Kirouac, Guillaume B Riel, Gabrielle
Rousseau and Philip Staszewski.





In designing the interiors of Montreal-based Middle Eastern tea salon and wine bar Shay, Ivy Studio opted for a mineral colour palette that's inspired by the setting sun over the Syrian Desert.

Less than half a decade into the game, Montreal's Ivy Studio has already amassed an extensive list of local clients, whose identities it helps to precisely define through material-driven, hyper-customized design.

Words Adrian Madlener
Photos Alex Lesage

Montreal's burgeoning design scene continues to garner international attention. A slew of autonomous craft-led makers and boutique brands have joined the city's crop of ground-breaking architects who make strong statements with the city's plethora of public spaces, restaurants, stores and offices. There's an inherent appetite for the bold and unconventional. At the precipice of this movement is Ivy Studio. The collaborative practice was founded in 2018 by four young architects – David Kirouac, Guillaume B Riel, Gabrielle Rousseau and Philip Staszewski – looking to break out of jobs at traditional firms and develop an approach all of their own. They talk about designing retail concepts and workspaces that help companies define their image, the power of an uncompromised approach in a post-Covid-19 world, and the agility that comes from running a small collaborative practice.

You've recently completed the Spacial co-working space, Vention office and Crisp barbershop, which all feature striking structural elements, textured materials and bright colours. How do you continuously create tailor-made concepts for each project?

PHILIP STASZEWSKI: We follow our instinct and get inspired by everything we see around us. We're not necessarily interested in developing timeless designs that follow a defined aesthetic, but want to create unique results. We want people to feel that they're experiencing something new and to leave with a strong memory. We're trying to counteract

the sober black, white and wood palette that is all too common in Canada and to use components that stick out. This is why our projects contain a lot of curves, colours and unusual materials. Yet, as architects, we know that structure and simplicity are also crucial.

A defining factor that sets us apart from our competitors is our age. We've all just turned 30, and as one of the youngest practices in the city, we have yet to define routines or patterns. We see our relative naivety and hunger for experimentation as an advantage.

How does this flexibility play into your ability to work with different typologies: co-working spaces, gyms, stores and even barbershops?

GUILLAUME B RIEL: Our biggest fear as a team is that we might get typecast to a point where people begin to expect a specific style from us. Taking on a wide variety of projects keeps us on our toes. We've conceived restaurants, offices and a gym or two in the past, but not long enough to develop reflexes. Although we understand the basics that make a space function, we're constantly learning new ways of designing them. The obvious challenge with this approach is the amount of additional work we need to do to understand the specific needs of each new commission. In this respect, maintaining a close collaboration with the client is crucial.

There is always the potential of unintentionally creating a new typology. With the Spacial co-working office, we conceived a workspace that resembles a café. The

function is almost identical. We can take the essence of one typology and transmit it to another. This flexibility also lets us be more responsive to changing behaviours and trends. Overall, it's a riskier way of working but it's the only way we stay engaged in the medium and draw in new clients.

What were the challenges of completing projects during the Covid-19 pandemic? How have client demands changed?

GABRIELLE ROUSSEAU: The types of projects we work on now have shifted. A year into the pandemic, the majority of our commissions consisted of residential and office renovations. We saw that working from home had considerably altered people's views of their surroundings. Renovations increased tenfold. With fewer expenses and a booming real estate market, investing in your home seemed to be a popular decision. Clients were no longer just aiming for practicality, but also showed more and more interest in building their dream homes.

Conversely, companies now need to work much harder to get their employees to come back to the office, given that working from home has been proven to be effective. We've felt an essential change in companies' visions for physical workspaces. Before, the goal was often to optimize square meterage with open spaces. With alternating schedules and shared workstations now an option, offices require fewer desks. Employees can be productive at home while still preferring to have meetings in person. Clients are now »



At co-working space Spatial in Montreal's Verdun neighbourhood, Ivy Studio created an interplay between exposed elements and materials/finishes with a contemporary aesthetic, such as colourful zinc cladding.

Also based in Montreal, Vention is known for developing a system of customized aluminium extrusions that simplify industrial automatization for manufacturers. The aesthetic of these perforated extrusions became the key components in Ivy Studio's transformation of Vention's 1,300-m² warehouses into the company's slick workspace.

**'The best way
to portray an identity
is through
custom-made furniture'**



Behind the tall pampas grass in the windows of Montreal barber shop Crisp lies a minimalistic and raw interior where walls are finished with a handmade *faux fini* paint.



asking us to come up with new ideas for making collaborative work environments.

With restaurants slowly reopening, owners are already starting to prepare for returning customers. They need to find an even bigger incentive to get people to spend money on food and beverages rather than cook at home. We are fortunate that the pandemic has positively impacted our field of work. Not only do people want to build and renovate, but they are also looking for innovation and excitement, which we're willing to offer in droves. There's a growing desire for unique spaces.

Tell some more about how interior design can define or extend a brand's image.

DAVID KIROUAC: Our favourite type of mandates are commercial spaces, especially those developed for start-ups. Designing an office, a boutique or a restaurant is always an opportunity to reinterpret a brand's image through physical space. It comes with its own set of challenges that centre on our ability to fully grasp the client's values, character, vision and intentions. They usually have a very different view of their image than we do and so our first design proposals are often surprising. Overall, we try to focus on the essential qualities that

make them unique, which will consequently help us achieve our goals.

We recently completed an office space for Vention, a new technology company that developed an automated robot aluminium extrusion system. When asked about their brand, they simply described themselves as a start-up and wanted a concept that would resemble a Google or Facebook office. For us, it was clear that Vention has a strong identity that we needed to illustrate. Their products inspired us to create monolithic blue volumes for their conference room. We developed a custom Vention Blue perforated steel wall and, in some areas, added neon lighting to give the project an even more mechanical appearance. When entering the space, it's apparent that it was designed specifically for them and not just any start-up. We believe that the precise definition of a brand's identity through design is what clients come to us for.

How do the right choices of material, furniture and accessories make or break such undertakings?

PS: To create the most distinct spaces possible, we need to introduce strong signature elements that guide the design. We believe that the best way to portray a particular identity is through custom furniture. When you buy a standardized item, it can make you think of other projects you've seen it in. When something is custom-designed and built, you tend to remember it better.

Our design for the Crisp barber-shop was solely based on custom-made steel furniture. We used two-layered raw steel sheets for the benches, stools, shelves, barber stations and the reception counter. The use of these elements sets the space apart from all other barbershops in Montreal. Sometimes, a design can be based on a straightforward idea, such as a colour. No matter what, differentiation is essential.●

ivystudio.ca