

IIDEX: —The First 25

It's unlikely that ARIDO

By Annette Redican

management and the group of dedicated member volunteers who worked so diligently to produce the original IIDEX were thinking much beyond that inaugural 1984 event. And it's almost certain that no one was speculating about what this new venture might look like a quarter century on. All the more impressive then to consider how the past 25 years has seen IIDEX/NeoCon Canada evolve into Canada's largest exposition and conference for the design, construction and management of the built environment.

As the years have unfolded, IIDEX/NeoCon Canada, which is owned by the Association of Registered Interior Designers of Ontario (ARIDO) and produced and managed by Merchandise Mart Properties, Inc. (MMPI), has developed into much more than just a tradeshow. Guided by a compelling and broad mandate to serve the interests of interior design, architectural, facility management, real estate development and business communities, this tradeshow and conference held annually at the Direct Energy Center in Toronto, Ontario, strives to be all things design to all people!

Lorraine Tierney, former vice-president of marketing for IIDEX/NeoCon Canada and a Fellow Member of ARIDO, looks back to the beginning, "When IIDEX launched in 1984, it was an exciting, highly-designed event with every detail meticulously planned by the volunteer steering committee and ARIDO management."

Tierney notes, "From the beginning, I have participated as an attendee, exhibitor, journalist and volunteer. For 10 years I worked with Tracy Bowie on IIDEX, two years with our own company and then with MMPI. I consider myself fortunate to have been involved in the shaping of this challenging, exhilarating and rewarding event.

And what an event the 25th anniversary edition is designed to be! The conference dates are September 23 to 26, with the exposition to be held September 24 and 25. Projections call for more than 16,000 interior designers, architects, facility managers, business executives, developers, manufacturers and other stakeholders involved in the design and management of the built environment to attend. IIDEX/NeoCon Canada 2009 will feature over 300,000 sq. ft. of exhibit space and 350-plus exhibitors showcasing thousands of innovative products and resources. Attendees can also experience an impressive range of international keynote speakers and select from more than 100 CEU-accredited seminars.

Tom Bernard, president of Octopus Products, has been involved with the event since its inception and every year since. He recalls personally picking up the deposit cheque from the first exhibitor the first year. "For the initial show we used a third of the Metro Toronto Convention Centre's exhibit hall, the next year we required two thirds and by the third year we used the entire space," he recounts by way of illustrating how quickly the industry embraced IIDEX.



Since 1998, the ARIDO-owned show has been produced by Merchandise Mart Properties Inc., a management company that oversees 300 market events, trade and consumer shows and conferences each year including the prestigious NeoCon World's Trade Fair in Chicago. Mark Falanga, senior vice president considers this strategic alliance: "MMPI has partnerships with hundreds of associations. Of all these relationships, one of the best, if not the best, is the collaboration with ARIDO. This is a relationship that is defined by great respect, tremendous collaboration and mutual success. The MMPI/ARIDO association has seen IDEX/NeoCon Canada grow and develop into a much better event than either party could have achieved on their own. This is really the definitive measure of a successful collaboration."

In 2005, ARIDO purchased and added the Canadian Facility Management & Design Expo and Conference cementing its position as Canada's largest exposition and conference for the entire spectrum of the design industry.

Tracy Bowie, vice-president, Merchandise Mart Properties Canada Inc., is another industry stalwart who has a history with IDEX that's as long as the event itself. "When I first started working on IDEX in 1996, one of my first calls to sell booth space was to Klaus Nienkamper. He said, 'Tracy, I'm not going to exhibit this year, but don't give up. I want you to know that it is really important to have a strong Canadian design trade show in Toronto. I want it to be successful and I will support it.' I didn't give up and he has done so every year since."

