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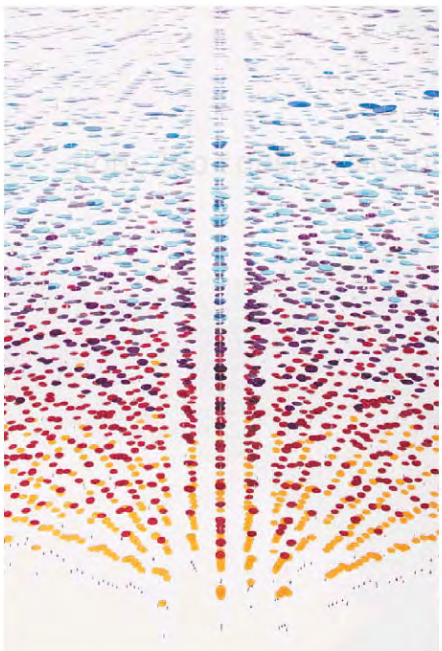
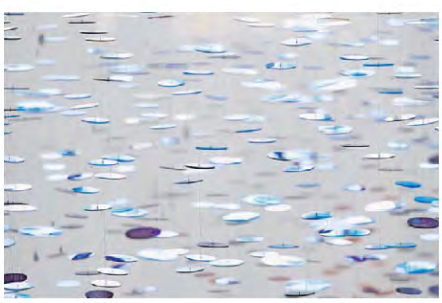
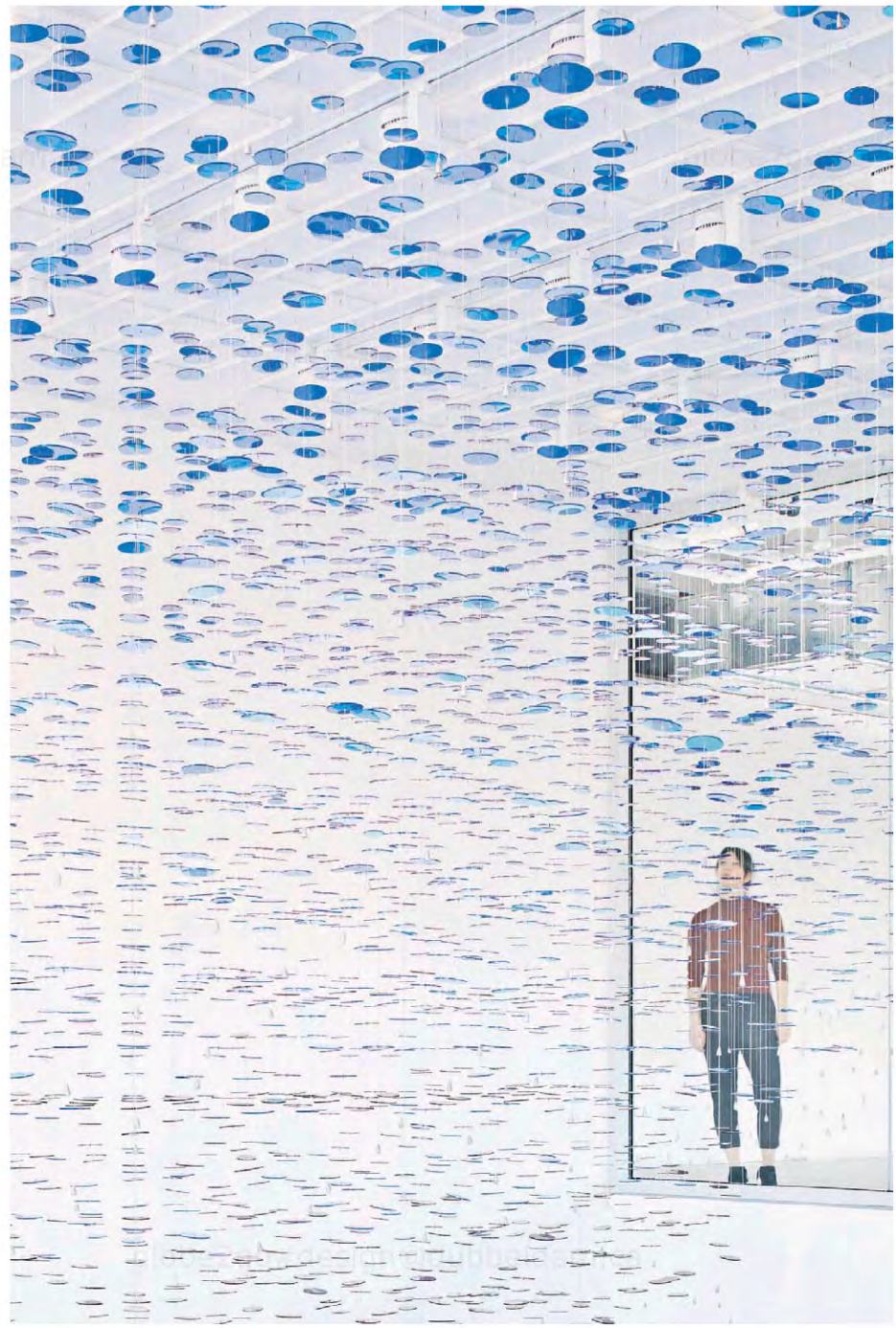


