

## WATERWORKS



Kramer Design Group transitioned Waterworks from a fast growing family business to the most recognizable luxury brand in the bath business.

Robert and Barbara Sallick founded Waterworks in 1978 as a family hardware business specializing in plumbing fixtures. At that time, no one imagined that picking faucets, tubs and sinks could be as exciting as purchasing the season's "it" bag. The Sallick's commitment to design and craftsmanship for their products set Waterworks apart from the competition. Peter Sallick, the founders' son, understood that good design was the difference between purchases motivated by desire and purchases motivated by need. Thus, Waterworks took bathroom fixtures and fittings out of the nuts and bolts realm of the plumber and into the world of artisanship and luxury consumer goods. The Waterworks bathroom features towels by Missoni, copper basins and mosaic tile.

### CHOOSING THE RIGHT FIRM

Kramer Design Group designed the first two Waterworks stores in 2000 based on a focused merchandising strategy and a new concept for the collection. Kramer suggested that better materials and craftsmanship brought luxury to an otherwise pedestrian item. Kramer began by assessing the products, showrooms and branded collateral, and discovered that while brand consistency was evident throughout the product line, the Waterworks stores lacked consistency. The brand identity conveyed a strong fashion message but wasn't translated into the stores.

### BRANDING

A competitive analysis into companies such as Kohler, Ann Sachs and Country Floors helped Kramer to understand the values that differentiated Waterworks from the rest. The Waterworks business model resembled a luxury fashion label more than a utilitarian home supply business. With that in mind, Kramer approached the store design process not as an architectural program, but as a platform to communicate the brand message more clearly. The Waterworks consumer experience would be based on the Sallick's belief that products can have both form and function. Kramer asserts that the depth of that experience has direct impact on the volume of transactions.

### STORE DESIGN

Waterworks has two distinct customers, professionals and non-professional homeowners. In order to accommodate both needs in one space, Kramer focused on a "design studio" concept, a creative environment that professionals and homeowners alike would find inspiring, alluring and sexy. Large work tables and a library of materials gave each store that design studio feel. Customers could sit around the table and go through textures, colors and materials from the library with the Waterworks consultant to design the dream bathroom. Kramer devised a merchandising system that worked exactly like a resource library in an architect's design studio. Flexible tablets showcasing wall mounted fixtures and a modular display box for loose fixtures were designed to be able to mix and match with other items throughout the store.

Real estate also played a large role in the store design process. Each Waterworks property is notable for its design integrity and is located in a neighborhood known as the aesthetic core of its community. The interior design and merchandising strategy had to work within a range of landmark architectural settings as diverse as Georgetown, Miami and San Francisco.

### MERCHANDISING

Kramer's insight helped Waterworks understand that the typical consumer needed help putting together the design equivalent of a fashion ensemble. The zoning plan featured "vignettes"—a freestanding installation where the customer could see how the whole look would be pulled together—coordinating faucet and basin, towel racks and shelving and occasional personal care products. The vignette was meant to reflect the customer's self-perception within a traditional, modern or classic aesthetic.

At first, the notion of creating vignettes was a concern because of the costs involved in changing the displays. Kramer designed them as a stage set with a system of false walls to make change-out almost as easy and cost-effective as changing the clothes on a mannequin.

The front of the store, visible from the street, was filled with bath accessories, textiles and apothecary to change the consumer's perception of a professional's only resource and to spark impulse purchases.

Waterworks was built on the promise of product variety and customization for a discriminating consumer who disdains cookie-cutter solutions. This sophisticated, design-conscious customer believes that everything about their bathroom should look and feel hand-made. Although Waterworks has a tremendous variety of product, Kramer chose to show less of it on the store floor to create the impression of rare and precious objects. Interestingly, surveys revealed that after Kramer refined, reorganized and relocated the product mix, consumers perceived a larger offering than before.

### RESULTS

Waterworks and Kramer have worked together for six years. Each project is of a different scale, located in a distinct and expressive architectural context, and featuring a different product mix. Kramer consults on an ongoing basis to develop new store concepts for design-sensitive communities; to re-imagine the merchandising strategy; to create modular fixture designs that fit into a variety of configurations and sizes; and, to design their kiosks at trade shows.

The professional and non-professional alike can understand the relationship of components—from tile, mosaic and stone to plumbing and fixtures as well as accessories—in an organized fashion. The design for the seating areas, the cash wrap and the overall quality of materials brought the store environment up to the high standard of the product offering.

Kramer has contributed to re-framing the overall corporate identity and developing new sub-brands; conceiving brand extensions and communicating the brand more effectively in advertising; package design and displays.

The brand message has penetrated the marketplace and a new population of consumers believes that high-end fixtures and fittings and a customized bathroom will fit within their own home no matter what the style. According to Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies, "Remodeling expenditures by homeowners and rental property owners totaled \$233 billion in 2003, accounting for 40% of all residential construction and improvement spending and more than 2% of the US economy." Waterworks is poised to increase its share of the high end of that market.

By aligning themselves as a design company, Kramer helped Waterworks capitalize on a fast-growing social and economic trend. Waterworks hosts an annual design summit to deepen that association. In a recent article, Peter Sallick said "We love investing in emerging design communities" and "we hope to be a catalyst for further investment in that area." The consumer experience in the Waterworks store transcends shopping—it's a zeitgeist moment in which enjoying good design suggests a richer, more dimensional way of life.