

# BABY

THE BAY AREA BUSINESS MAGAZINE

## Michael Vollbracht

Always in Fashion

**Pauline Salzman**  
Quilt as Art

**Jay Winchester**  
High Caliber Wordsmith

**Kevin Scolaro**  
Very Animated

**David Balber**  
Eco Architect

**David Balber** Architecture  
Creating a Sphere of Influence





The letter "b" is everywhere at David Balber Architecture. You see it the minute you walk into the curved reception area. You notice it as you are ushered into the conference room: gentle circles, careful use of space, everything fitting into place. Founder and owner David Seth Balber says, "I used the "b" in creating our company space not only because it's the first letter of my last name but also because of the circle in the letter. The sun and moon are circles. We find circles in everything in nature. It touches a nerve. Besides perfect circles are hard to construct. Creating a circle design appeals to my sense of challenge and craftsmanship. Clients notice the design and comment on it and appreciate the work and creativity that went into the design."

That passion for the creative, practical and esthetic aspects of architecture permeates Balber's conversation. But the thirty-three year old who began the company just two years ago, came to his calling through a circuitous route. "I started out majoring in architecture, but then I became interested in pre-med. I ended up getting a B.A. with emphasis in psychology from Wright State University in Ohio. Then I realized I was missing my calling. So I went to graduate school at USF and became an architect," he laughs. All those science and psychology courses come in handy, Balber says. "I apply my education every day. Those courses trained my mind to think analytically and to understand the human psyche. I apply it to clients' needs and to the needs and desires of the general public who are going to use the spaces I design," he added.

### Freedom and Challenges

He says owning his own architecture firm is a life long dream. "I love the freedom of owning my own firm. I'm interested in doing every type of project you can think of. Building shops, museums, hospitals, homes...they're all exciting for me," Balber says.

Yet, Balber admits getting started had its challenges. A former Design Director for Gritton and Associates in Tampa, Balber noted that part of him didn't want to leave the "family" culture he experienced there. "But I realized that I'll never be this young again or have this much energy and drive," he said. Then he faced a major hurdle - marketing. His new company's portfolio couldn't include designs he had worked on at his former employer's firm. Balber says, "Instead, I relied on testimonials. I put them on my web site, my printed materials and used them whenever I could. I offered the people who gave me testimonials links on my web site to their web site. These people were so generous and many are well-known in the Tampa Bay area. It proved to be a good marketing technique."

# David Balber architecture

## Branding is Personal

Balber's logo is another marketing technique that seems to be working. "I wanted to come up with something that really 'branded' the company. My wife, Sharon, and I knew everything would revolve around the logo. We came up with the small circles to form the letter 'b'. It represents the idea of synergy - a lot of little things forming something bigger." He adds that he gave the company his name for two reasons. "Part of it is ego, sure. But the other part is accountability. I want people to know that there's a person here who stands behind this company and there's great pride in what we do. In essence, my name goes on everything."

## Philosophy and Mission

Sustainability and the "green" movement are major parts of Balber's design philosophy. He says that he likes value engineering. "I take both materials and the structure into account in my designs." Balber tries to avoid what he calls 'structural gymnastics' (architectural elements that are added for interest but may not add to a room's structure and generally are more costly). "We try to save the client money in a variety of ways. One example is carefully planning bearing points within the building. Another example is square footage. Most people think the more square footage, the more the building will cost. That's not necessarily so. Sometimes by adding just 200 square feet more in one area you can actually save money by sharing a bearing wall. 'Wet walls' (areas with shared plumbing) are another example," he says.

Green design is another Balber passion. "We try to use 'green' elements as much as possible," he says. "It varies from project to project and depends on the site, the budget and the client's needs." Some examples are his company's use of recycled materials, low maintenance siding such as Hardy Plank siding which contains cement, and xeriscaping with native plants. Balber also likes to use solar as much as possible. He points out that "it helps with the heating and cooling, saves on electric bills, and the spaces feel more humane and natural."