PLAYING WITH COLOUR

Heather Dubbeldam and Scott Sampson of Dubbeldam Architecture + Design have created an immersive and sometimes kinetic installation ■ H4





Binary Spectrum is an installation of 8,000 coloured, transparent discs suspended on 650 cables at 345 King St. W. in Kitchener, Ont. Architectural fabricators Sixpenny manufactured the piece. PHOTOS BY RILEY SNELLING PHOTOGRAPHY

BRITISH COLUMBIA
High-rise rental tower will add significant density to Vancouver's South Granville neighbourhood ■ H2

NEXT MOVE
Buyers with preapproved mortgages have looked to make deals before they need to renew agreement ■ H3

HOME OF THE WEEK
Brick farmhouse in rural Ontario given modern conveniences while maintaining historical charm ■ H6

Enormous playful sculpture brings life to former factory

With 8,000 colourful lenses, installation by Dubbeldam Architecture + Design in a downtown Kitchener office lobby plays with the ideas of manufacturing and the digital realm

DAVE LeBLANC
ARCHITOURIST

KITCHENER, ONT.

Practically every architect I've ever met – and I've met a great deal – either started life as an artist or has always dabbled in fine art. Pencil, charcoal, watercolour, acrylic or oils, sculpture in wood, clay, metal or glass, photography and, of course, furniture design.

Yet, too often the general public sees the architect as a sort of glorified technician, capable only of creating sets of drawings that get practical things built. While a building by necessity needs to have as much science and engineering applied to it as fine art, if technicians were all that were needed it would mean all buildings would look like warehouses and none like Eberhard Zeidler's Ontario Place (and, if we applied that logic to automobiles, all would be Reliant K-cars and never a Porsche 911).

So, that said, please see the architect as artist. And, in particular, please see Heather Dubbeldam and Scott Sampson of Dubbeldam Architecture + Design, through that lens.

Well, through 8,000 lenses, to be exact.

Installed last year at 345 King St. W. in downtown Kitchener, Ont., *Binary Spectrum* is an enormous, immersive, playful, colourful, three-dimensional, always changing and sometimes kinetic installation made up of 8,000 coloured, transparent discs suspended on 650 cables. View it from outside (at night is best), from just inside the lobby, while lounging on the serpentine couches underneath, or from a window on the building's second floor, and it changes. It's rows, it's columns, it's fractals, it's rain, it's a lily pad filled lagoon, or maybe it's a starburst.

But it's more than that, says Ms. Dubbeldam: "Just playing with the idea of manufacturing, where they make things, versus the digital realm, which is more ephemera, and how to bridge those two."

She's right: depending on one's position, the work can look solid and manufactured, but at other times and under different light, it can also look as if the wind might transform all of those discs into ones and zeros and whisk them into a satellite's maw.

It makes sense. Kitchener-Waterloo was once a manufacturing powerhouse. Rubber; textiles; dozens of furniture-makers; shirts; shoes; buttons; leather goods; and later, electronics. In July, 1940, Frederick Edwards breathlessly described it for Maclean's magazine, calling the two cities "industrial centres of considerable importance to this Dominion."

