



FROM PIRANESI TO TOUGHENED GLASS

"Good interiors should withstand fashions and style trends. The architecture and interior design professions don't deserve to be told one day it's white, the next it's black and then yellow. For us, interiors are more than trends."

"Harmony, a combination of classical and modern elements and a quest for the essence - that's what we're about".

Milosh Pavlovicz and his two partners run Element Group, a successful architecture and interior design studio in Toronto.



Above: the three partners of Element Group, Toronto, from left to right: Alexander Josipovic, Olga Mihailovich and Milosh Pavlovicz. Above that, a view from the passage in the Element Building to the glass conference room at the front. In the foreground, a Korean rain drum.



Right: since 2000 the Element Building in downtown Toronto has been the home of the Element Group. The transformation of this 19th-century industrial building showcases the three partners' vision of architecture and interior design (within the budgetary constraints). Modern design and authentic antiques go hand in hand here. Above: a vista of the long passage with transparent meeting rooms.

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Below: the combination of modern chairs (Eames by Vitra), a table designed by Norman Foster and antique chairs in the large conference-cum-presentation room at the front of the Element Group's premises in Toronto. Right: an impression of the long passage and the bamboo garden.



Markham Street is on the eastern fringes of the centre of Toronto, Canada. Three architects and interior designers hailing from the former Yugoslavia have here created a showcase of their skills within a tight budget. At the end of the nineteen-nineties they bought a former 19th-century warehouse in Markham Street which had been empty for six years. Minor, affordable alterations were made to the exterior which emphasize the transparency and length of the narrow building. They set up their studio here in 2000. Inside, the original ground plan has been left largely intact. A few structural interventions produced a 'highly evocative, welcoming and elegant' entity with a modern look, as they put it. The building is deep but narrow. A long passage, over the entire length, links up the various design and display areas, which, with their glass walls, emanate discreet elegance. The passage ends at the back in a miniature bamboo garden. Additional visual interest is created in the modern surroundings with several antique furniture pieces and objects.

Milosh Pavlovic said in that context: "I believe you can introduce something that appeals to the memory in a modern setting. If you want to do it right, the pieces should be authentic. That's the way to make a strong statement".

His father was an architect and an admirer of Le Corbusier; his grandfather was also an architect, in the Beaux Arts tradition. That is why he feels at home designing modern and classical projects. "I entered this profession with plenty of cultural stock-in-trade. I'd seen first hand what my father and grandfather believed in and built on that."

He grew up with the idea that the exterior and interior of a building or house are created with the same logic, otherwise a contradiction might arise. Harmony - without style trends - is the key word. The practice seeks to apply that harmony to their projects, which they describe as subtle and image-conscious.

"Clients consult us to create a specific image. Sometimes they have a clear idea of their own, so we only need to provide elements to elevate the whole undertaking.



But at other times we have the opportunity to sustain the entire project, from the ideas stage on.”

Alexander Josipovicz, Olga Mihailovich and Milosh Pavlovicz went to Canada in the early eighties to complete their studies at local universities. When they graduated, the trio opened their own design studio, which has meanwhile accumulated an impressive list of achievements. For instance, they have built houses for the Mexican ambassador in the United States and for Ken Whyte, the editor-in-chief of the National Post, villas in Palm Beach, on the Greek island of Corfu and Harbour Island in the Bahamas. They are also very active in Toronto, building houses or furnishing penthouses and condominium suites. One of their more interesting projects is the reconstruction of a house from the original 1960 drawings by the late Peter Dickinson, a Toronto architect. That project is being worked out in consultation with the architect’s widow. In addition, the Element Group furnished the offices of the Red Apple Entertainment film production company, as well as for the film editing company school. And, as befits every self-respecting architect or designer in Canada, they also undertake refurbishment of restaurants - their main references in that field being the Cha Cha Cha supper club and Goldfish restaurant, both in Toronto.



Above: the central conference room, which is totally transparent on both the street side and from the offices behind. On the wall there is an original engraving by Giambattista Piranesi entitled ‘Veduta del Prospetto Principale della Colonna Antonia’. The engraving was purchased at Sotheby’s, London, and has been hung horizontally so people can take a good look at the wealth of detail on the column. Below that, anyone passing by can see whether a meeting or work is in progress in the conference room half-way down the passage.