

NEW JERSEY REPORT

B-3

Spa firm combines dollars and senses

Builder caters to a world of luxurious indulgences

By ALLISON PRIES
STAFF WRITER

Chris Kofitsas and partner John Farese specialize in the ultimate in sensory indulgence: spas.

Kofitsas, founder of Clifton-based New World Design Builders Inc., an architecture and construction firm, engages all the senses when he's developing a project.

The work requires the 35-year-old Clifton native to envision how his ideas will interact with the customer's senses when they become three-dimensional. For example, at one spa Kofitsas had lilies painted on the wall that would be eye level with a person soaking in the tub. He said it gives the appearance of being surrounded by a field of flowers.

"You have to think about how the design will make people feel," he says.

The self-indulgence niche has proved to be fruitful since the spa industry has really taken off in the past 10 years. Once thought of as fat farms, spas are now synonymous with luxury and relaxation. They exist in resorts and hotels, on cruise ships, as day spas and medical retreats, and at mineral springs.

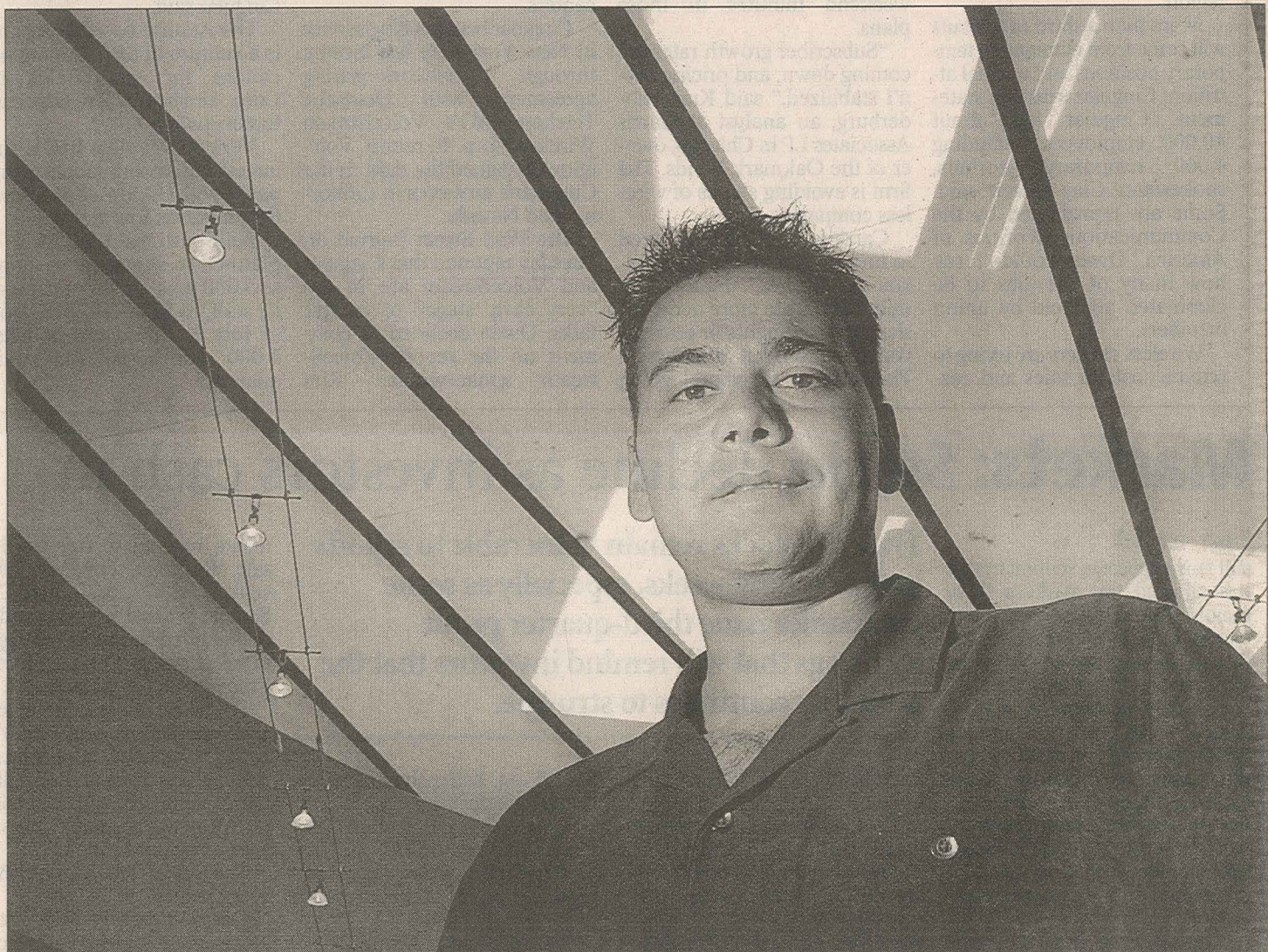
As of 2000, the last year figures were available, an industry study found that spas generated more than \$5 billion annually,

