



Enhanced Experiences

ESI Design weaves the physical and digital worlds together to create immersive and impactful encounters.

By Michelle Lampariello

From 1971 to 1977, a three-person design team transformed the Brooklyn Children's Museum into an interactive wonderland. In 2019, a 70-person multidisciplinary team created a band of reactive media displays in Boston's financial district that draws in passersby with vibrant depictions of aquatic life inspired by the neighboring bay.

Technology, names and faces have changed in the 42 years since ESI Design was founded, but much has not — Founder and Principal Designer Edwin Schlossberg still strives every day to lead a team of problem solvers in search of turning design into an immersive experience.

ESI Design has been responsible for the digital makeover of several classic structures, as well as the development of many brand new spaces. From corporate head-

quarters to cultural centers, the firm has completed countless eye-catching projects that blur the line between interactive multimedia and architecture.

Carefully balancing permanence and durability with the need to allow projects to evolve with consumers and the needs of the client, Schlossberg begins every endeavor with a conversation. He discusses the client's desired look and feel for the upcoming project to understand their voice and the expectations of their target audience before he goes on a site visit.

"During our site visits, the designs start to take form — you can feel out the sense of drama that can be created within the building," he says. "As I walk through a space, I look at the existing architecture and design to see if there are any pieces of it that I think need to be enhanced or reduced. There is a

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certain mystery that usually emerges from walking and looking around.”

Schlossberg considers the entire studio at ESI Design’s Manhattan headquarters to be a prototyping lab — a place where designers collaborate and inspire one another as they brainstorm and workshop ideas. In the lab, designers often question what technology will work best for a space to create a desired experience.

“We don’t want to just use the latest technology for the sake of newness,” he says. “For each project we carefully consider the experience that we want visitors to have and then determine the technology. We work to build a prototype of a system

of the industry his client belongs to, he strives to immerse visitors of the space in a breathtaking interaction with visual technology, whether it is where they will spend 40 hours a week or they are simply walking through as a tourist.

“Designing an office lobby that people move through quickly but repeatedly requires a different tool set than designing a museum exhibit that people visit once or twice. But ideally, both designs are just as impactful on the people who use the spaces,” he says.

The firm has completed several projects for brands, museums, stores and other businesses. Some of these projects have involved revitalizing outdated spaces,



the heart of Washington D.C. that emphasizes interconnectivity with astonishing motion-activated media displays. However, prior to ESI Design’s renovations, the former site of civil rights activism was struggling to live up to its monumental legacy. Treating the walls as a single media canvas, Schlossberg and his team developed a more exciting, modernized lobby for the building that uses 1,700 square feet of motion-activated LED displays to immerse people in the landscape of Washington D.C.

In the “Seasons” mode, the displays depict the lifecycle of Washington’s trademark cherry blossom trees. When the display is in “Spring” mode, the trees bloom in tandem with people walking by until the petals fall off — if someone pauses, it sends a signal for butterflies in the scene to flutter their wings.

The eBay global headquarters, meanwhile, is an entirely new structure that tells the story of the powerful brand. Large-scale interactive features set the tone for the company’s identity as a technologically savvy and successful business.

“Dubbed Main Street, the space welcomes employees and partners into a stylish, media-rich setting that captures the pulse of eBay’s business,” Schlossberg says. “It also provides much-needed flexible, well-equipped spaces to host meetings, conferences and events.”

Regardless of any project’s context, Schlossberg sees every new undertaking as an opportunity to problem-solve and celebrate the complexity of digital design.


“Over the past 40-plus years we still seek to solve complex problems in unique ways with solutions that get better over time,” he says. “Though technology has come a long way since our first project designing the exhibits at the Brooklyn Children’s Museum in 1977, this love of problem-solving has driven all of our work.” 



PHOTO BY ERVYN PATRICK

and see if it meets our criteria. We want all of the systems that we design to work beautifully, flawlessly and continuously over time.”

Each iteration of a project during the prototyping process is rebuilt with new modifications to achieve the best possible design as the team conducts technological trials. Prototypes have ranged from interactive digital pieces to ambient light art sculptures.

“The prototypes allow us to test the limits of our conceptual thinking, and get real-time feedback from our design team and client stakeholders throughout the process. It also gives everyone in the office the opportunity to see how they are working and comment on whether or not they are successful,” he says.

Schlossberg says that his design style is best described as an ethos — regardless

while others have required an entirely new vision. Schlossberg does not have a preference between these two assignments, and deems them both worthy of a great deal of focus in their own way.

“One of the reasons I love design is because I love solving problems, and both starting fresh and reinvigorating existing spaces come with their own problems and opportunities,” he says.

These different, yet equally attentive, approaches to projects at different starting points are exemplified in the dichotomy between two of the firm’s projects — the Terrell Place complex and eBay’s global headquarters.

Terrell Place, owned by real estate investment firm Beacon Capital Partners, is now a lively office and retail center in