

Q+A: How Designers Do Inspiration

Work spaces need to provide inspiration without compromising performance. Inspiring moments within a space can engage the mind, allow for respite from the rigors of the workday or allow people to see a problem from a new perspective.

As president of Designtex for the last five years, Susan Lyons leads a team of innovators who are relied upon to inspire others with an evolving collection of textiles, wallcoverings and other applied materials with reduced environmental impact. Designtex, a Steelcase company, is the leading company in the design and manufacturing of applied materials for the built environment.

360 recently sat down with Susan to ask her about where she finds inspiration, how her team becomes inspired to create new products and what's inspiring them now.

360: How does your team keep a pulse on what's next? What colors and textures will inspire people at work?

Susan: Now, it's almost like you can have too much information. The trick is not so much seeing what the trends are — there's a million places to see what people are doing. To me, the bigger trick is taking all that information and distilling it into something that's meaningful in your space.

We use the internet as much as anyone. But, we rely on our network of partners. We believe in collaborating with the outside world. It's really important and fruitful to look outside your company at artists and designers. They have a different point-of-view. There can be a little freedom to working with designers and artists not in your system. We rely on them to take us on a journey. They help us open the floodgates and we get taken to places we didn't expect to be taken — which is very exciting.

360: How do you encourage your team to use what inspires them to enhance their work?

Susan: We're big believers in the notion of displayed thinking. In the Designtex studio, we keep a visual on color tracking. We have an entire wall where designers track subtle shifts happening in color. We look at architecture and fashion and map it in a grid to see how it links up with what we've already done. Then, we use it to see how we can move in other directions. We track color aggressively in a visual way. Everyone contributes and you can see how things move and shift even over just six months.

Individually, each designer has their own way of displaying what inspires them. We have sheets of foam core all over the space. It's a very DIY kind of studio. It's very flexible. Designers have their own way of keeping what strikes them in front of them. It could be yarn or a postcard. Right now, I have a piece of that flat paper with slits in it that curves over an orange tacked to my inspiration board.

Visual inspiration boards at Designtex track color trends as they evolve over time.

360: What color or textile is inspiring you right now?

Susan: I really love all colors. I feel like color is so contextual it depends on what we're talking about. If I have to pick a color, I'll go back to when I was a kid. Then, I would always say yellow.

Right now, I'm a big fan of felt and we just launched a big collection of felt. It was the very first textile in history developed by prehistoric man and the first man-made textile. So, I'd have to give felt a shout out.

360: How do materials help inspire people at work?

Susan: We talk a lot at Designtex about a layering experience. We talk about how a variety of products layer in an environment to give an experience to someone. I love the notion of adding different layers of texture and gloss and all of those qualities that materials can have. To me, it makes for a much richer environment.

I relate it to a city. Cities are so encouraging of innovation. There's a cacophony of sights and smells that add to a human being's thought. I see materiality in the same way. It's about bringing together parts and pieces with color included. It has a profound effect on people.

Explore how thoughtfully-designed spaces can blend design, materiality and performance to inspire by downloading the [lookbook](#).

Rebecca Charbauski **Senior Communications Specialist**

Rebecca, an Emmy-winning journalist, reports on global research impacting the places where people work, learn and heal. Over her career, Rebecca spent 17 years covering local and national news events on television and a variety of digital platforms. She directed a digital news group in Kansas City for three years before becoming news director in Grand Rapids, Michigan for more than five years. Prior to Steelcase, Rebecca worked with one of the four largest media groups in the United States to coordinate news coverage among 48 newsrooms from the east to west coast.

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