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‘Diversify or die’

How architecture firm Rotwein+Blake remains relevant in a changing business environment



From left, Aavart Patel, director of projects, Lance Blake, president, and Cammy Hardison, director of interiors, Rotwein + Blake. – AARON HOUSTON

Commvault, BASF, Metrotop OfficePark, Vermella. These are a few of the design creations of Rotwein+Blake. In fact, the Livingston-based architecture and design firm has been creating and transforming projects within the state for the past 65 years. With the company’s design and planning experience, plus insight from its leader Lance Blake, it looks like R+B will have opportunities available to continue its legacy for decades.

The son of co-founder Edward Blake, Lance Blake joined the firm right out of school, and soon after became director of design. A short while later he began to take over the leadership and management duties. “It kind of happened organically,” Blake said.

As president and managing principal, Blake saw that in an ever-changing economy the firm needed more than innovation and skill to create architecture relevant not only for today but well into the future. He said that in order to weather the ebbs and flows of the business he needed to expand its horizons. In his management duties Blake saw that there was an opportunity to break out of the “pigeon-hole” reputation of only designing core and shell or industrial buildings and knew the best way to do so was to use the company’s exceptional talent to find new ways to do business.

“We had to diversify or die. That was my mantra. I felt we had really good talent in the office. Very seasoned and experienced people.

It was like having a Ferrari and only being able to drive on the sidewalk,” he said.

Blake said he and his team felt they could design anything because the group always had the technical ability and background to shift gears.

R+B weathered several recessions that way. It also kept them ahead of their competition. The company was always finding another focus of expertise for its designs. Sometimes their hardest struggle was to convince clients that



Lance Blake, president, Rotwein + Blake. – AARON HOUSTON

they indeed had the means and talent to shift gears and concentrate on a different type of construction.

Clients noticed. “We have a relationship with Rotwein+Blake extending back over 50 years and, in our opinion, there is no architectural firm that compares,” said Steven Denholtz, chief executive officer of Denholtz Properties in Red Bank. “We have long trusted Rotwein+Blake for their unique ability to imagine spaces that can stand on the leading edge of architectural design yet remain timeless focal points within our local communities for generations to come.”

R+B has always looked at its projects as having not only a long shelf life, but an



From left, Interior designers work with Director of Interiors Cammy Hardison. From left, Kenha Mistry, Hardison and Taylor Maxson. – AARON HOUSTON



A luxury condominium project in Red Bank rendering. – ROTWEIN + BLAKE

afterlife. Because of that mentality, R+B forms close relationships with its clients. “Client relationships are at the core of what we do,” said Cammy Hardison, director of interiors.

The fact that R+B is a family-owned business that offers a personal touch is appealing to clients. They benefit from the close relationship and can always deal with the same person who is knowledgeable on the project.

“It’s important for them to know that we care deeply – that we get them,” said Isabel Turner, R+B’s marketing director.

“Sometimes you have to hold a client’s hand because they don’t really know what they want,” said Aavart Patel, director of projects. “You enjoy working with contractors, and when you are working with new design it is often a challenge to help a client know and understand exactly what is being done. With an interesting design the real challenge is how to build it. It takes an adjustment time to understand the design. From start to finish the

experience is just amazing.”

Blake acknowledges that clients today are more open to ideas and concepts given the ubiquity of new technology. It is easier to get a client to understand and see what the finished product is because of technology. No more building little models. Clients can be persuaded because they can “see” a space before it is built. It is easier to get them to go that extra step.



Aavart Patel, director of projects, Rotwein + Blake. – AARON HOUSTON

To Blake, every project is significant and deserves principal oversight and direct involvement from its inception. It is that dedication that earned him a reputation beyond reproach in the industry. He is responsible for a wide variety of projects including corporate, institutional, cultural, education, medical and master planned development.

“Rotwein+Blake are not only experts in their craft, they were also a valued partner to us throughout the redesign of our Teterboro headquarters,” said William Hanson, president of NAI James E. Hanson. “Having the vision and foresight to determine layouts and design elements that were conducive to our firm’s goals, Rotwein+Blake gave us a finished product that truly captures the essence of NAI Hanson’s history and legacy while creating a modern, collaborative space we are thrilled to conduct business in each day.”