"Kitchener has 127 factories, housing 160 industrial efforts, and … Waterloo adds another 33 factories to the tally," he wrote. "When these folks want something, they go after it."

And, after the factories began to clear out in the 1980s and 90s, Kitchener-Waterloo went after technology. After Research In Motion struck it big, the region became "Silicon Valley North." Just a few years ago, Google created their largest office in Canada and placed it in the Breithaupt Block at King Street W. and Moore Avenue. Part of the complex, naturally, was an old rubber factory. That Perimeter Development Corp. owns both buildings is no surprise.

Binary Spectrum began with a phone call: Perimeter called the Dubbeldam office and asked if they'd like to create some "interesting artwork" for the wall of 345 King. They agreed, but after seeing the building's lobby, the architects asked if it could be "spatial" instead, Ms. Dubbeldam says.

Mr. Sampson picks up the story: "At the onset the whole team got together and [we were] just spit balling ideas, trying to figure out what we wanted to do. … It was a fun design exercise. Not having to deal with structural implications or, you know, health and safety and all that kind of stuff that we're constantly talking about."

And once the idea was hatched, the final warm and cool hues decided upon, and the renderings completed, it was time to find a company that could manufacture the piece. Architectural fabricators Sixpenny, on Toronto's Geary Avenue, had the necessary mettle.

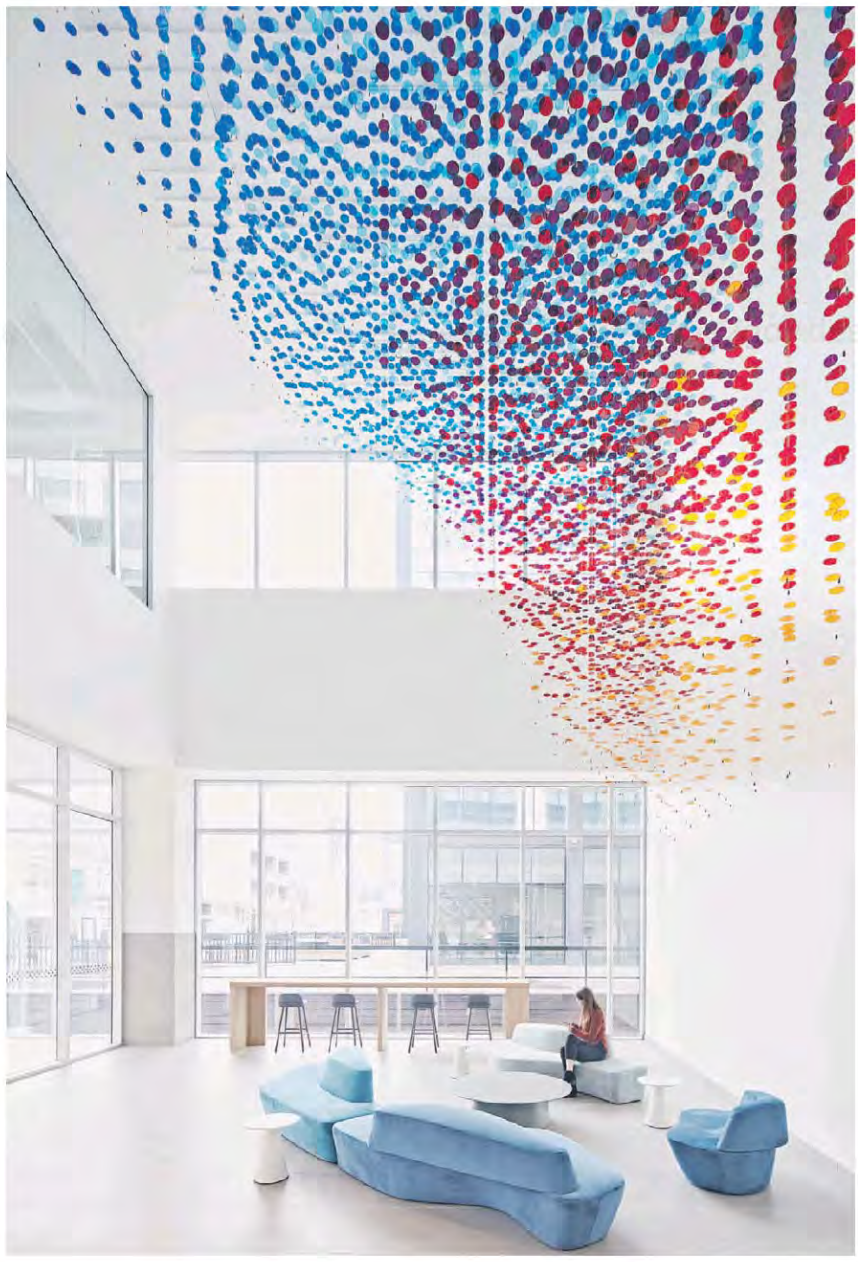
"They can really do anything," Mr. Sampson says. "And they just happened to be in our 'hood. … We knew that this was going to be a very collaborative process and we'd be seeing a lot of different mock-ups, then working through the whole fabrication process."