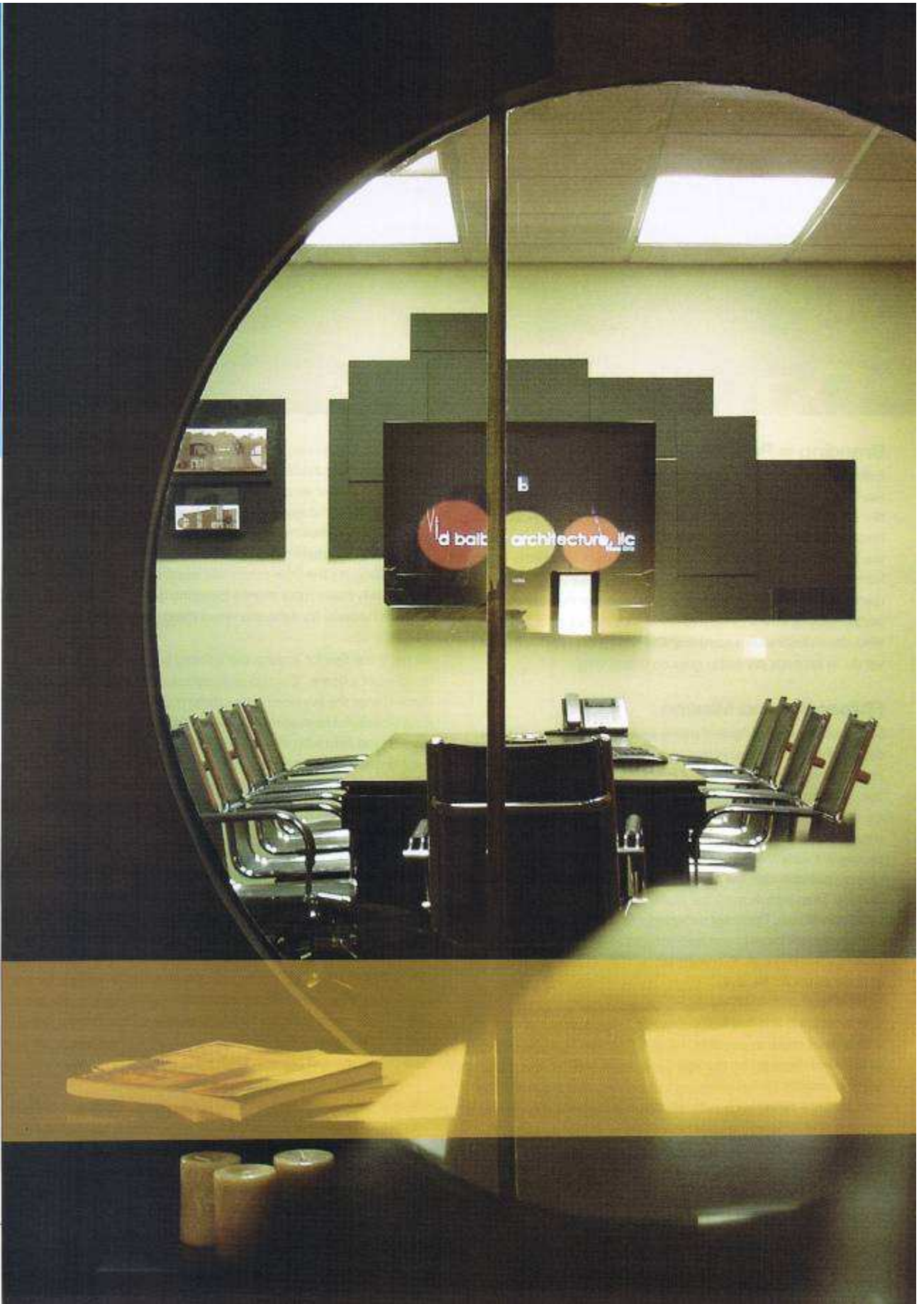
Balber also likes to use low VOC (volatile organic compounds) paint. "It's readily available and generally no more expensive. Yet it helps the indoor air quality," he says. When designing business buildings, his company spends time thinking about human needs such as special smoking areas. "We design smoking sections at least 25 feet from the main entry. That helps with the air quality inside the building. It's the little things like this that I'm interested in. Yes, we basically make more money by 'going green,' but not that much. We do it because it's right, the moral thing to do," he says.