Let’s do it

Learning how things get put together has been instilled in Blake since his beginnings with the company and those who were at the company before him. “We take a lot of pride in the design capability and the execution. Without the execution we wouldn’t get the next one. Design is only as good as it can be built,” he said.

Moving forward, looking to the next phase of how to keep the firm relevant, Blake plans to think about succession. He does not plan to retire any time soon, but he is considering his next move. Maybe it’ll involve a Ferrari.

Current Projects					
Project	Address	Size	Type	Client/Developer	
11 Avenue	New York, NY	55,316 (10 stories, 48 units, 4,600 SF Retail)	multi-family/mixed-use	BLDI	
7 Becker Farm Road	Fort Lee, NJ	4,000 SF	Capital Improvements	CBRE	
Headquarters	Fort Lee, NJ	70,000 SF	financial institutions	Confidential	
The Hall at Red Bank	Red Bank, NJ	154,000 SF (87 units/7,000 SF Retail)	multi-family/mixed-use	Denholtz Properties	
MultiFamily	Red Bank, NJ	4 story, 42,000 SF 10 units	Luxury Condo	Denholtz Properties	
North Gold	Robbinsville, NJ	33,000 SF	ground up warehouse	Denholtz Properties	
For Merck/Health Flux	Tinton Falls, NJ	High Tech Park- multiple buildings 200,000 SF +	ground up office/warehouse	Denholtz Properties	
MultiFamily Mixed Use	Florham Park, NJ	30,000 SF Retail/Office and 66-75 unit residential building	multi-family/mixed-use	Garden Home Commercial Property	
Goldberg Realty	West Caldwell, NJ	12,000 SF	interior office renovation and common area upgrades	Goldberg Realty	
Terrace at Berkeley Heights	Springfield/Berkeley Heights, NJ	52,700 SF (20 units/4000 SF Retail)	multi-family/mixed-use	Lockhorn Urban Renewal	
80 Executive Drive	Edison, NJ	50,000 SF and 1,000 SF mezz office	Warehouse	Merito Realty Ventures	
Newmark Knight Frank	East Rutherford, NJ	23,000 SF	interior office renovation	Newmark Knight Frank	
One Halvaah	Bergenfield, NJ	18,000 SF	new construction symphony	One Halvaah	
51 Lincoln	Orange, NJ	351,636 SF 4 story 200 units residential with 2 level parking garage	multi-family	Russo Development	
The Bridge at Verona	Kearney, NJ	340,000 SF 210 units, 10,000 SF Retail	multi-family/mixed-use	Russo Development	
Shoppers at Verona	Verona, NJ	3 building complex 38,000 SF	retail	Russo Development	
Whispery Village	Whippany, NJ	78,052 SF (46 units 55,000 residential/16,000 retail)	multi-family/mixed-use	Winfield Properties	
Living Town Center	Living Township, NJ	5 building complex with 191 units and +/- 18,000 SF of retail	multi-family/mixed-use	Atlantic Development	
Recently completed projects					
NAI James E. Hanson	Teterboro, NJ	17,000 SF	warehouse conversion	NAI James E. Hanson	
The Element	Red Bank, NJ	50,000 SF	multi-family/mixed-use	55 West Front Street Partners LLC	
Lighthouse	Lansing, NJ	53,000 SF	warehouse conversion	Frederick Circle	
Cole Schetz P.C.	Hackensack, NJ	35,000 SF	retail	Cole Schetz P.C.	
7 Sylvan Way	Parippany, NJ	50,000 SF	headquarters renovation	Mark-Cali Realty	
8 Campus Drive	Parippany, NJ	8,000 SF	headquarters renovation	Mark-Cali Realty	
Essex Centre	Red Bank, NJ	20,000 +/- SF	capital improvements	Mark-Cali Realty	

Rotwein + Blake current projects chart – NJBIZ