BUSINESS Q&A

according to the Kentucky-based International Spa Association. The trade group began in 1991 with 91 members, and at its 10-year mark counted nearly 1,800 members from 52 countries.

Kofitsas, a 1992 graduate of New Jersey Institute of Technology, grew up wanting to be an engineer but his dad wanted him to be an architect.

"He was a builder who always wanted to be an architect," Kofitsas recalls. "When he passed away, while I was 18-years-old, I had this incredible urge to try architecture. During freshman orientation, when they gave us our first project to work on, I knew this was what I wanted to do."



JAMES W. ANNESS/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

"You have to think about how the design will make people feel," says Chris Kofitsas, founder of Clifton-based New World Design Builders.

Just three years out of school, Kofitsas started New World. He focused on the spa industry after completing several projects in metro-area salons, including building Pasquale in Fort Lee from the ground up. "Spas and salons go hand-in-hand, since a lot of spas are being added onto salons," he says.

The seven-year-old firm completes 10 to 15 projects a year with about 65 percent being spas. The remainder of New World's work is in the hospitality industry, at bars, restaurants, and residences.

Q. Why did you start your own business?

I've always felt such a strange rift between architecture and construction. The fields have two different agendas. We pour in all this work, then what we see in the field is not carried through. When I was working for a firm in Manhattan, I convinced my boss to allow me to build a project because I felt that

if I had control over building a project it could be carried out to its true potential. So that was the catalyst to what we became today.

Q. How do you attract clients?

Typically through existing clients. Or they read about us in magazine and newspaper stories. But the strongest way is still through word-of-mouth. Clients want to be taken through the experience that other clients have been taken through.

Q. Where are your clients located?

Up until last year they were mostly in the New York metro area. Now we're getting pretty national with projects as far away as California, St. Louis, and Florida.

Q. How has the economy affected your business?

I haven't felt it one bit. I think it's affecting the corporate world more than our industry. I think

In 2000, spa building was a \$5 billion industry, according to the International Spa Association, a Kentucky-based trade group.

the problems with the stock market haven't caught up with the construction industry. People are still confident and putting money in real estate, so that keeps the construction industry healthy.

Q. What trends are you seeing?

Different businesses are trying to capture the spa-like environment, like hotels with a microcosm environment in each room. Even bars are getting more spa-like. I'm doing a project for fashion designer Emanuel Ungaro, which will be a spa-like showroom that includes the typical catwalk, but they wanted the feel to be spa-like so that the buyers are influenced by both the fashions and the environment.

Q. How many employees do you have?

Fifteen. With subcontractors it's 50. I have a crew of subcontractors that I use religiously because they know what I expect through experience.

Q. What is your annual revenue?

This year, I think we'll do \$7 million. Last year, we did \$3 million.

Q. To what do you attribute the growth?

The environments we create. They attract a lot of attention and future clients.

Q. What are your plans for the future?

To grow nationally and eventually go internationally. I love doing different projects in different cities. I enjoy dissecting a city.

I extrude different things and incorporate them into the projects. It's also always been a dream of mine to build something in Italy, since I lived there for about a year studying at the University of Florence after NJIT.

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