

## New Showroom Embodies Neighborhood Spirit

By Andrea Girolamo

**S**oHo, New York's fashionable downtown neighborhood, is frequently noted for its distinctive character, cutting-edge style and array of specialty shops. When Davis & Warshow planned to open a branch of its plumbing supply showrooms in this trendy neighborhood, the firm recognized the importance of staying relevant to the character of its surroundings.

"When we decided on SoHo, we wanted [the showroom] to be a true representation of the place," says David Finkel, v.p. of Davis & Warshow.

The furthest south D&W had been in Manhattan prior to opening the new location was Midtown. The company was spurred to establish itself downtown by the request of a vendor, who wanted to gain a presence in the SoHo neighborhood.

The search for the right space was a lengthy one. Among other considerations was a desire to avoid settling in a ground floor space, without exterior signage.

The business has always been geared toward trade, says Sheldon Malc, showroom sales manager for Davis & Warshow. But with the ground floor location in Midtown, designers, builders and contractors tended to stay away. Instead, consumers came to browse. It was clear that creating a destination showroom would require a location off the street, to encourage a more serious clientele.

"We really fell in love with this space," Finkel says of the historic, 7,220-sq.-ft. space.

The building itself posed unique challenges during the considerable renovation process, including terra cotta ceilings and a sub floor that couldn't be breached, which resulted in modifications such as back-outlet plumbing for the working toilets, among others.

This contemporary powder room is among several displays featured in the Davis & Warshow SoHo showroom

NEW YORK—



The uncluttered, gallery-style design of the Davis & Warshow showroom in New York City's SoHo neighborhood promotes a calmer shopping experience.

Courtesy of Davis & Warshow

### DESIGNING THE POD

When designing this showroom, they wanted to avoid some of the design elements incorporated into previous showrooms that they were unhappy with.

Malc notes: "The first thing we wanted the architect to do was go around town to all of the showrooms, including ours, and tell us what she didn't like. Once she'd done that, we said, 'Great. Now you know what we don't want.'"

It was architect Ronnette Riley's job to forget all she knew about plumbing supply showrooms and work with the Davis & Warshow brain trust to formulate a new concept for the space.

"We didn't have conference

rooms in our other showrooms, and it was time to think differently." Finkel notes that a conference room gives the trade a home base to set up drawings and blueprints, thereby encouraging them to spend more time in the showroom.

However, one of the most immediately noticeable traits of the space is the biggest innovation: the custom, woodworked "pod" system. These pods contain various products on slides and pull-outs, arranged by manufacturer, allowing for an eye-level division of space. It encourages clients to have a walk-through with a salesperson. The pods frame displays of tubs and vanities while they remain just below the natural line-of-sight. This maintains an openness and lightness to the space. Traditional showrooms rely on walls to display products, but that was not a viable option since there are 21 windows on two sides of the showroom.

The pods contain 70 bathroom faucets, 42 kitchen faucets, 60 lavatories and 22 tub/shower systems. The firm plans to continually update the pods to reflect the latest trends and products available.

The pod system is also moveable. Finkel estimates that 60% of the pods can be moved to easily change product or the layout of the showroom itself, for redesigns or special occasions.

One such occasion happened recently when the showroom hosted the first in a regular

interview series called "Dialogue on Design." A collaborative effort between design journalist Rima Suqi and Davis & Warshow, the event brings design arts professionals into the showroom for an informal conversation about their art form and a presentation of their work. The first "Dialogue on Design" interviewee was interior designer Jamie Drake.

### SIMPLIFYING THE SALE

Malc believes the biggest problem with modern plumbing showrooms is organizational.

"In a typical plumbing supply showroom, there are hundreds of toilets and sinks and faucets. It tends to be a little overwhelming, even for a seasoned trade professional. What tends to happen is that the client runs around looking at everything, getting prices, and it's hectic," he says.

The goal was to simplify the sales process, and that goal influenced the final, uncluttered, gallery-style design. Since the pods conceal all but the biggest items on the show floor, the result is a streamlined, calm space.

The pods aid in a central pillar of the selling philosophy of the new showroom; the firm discourages brand recognition and instead chooses to focus on the products and details themselves.

"We didn't want to use manufacturer's displays, because they tend to be very high and they all tend to be different finishes. We wanted a uniform look," Malc says.

The separation of space through the pods creates a flow that encourages clients to walk through each part.

One L-shaped display separates a kitchen, two powder rooms and a steam room display from the rest of the showroom. The dual powder rooms are functional and done in contemporary and traditional styles, respectively. The functional steam room is finished in red mosaic tile.

At the Spring Street location, Davis & Warshow offers products from the Kohler companies, Dornbracht, THG, Duravit, Lacava, Grohe, Elkay, Hansgrohe, Gessi, Blanco, Mr. Steam and Keuco, among others. SoHo is Davis & Warshow's twelfth location.



Courtesy of Davis & Warshow

