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Case Study: **A Showcase Ceiling**



Photos courtesy of 321 design

This interior designer's retail showroom reflects a designer's eye and taste, including a decorative ceiling from Ceilume that recalls the stamped metal ceilings that were popular when this 120-year-old building was built.

GRATON, CA, 2024-May-21 – The first project an interior designer must do well is designing their own space. Angelyne Rockenbaugh understood this thoroughly when she renovated a retail space in downtown Elkhart, IN, to house the furniture and accessories showroom that she runs in parallel with her design business. She wanted to be in an historic building, and have a space that honored the building's architecture and heritage. She achieved it by restoring the original wood floor, exposing the structural brick and iron columns, and installing an "old-school tin ceiling" that is really made of Ceilume thermoformed panels.

Interior Motives by 321 Design had been located on the north side of Elkhart, but Rockenbaugh thought it really belonged in the historic downtown. Elkhart first gained prominence in the late 19th century as a center

for musical instrument manufacturing (“the band instrument capital of the world”), and as the home of the Dr. Miles Medical Company, later known as Miles Laboratories, inventor of Alka-Seltzer and One-a-Day Vitamins. The location Rockenbaugh moved into was built in 1904 during that early 20th Century boom. The three-story structure has a façade of decoratively patterned yellow brick accented with white brick, a bit of architectural flare clearly designed to impress. However, the street-level retail space was most recently occupied by an antique and furnishings marketplace whose 1980’s remodel suppressed any hint of flare.

Rockenbaugh took it over in early 2021 and began an extensive renovation. She describes its previous décor with one word: “Hideous.” The walls were plaster painted in light shades of blue and green. There were prominent square columns down the middle of the store, painted stark white. The floor had islands of brown carpet with vinyl tile walkways running through them. The grid ceiling had white mineral fiber acoustic tiles, varying in age due to frequent spot replacements when they acquired water stains, so the tile colors didn’t match. As a designer’s showroom, it was totally unacceptable.

“Keeping the integrity of the architecture is important,” Rockenbaugh observes. She stripped the floor through several layers of VCT and plywood, down to the original 1904 wood planks. She removed the wall plaster to expose the brick, and added a vintage accent of weathered corrugated steel on one display wall. The columns were freed from their plain covers to reveal the structural iron columns.

Overhead, she wanted the look of an old-fashioned tin ceiling of the sort that was popular when the building was built. The existing ceiling grid had three separate sections, divided by large joists that ran the length of the store. The center grid was parallel to the joists, the two side grids were offset at a 45° angle, so extensive cutting would be required for every edge-tile in the side sections. Rockenbaugh searched for tin looks and discovered Ceilume thermoformed tiles, a product made in the USA by a family-owned company in California. She selected Ceilume’s Stratford style, a shallow coffer-like pattern that projected the old-school look she desired. She chose black panels to achieve an upscale appearance without distracting from the furniture on display.

The 2’x4’ panels were simple to cut and install, and made a complex job easy. “I love the fact that they’re plastic,” Rockenbaugh comments. “I cut them with a pair of scissors.” Because thermoformed panels are highly stain-resistant and impermeable to water, she doesn’t have to worry about possible leaks like the ones that stained the previous ceiling.

The design has been a hit with customers. “People love it,” she reports. “They’re always shocked when I tell them the ceiling’s plastic. They think it’s wood.” The space not only presents furniture, it shows off the owner’s design skills... beautifully.

About Ceilume

Ceilume is the leading manufacturer of thermoformed ceiling and wall tiles and panels. The company’s roots go back to the pioneers of modular ceilings, when “Mid-Century was Modern.” The family-owned business is

located in California's wine country and occupies a historic apple-packing warehouse. With an eye on the future, Ceilume's research and development continues to improve interior finish systems to meet changing environmental, performance, and aesthetic needs. For more information, see ceilume.com/pro.

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BEFORE (Left): The space had been last renovated about 40 years ago, with VCT and carpet on the floors, pale plaster walls and a flat ceiling with mis-matched mineral fiber tiles that had been replaced at various times because of water-staining.

AFTER (Right): Honoring the building's historic nature, Rockenbaugh exposed the original wood plank floor and the structural iron columns, and added a decorative black thermoformed ceiling that reflects the building's vintage.



Photo courtesy of Ceilume

Ceilume's Stratford pattern, made in both 2x and 2x4 versions, is seen here in black, one of 16 available colors and finishes, made in the USA by a family owned company in California.



Before and After: Simple changes in favor of architectural authenticity, such as exposing the wall brick and restoring a vintage-looking ceiling, transformed a non-descript space into an intriguing and lively showcase.

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