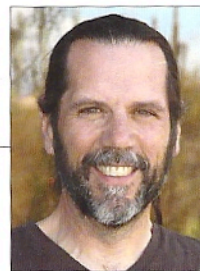


BIZKNOW-HOW

with Joe Zazzera

IN THE LEED



Lobbying for plants as part of the picture

'green:' perception vs. reality

A few weeks back, my wife, Karen, and I had the rare opportunity to spend the afternoon shopping. With the shopping done, we thought we would eat at the latest sensation, The Green House. It appealed to us because we like organic food, and the atmosphere was hip.

We were pretty hungry, so when we found out the wait was 45 minutes, we decided to continue walking around to look for another option. We came upon a moderately fancy Italian number, not unlike many around the country. We could see in the windows as we walked up. Compared to our first-choice restaurant, there were only a few patrons in the dining room. It appeared we could walk in, sit down and eat right away. Before going in, we looked at the menu posted outside, glanced at each other and said, "Sure, why not?" The hostess guided us to our table and gave us the standard but overused, "Enjoy." Within a minute or so, the server greeted us and asked if we would like bottled, Pellegrino or tap water.

I heard the tap water comment at restaurants before, but for some reason, this time, it really hit me. "Tap water" - it was an obvious preplanned dig at the perception many people have that water out of the faucet is somehow inferior to other forms.

This is not intended to be a commentary about the state of water quality or bottled water (although I am pretty opinionated if you ever want to have that discussion). I was taken at how we have certain perceptions, and thought about how they are formed, where they come from and how we make them a reality in our lives. I began to think about our industry - what and how we do it, and the role of perception, presentation and reality.

positioned to profit

If I present a photographed interiorscape to a client, I am presenting a perception: "With these plants I endeavor to make your work or home life less stressful,

more productive and, most importantly, healthful. I will create a biophilic environment that will connect you with nature." If I install that interiorscape, I am making the perception real. Perception has led to reality with follow-through on my part. I help create the perception, and sometimes I even offer multiple choices of perception with the hopes of selling upgrades (a reality I prefer).

According to Google, the word "green" is searched about 4 million times per day. I don't know about you, but when I think of green, I don't think about some kind of insulation made with blue jean scraps or newspaper, I think of green plants. Granted, this may be because I am in the plant business. But look closely at green advertising - nearly every ad that uses a logo takes its design from the plant world. Four million times per day, we are getting validation for what we do, 4 million exposures of plants perceived as contributing to health and goodness.

What is your perception of green? What reality do you hope to gain from it?

My perception is that with or without the inclusion of live plants into the LEED rating system, we are in a great position to blow the doors off of our industry. Nearly everyone I talk to knows at a minimum that live plants produce oxygen in the indoor environment. During most of our installations, someone comments about how we are improving the environment with cleaner air. The awareness of the benefits of indoor plants are, from my view, at an all-time high. Google keyword alerts link me to new blog entries and topical articles every day. A benefit concept that started years ago in our industry as a perception was actually always a reality, then it became a perception that we promoted, and it is now commonly accepted as reality.

what can be done now

Do I think plants in the LEED rating system will make a difference? Absolutely! All of

us at Green Plants for Green Buildings will work tirelessly until we reach that goal. Do I think we should wait for that to happen before we, as an industry, make a really big deal about it? No way. In this new green economy, I believe we all will do well, but we will do even better if we are conscious of how we lay down the perceptions and promote the realities.

Aside from your involvement in Green Plants for Green Buildings, connect with your local U.S. Green Building Council chapter. Phoenix hosted the Greenbuild conference last year, and I was on a Greenbuild project committee. Now, I am involved with the chapter board. You may have to sit through some luncheons on topics you don't understand, but it's here that the built environment is changing. It's here where our message belongs. When the time is right, make the case for indoor plants to anyone who will listen, and create a grass roots movement in your area. Believe me, it is going national in a big way. If you are trained through Green Plants for Green Buildings as a trainer, do presentations. This is working for us and has been well-received. The locals know our message and what we as a company and industry are about. Promote the reality.

feeling good about what we do

I buy my groceries at Whole Foods for several reasons. Not only do they support our interiorscape industry through the use of live plants, but I feel good about my purchases because they sell local foods and products, which helps support our local economy. They have a good selection of organics, they seem to promote social accountability, and they provide quality employee benefits. These are principals that I try to live by, personally and professionally. Is this just a perception? Does it matter? Do I care about their marketing motive? The point is, it is a reality for me. I feel good

about my experience and fulfilled when I shop there. The perception they created, healthful marketing, fulfilled a reality for me. I don't really care about their agenda; I care that I like who I am and that I am making a difference in my life and the lives of others when I shop there.