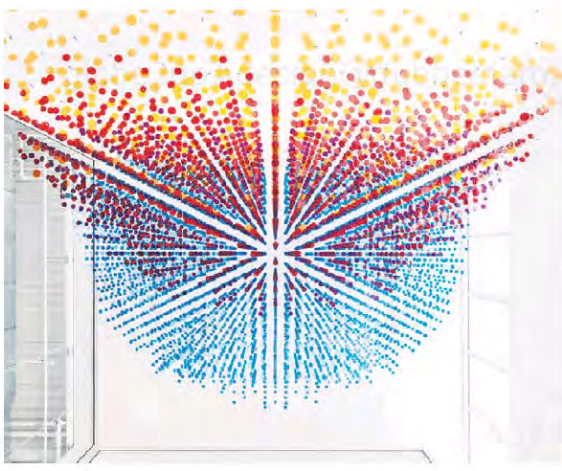
After Dubbeldam sent a 3-D rendering and Sixpenny had created a 4- by 4-foot sample in their office, details such as the thickness of the cables and how they might terminate (with very small, teardrop-shaped, metal plumb bobs) were decided upon. Then, it was time to build the whole kit and caboodle, which, says Mr. Sampson, didn't take more than a few weeks, with actual installation taking about three days.

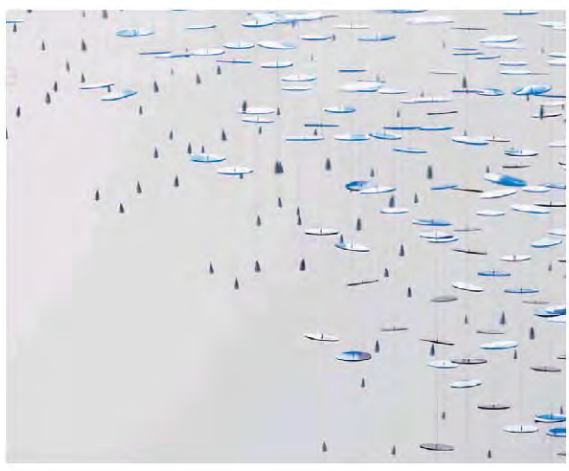
"They first installed the [ceiling] grid, and then they had a very rigorous technique where they had each individual strand in a Ziploc bag, categorized 'grid A-6,' that kind of thing. … We actually took a time lapse video of them installing it. You would think it took a long time but it didn't, it was a lot of front-end work that made the installation pretty seamless."

But will 8,000 hanging discs in an office building lobby change the world? No, but like all good art, if it stops folks in their tracks, fires a few extra neurons in their brains, and makes them smile, it will have done its job.

"This was our first opportunity to do something like this," Mr. Sampson says. "And we think we did a pretty great job."







Perimeter hired Heather Dubbeldam and Scott Sampson of Dubbeldam Architecture + Design to create some 'interesting artwork' for the wall of their building at 345 King St. W., in Kitchener, Ont. The result is Binary Spectrum, a three-dimensional installation made up of 8,000 coloured, transparent discs suspended on 650 cables. PHOTOS BY RILEY SNELLING PHOTOGRAPHY