Bowie adds, "Having a national show and conference that brings the industry together from across Canada to share, network, become educated and inspired, and see new products is very important. The exhibits and products represented have continued to diversify over the years, so all areas of design are represented—workplace, health care, retail, hospitality, residential, sustainable design. I think it is very important to continue in this direction and I look forward to proudly attending

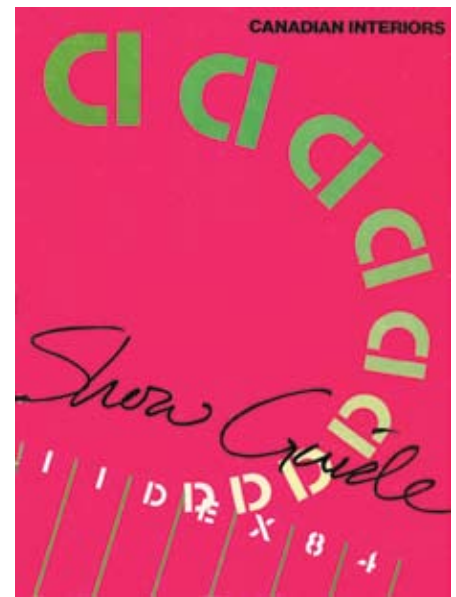
IDEX 2034 direct from my seniors residence!"

Mindful of sparking rather than following trends, IDEX/NeoCon Canada has consistently changed ahead of the times. It recently commenced a comprehensive initiative, to be implemented over the next three years, which will see the show become more sustainable by using green suppliers and contractors to create Canada's first GREEN trade show. Initiatives include printing all promotional materials on FSC certified 100% post-consumer recycled paper, creating a carbon neutral show, and collaborating with the Direct Energy Centre to reduce the environmental footprint of the show. IDEX/NeoCon Canada is determined to lead by example in environmental education and the advancement of market transformation.

"Sustainable design was not even on anyone's radar 10 years ago," observes Bowie. "And now we have the Green Building Festival—a show and conference within a show (supported by Sustainable Buildings Canada) co-locating with IDEX/NeoCon Canada—that will continue to grow in importance. And we have Light Canada—a lighting and conference program (sponsored by IES Toronto Section)—that will also continue to expand."

As for the next 25 years, Bowie numbers among those in the know who predict that IDEX/NeoCon Canada will continue as the pivotal event for the Canadian design industry. "I believe generally people want to get together. Trade shows and conferences provide the opportunity for face-to-face contact that is so very important. To remain the industry leader, IDEX/NeoCon will continue to anticipate and add new and relevant elements as the marketplace demands."

Bernard, also looking forward, offers his assessment, "As with any show, at the end of the day exhibitors need to see a return on investment, while attendees need to leave educated, enlightened and inspired. For the past 25 years, IDEX/NeoCon Canada has done a great job of meeting the industry's need and desire for a really high-value show. It has cultivated



a solid, quality group of exhibitors along with offering innovative elements and special features that attract the trade. This approach will continue to serve IDEX/NeoCon Canada into the future."

ARIDO member Trevor Kruse of Hudson Kruse has been the liaison for IDEX/NeoCon Canada for the past 14 years. It is clearly a volunteer job he loves. "IDEX is an amazing story, built by incredible volunteers—including stalwarts such as Howard Taylor, Barbara McLennan, Howard Isenberg, Els Coopman, Tom Bernard, Barry Carroll, Reva Karstadt, and so many more—and two energetic, crazy ladies, Tracy Bowie and Lorraine Tierney, and one tireless guy, Matthew Searle, who replaced Lorraine when she retired five years ago. Their incredible drive and passion have resulted in the huge success of this show.

"Of course, IDEX would be nothing without the exhibitors. I'd like to acknowledge and thank all the exhibitors and, in particular, those who have participated almost every year since the inaugural show in 1984 and are still participating today. They include: Canadian Interiors, Crown Wallpaper, Designers Walk, Gallery 133, Global, Keilhauer, Kimball, Haworth, Nienkamper, Octopus Products, Prismatic, Spinneybeck, Teknion, Thames Valley, Three H, and many more."

Here then is a nod to the next 25—with IDEX/NeoCon Canada successfully building on a quarter century tradition of innovation, inspiration and education. ■