

Kai-Yee Woo: Versatile International Designer

by Mike Skaar

Kai-Yee, you've been involved in HIA for many years. What is your background?

For more than 10 years, before I formed our current firm, I was a senior designer with Gensler where I learned many aspects of our industry. Prior to Gensler, I graduated from Tamkang University in Taipei, Taiwan, with a French degree, and then received a second degree in interior design from California College of Arts & Crafts in Oakland, California. Currently, I'm a member of several boards, including UCSF Hospital Medical Center Auxiliary, North & South Market Adult Day Health Center, and Chinese American Business Women's League. And, shortly after we started our firm, I became a professional member of the US Citizen Ambassador Program Professional Health Care Delegation, in Russia, where I look at policies and designs at various hospitals and sanatoriums in the waning days, of the Soviet Union's rule, in the country.

People associate your firm with a broad spectrum of projects. Was this a deliberate choice to diversify?

Each of our clients demands a specific skill set, and we have been fortunate to have a diverse range of talents in our firm. We work on healthcare, hospitality, senior-assisted living, Alzheimer and skilled-nursing facilities, in addition to airports, high tech, corporate, financial institutions, retail and select residential projects.

What is your favorite type of client?

We seem to work best with clients who can utilize all of our services — from interior design to purchasing. When we are allowed to use our project planning and design-management skills from the start of a project, we achieve a greater integration of our client's requirements, culture and goals — all of which we strongly believe are integral to good design and long-term facility use. When we can control these key elements of the project, we deliver a great product on time and on budget.

What are some of your most satisfying projects?

We mostly enjoy projects that improve the lives of people. Our senior facility and hospital design work are always pleasurable experiences, especially when the residents and staff are happy with the final product — interior design, surroundings and furnishings alike.

Let's take a look at some of these clients.

The last couple of years, we feel fortunate to have been commissioned for projects with: On Lok Senior Housing & Day Health Center, Jewish Family and Children's Services, Rhoda Goldman Assisted Living Plaza, Home for Jewish Parents, and Northern California Presbyterian Homes and Services, in addition to Tamalpais Assisted Living, Chinese Hospital, Belmont Convalescent Hospital Vista Assistant Living, Children's Hospital Oakland, and the International Hospital Group in Beijing, China.

What are you currently working on?

We are pleased to be the interior design team for the newly awarded Port of San Francisco James R. Herman International Cruise Terminal, with the development group of Lend Lease of Australia, Port of Singapore Authority, Chinese Maritime Transport, and Whitney Cressman, along with lead architects, Skidmore Owings and Merrill.

In addition, we were recently selected by the City of San Francisco for the new Laguna Honda 1,200-bed, skilled-nursing facility and campus complex. Our design team's lead architects are Anshen + Allen and Gordon H. Chong & Partners.

A firm such as yours doesn't exist without awards. Any you're particularly proud of?

We received numerous awards for the Chicago offices of Hal Riney & Partners. It was a fun project and, as you can imagine, the client had no shortage of creative ideas!



You use the term "we" in most of your references. Tell us about your team.

William Joseph, our firm's managing principal, and I have been together since the first day of operation. We worked together at Gensler and knew that we had complimentary skills and would make a great team. William has a strong foundation in architecture and strategic facilities planning.

We work with a great professional staff who is international in experience and culture. Our firm's international purchasing agent-broker service work is growing, and now includes transaction clients in three continents. This venture, along with our contemporary furniture showroom at the Design Center, keeps us moving every day with a new sense of excitement and adventure.

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