What if we focused on how well we did our jobs instead of how many jobs we did, if we raised the level of quality a notch or two, turned down a few loser jobs instead of being afraid of being without and gave freely of our time even though we are busy? In our company, not only have we raised the bar on products and services, we have focused on relationships with our clients, our friends and our business partners, as well as others who are important to us. In times past, when overly busy, the important relationships sometimes took a back seat to running the business. I personally have re-established and created an abundance of friendships and relationships in this "bad" time that I now look at it as a "great" time. I was missing so much. By evaluating things that are important, at every level, I have realized that what I thought was important was not so much. Once again, it's the perception vs. reality dichotomy. If being green is about sustainability, then work at sustaining friendships and relationships, both business and personal.

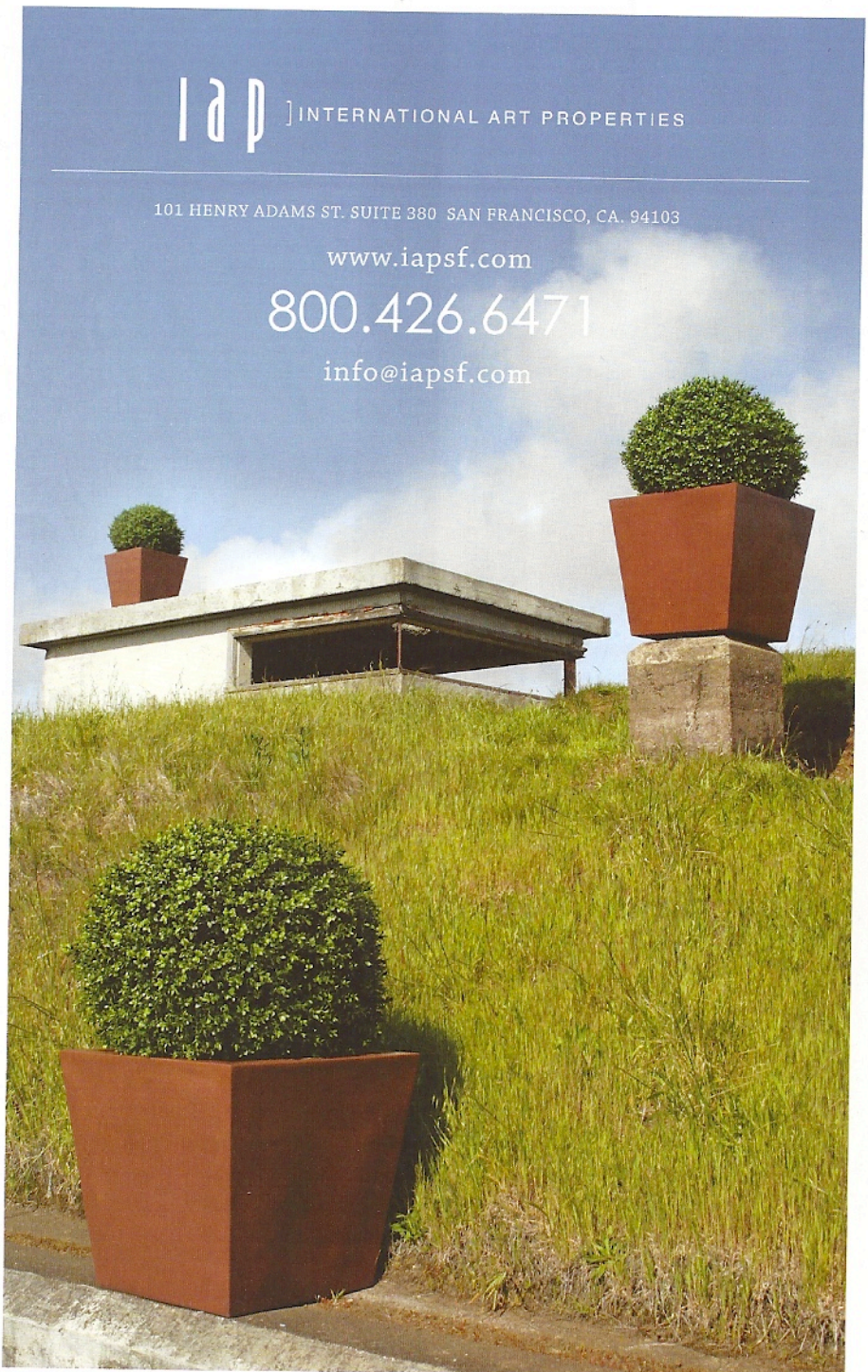
I ask you, what is your perception of green? What reality do you want to create? How will you do it? Are you fulfilled by it or simply tired of the grind? Think about it. Then I challenge you to shift your perception, try something new and learn a new twist to an old procedure. Set a new goal. Carry the green message in a way that you can be passionate about, that fills you up, that fits for you. By shifting your perception, you can create a new reality that is all yours, which will hopefully motivate your clients to "shop" with you because they feel good about it.

Getting back to the two restaurants. What caused one restaurant to be busy with a wait and gain the reputation of "the place to be," while the other restaurant was simply a mediocre establishment? Both designs were pretty good, they were

in the same area and prices and quality were about the same. What made them different? The crowded restaurant was called The "Green" House. Makes you wonder, doesn't it?

By the way, I ordered the Pellegrino. 🌿

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