

Providing the Missing Link in the Design Process

By Darrell Noakes



Tamara Bowman and the team in the design studio at Metric Design Centre, downtown Saskatoon. Shown (left to right): Cara DeLong, associate designer; Christina Garner, kitchen and associate designer; Tamara Bowman, owner and lead designer; Kim Krueckl, associate designer; Lisa Godwin, associate designer. Photo by Darrell Noakes

Tamara Bowman was raised among entrepreneurs. Her parents worked in commercial construction, sparking in her an interest in interior design. After gaining an education in design in Victoria, Bowman returned to her Saskatoon roots, building a home decorating and design business from home.

After 12 years, she found that the work, client base and range of services had grown to the point that it was time to expand into commercial retail space. So, in July, 2011, Metric Design Centre opened its doors in a deftly renovated period building formerly occupied by a pharmacy in the heart of a rejuvenated downtown Saskatoon.

"I noticed there was a need, a link missing in the design process," Bowman says. "To make selections for a client's home, we would have to go to the flooring store and the counter-top place and the kitchen supplier. There was just so much travel throughout the city, I found it was a really difficult process for clients. You're dragging all of these heavy samples around, and it was just more complicated than it needed to be, plus they were paying me to go to all these places with them. So I decided to open a showroom, which is more of a resource centre."

As a resource centre, Metric Design gathers all the exceptional products Bowman has sourced through relationships forged over the years with local and national suppliers, and brings them together to showcase in a single location.

"As well, I did a lot of travelling, all through Canada and the United States and Mexico to find the best that was available in design that wasn't available in Saskatoon at that point," Bowman says. "I collected great brands and more green-leading products, different products that weren't available, and brought those here."

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"Plus, it's a beautiful and inspiring environment," she adds.

That environment includes a showroom highlighting kitchen, bath, flooring, wall coverings, furniture and lighting designs not normally found in Saskatoon. Metric Design is the exclusive Saskatchewan showroom of Canadian-made Neff Kitchens, recognized by renowned designers and architects the world over for its premium cabinetry.

The Metric Design space includes an office studio employing five designers besides Bowman, operations manager Lincoln Turtle, and showroom sales manager Karen Palibroda.

"The intention of the showroom was to make design more accessible for people, and to get them excited by all that this great industry has to offer," Bowman says. "I feel like our role as designers, although it interests people, is also quite intimidating at the same time. People are a bit nervous about committing to working with somebody when they don't quite understand the process or they don't know their style."

"People can come here and they can actually 'feel' our casual, uplifting, no-pressure environment," she says. "They like that personal touch. They can ask questions and book something if they're interested in the services. Otherwise, we

have all these products available if people want to just come and shop and browse on their own, too."

"It really just depends on where people are at and what they are comfortable with. People can come in and look for unique and interesting products for their own space. If they want to select their own furniture, pick out some wallpaper or some really cool tile, we have all these items available."

"Or if they want to go that step further, they can enlist the services of a designer to go with them through this process. We do everything from colour consultations, to floor plans, product selections, all the way up to full scale renovations."

It's a business approach and customer service philosophy that seems to be paying off. In May, 2012, Metric Design Centre won the Saskatoon Awards for Business Excellence (SABEX) award for New Business Venture. Since then, the business has only continued to grow and prosper.

"It was so exciting," Bowman says of the SABEX experience. "I was just blown away by the whole process. To be so highly recognized in the business community in Saskatoon is a pretty amazing thing, as we're a land of entrepreneurs, and to be included in this success story is pretty fantastic."