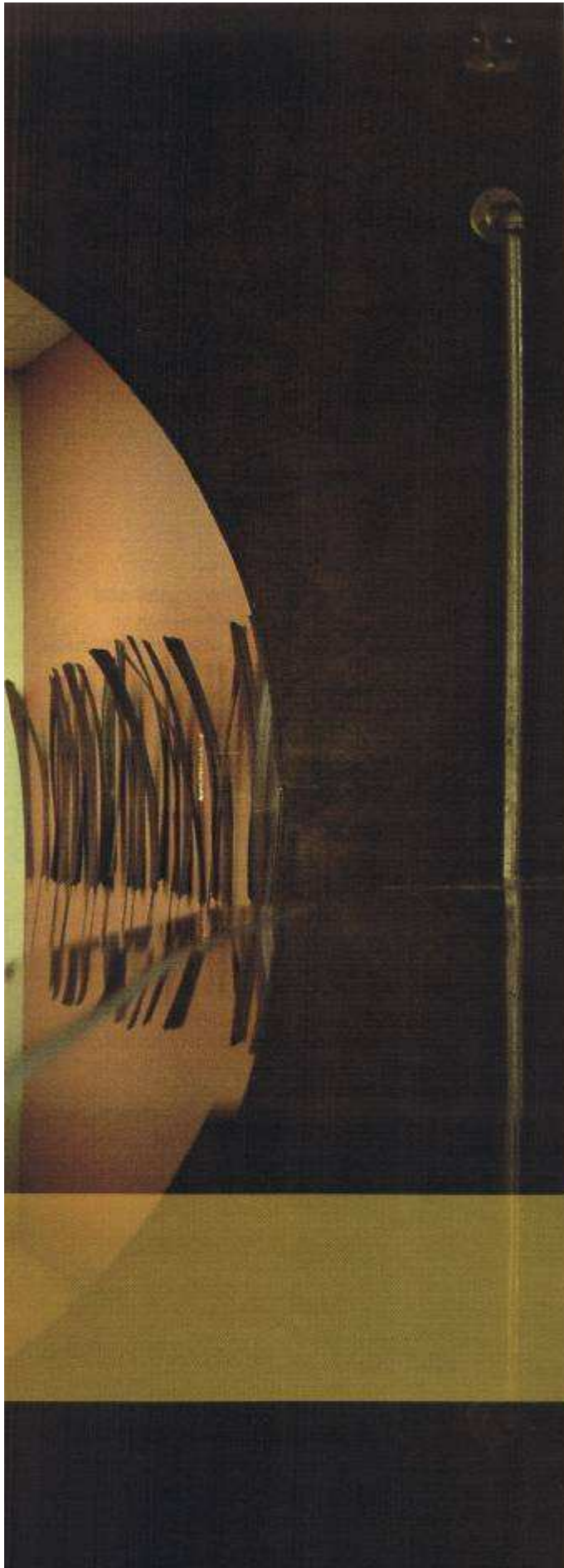
He has a few tips for anyone considering building a commercial building or a home. "Contact an architect right away. There are so many things the average person doesn't think of that can make for a wonderful homogenous project. An architect will look at the site and help with interior and exterior design, structure and even the landscaping. At David Balber Architecture we offer free consultation. Most people have never worked with an architect before so we hold their hand through the entire process," he added.

## BUILDING A REPUTATION AND SUCCESS

Balber likes to talk about the design he submitted for the new World Trade Center in New York and how it brought him and his company recognition. "After 9/11 they had a contest to get new ideas. My design was chosen and aired on CNN. We have a clip of that video footage on our web site," he says. The craftsmanship and quality of their construction documents is another reputation builder for the company. Balber says, "Most people call them blueprints. We get great feedback from clients and from builders. They like our detail, thought process and the way we carefully design the layout. It's just another example of our commitment to detail and quality."

Another project that brings David Balber Architecture accolades is the recent remodel of a south Tampa home that is highlighted on his web site. "The house will be featured in the *Flair* section of the *Tampa Tribune* and *House-Trends Magazine*," he says. "They chose it because it was a complex job with a lot of challenges. Here was an existing structure and we had to get the floor plan and function to look and flow like it was that way from the beginning."





Originally, that home had a lot of what I call 'ups and downs, ins and outs.' Our goal was to make it look like a Mediterranean country home modified from generation to generation to fit each era's needs," he says. One of the creative ways Balber made this happen was to expand the second floor, lower the roof, and put an addition onto the rear of the home. "We also modified the covered entry, changed the garage and added a tower element in front," he added.

#### **NEXT ON THE DRAWING TABLE**

A new project for the company is Avenue Cellars in Westchase. The store will be both a wine shop and lounge, and a prototype for the business.

Balber has high and diverse goals for his company. "I'd like to see us get involved in a variety of projects around the area. What I see happening is getting involved with a project of significant scale that has a "Wow" factor. A few of these are in the works and will make an impact on the local architectural society."

#### **BALANCING FAMILY AND BUSINESS**

Balber likes to quote his father. "My father told me to love what you do. He says, 'If you love toothpicks, make the best toothpicks. You will make money. The money will follow.'" He admits that running the business, being responsible for a wife, an eight-month old son (Jake), and five employees puts a heavy load on his young entrepreneurial shoulders.

"But this is my *Passion!* It's not just a job. I'm creating something for my family and hopefully it will be a legacy company that can be handed down for generations to come. I think about design and architecture all the time. I take it with me everywhere. This makes me happy and when I'm happy my family is happy."

*David Balber Architecture, L.L.C. is located at 10004 North Dale Mabry Highway, Suite 114 in Tampa. They can be reached by calling 813-868-3242 or by visiting their web site at [www.davidbalberarchitecture.com](http://www.davidbalberarchitecture.com).*