

design



# a delicate balance

A San Francisco architect with Israeli roots brings sleek, minimalist design to a new financial services firm in Herzilya, Israel

By Barbara Horwitz-Bennett  
Photography by Amit Geron



A black wall leading from Global Factoring's lobby to office space (above) introduces a linear theme with recessed lighting inside the wall and in the ceiling. A circular light element breaks the linear language (opposite).

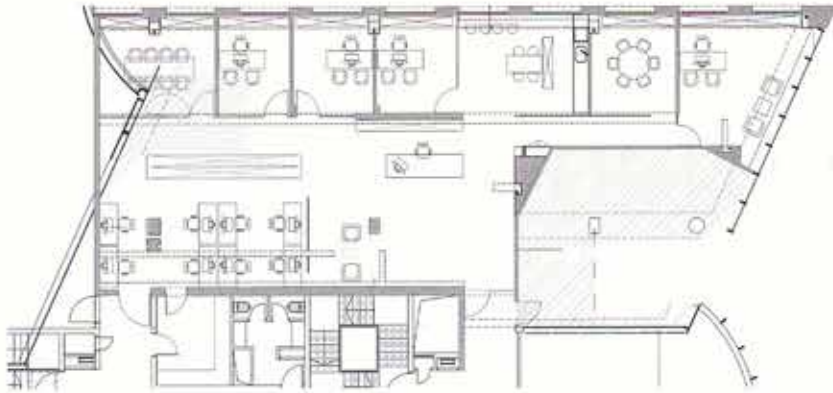
When a group of veteran Israeli business professionals got together to launch a new global financial services firm, they were in search of an architectural solution to convey precision, strength, and transparency balanced with privacy. Global Factoring vice chairman Nir Dor had a long-standing relationship with architect Irit Axelrod, having worked together on another project for spring water manufacturer Mei-Eden's corporate offices a handful of years ago, in addition to commissioning Axelrod to design his own private home in Israel in 2003.

"We share the same design view, and Nir trusted me to translate the company's ideas and solutions into the architecture and design," relates Axelrod, principal and owner of San-Francisco-based Axelrod Design.

As an out-of-bank funding operation that helps local companies to globalize their businesses, the 2,500-sq.-ft. office space—set in the Mediterranean coastal town of Herzilya, just north of Tel Aviv—had to both serve as a sophisticated, distinguished place for visiting clients, namely senior executives, while also creating a feeling of progressiveness and collaboration for the new company's employees.

"People in this kind of business need to work together, sharing ideas," explains Dor. Consequently, the space had to achieve a delicate balance of visual connection and physical separation throughout the program elements. These included a lobby/reception/waiting area, four private offices, two conference rooms, one common work area with eight workstations, a kitchen, and file storage.

In line with Axelrod's minimalist and modern style, the design solution features a strong linear theme, a monochromatic color scheme, natural light, an open layout, and the use of natural materials, such as concrete, glass, and wood. "The linear language is everywhere," explains Axelrod, "from the furniture to the lighting to the floor plan to the glass door handles."



For example, long, linear, pendant fixtures accent the lobby, conference rooms, and executive rooms, while linear recessed lighting washes up and down a number of the walls, essentially merging the ceiling, wall, and floor planes. Blending into this theme is a recessed banner in the lobby area that combines graphics and light and literally folds down from the ceiling onto the wall while displaying the company's slogan: "Factoring Your Success."

Serving as a backdrop to the lobby, a black wall leads toward the offices and contains recessed lighting, which actually causes the black wall to pop out and appear as a free-standing element. Similarly, perpendicular to the wall is a unique, freestanding, glass partition, enhanced with graphics in classic stripes.

Essentially, the recessed lighting within the wall niches and slots either serve to define the freestanding elements or bathe the walls in light. In either case, "being highly detailed, they create the impression of sleekness and precision," suggests Axelrod.

The semi-transparent partition also serves to balance a sense of openness with the amount of privacy the firm requires for the sensitive financial transactions that take place there. The private offices feature full-length glass doors to achieve that same delicate balance.

"What we tried to do in the design was to give a house to this new company in a sleek, transparent way," emphasizes Axelrod. And the application of glass, wood, and sealed concrete within a black, grey, and white color scheme creates a modern and up-to-date, yet elegant feeling.

"The design is very comfortable," explains Dor. "It's an efficient use of space with calm colors, which is suitable for the young people that work at our company. They have said that they like it very much as it gives them an impression of working for a fresh-thinking company." ■

*For a list of who, what, where, please see page 171.*

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Full-length glass doors with linear handles provide a private, physical separation for the executive offices (right) and conference rooms (opposite), while maintaining an open, visual connection to the rest of the workspace. A striped glass partition maintains the linear theme, while a ball of light on the floor lends modernity and elegance (above).