



Triple Crown Winner

Z Salon and Spa: the Kentucky Powerhouse

By Christine Castigliano and Thomas James

How does an individual entrepreneur maintain a growing market position for over 10 years? It's a winning combination of savvy management and a totally unique staging platform.

Z Salon and Spa in Louisville, KY is the Secretariat of the image and spa industry. Entrepreneurial winner Zenda Stakelbeck is like the thoroughbred racehorse that won the Triple Crown: she's way ahead of the pack.

Her secret? Do what others don't.

Zenda wanted to stand alone, to make a statement with a strong image and true Southern style & hospitality. She envisioned smiling staff greeting each guest, holding the door open, ushering them into a place they would never forget.

Zenda had the drive to succeed, a dedication to craft, and an acute gut level understanding of the industry. One example of Z's attention to detail: VIP packages include a limo or luxury car pickup, scented with your choice of essential oil.

Her vision became reality when she opened her second location in 2001, a 21,000 sq.ft. facility called Z Salon and Spa. Today, as she nears 11 years in business, with three locations and 120 employees, it's a story of a gutsy expansion done right.

Zenda credits International Design Concepts, her design team, with a portion of that success. "Our ability to handle the high number of guests we serve is the flow that IDC created. There's an ease with moving people," she said.

The Drive to Grow

Having opened her first salon in 1976, Zenda understood the business. She'd built a 7,500 sq. ft. salon and spa in a mall that was so successful that gift card appointments were 3 months out. She dreamed of a freestanding facility with a full range of spa and image enhancement services, all under one roof.

She hired a local architect, but wasn't wowed with the results. On a cruise for spa professionals, Zenda met Michael Effler of IDC, a respected design firm with more than 25 years' spa and wellness experience. They clicked.

Michael met with Zenda to unpack the functional elements of Zenda's vision. Her desire to create "more than a spa" included significant retail areas; a space for weddings and groups; a unique, seamless customer service experience; and a generous number of stations and treatment areas, including a men's area.



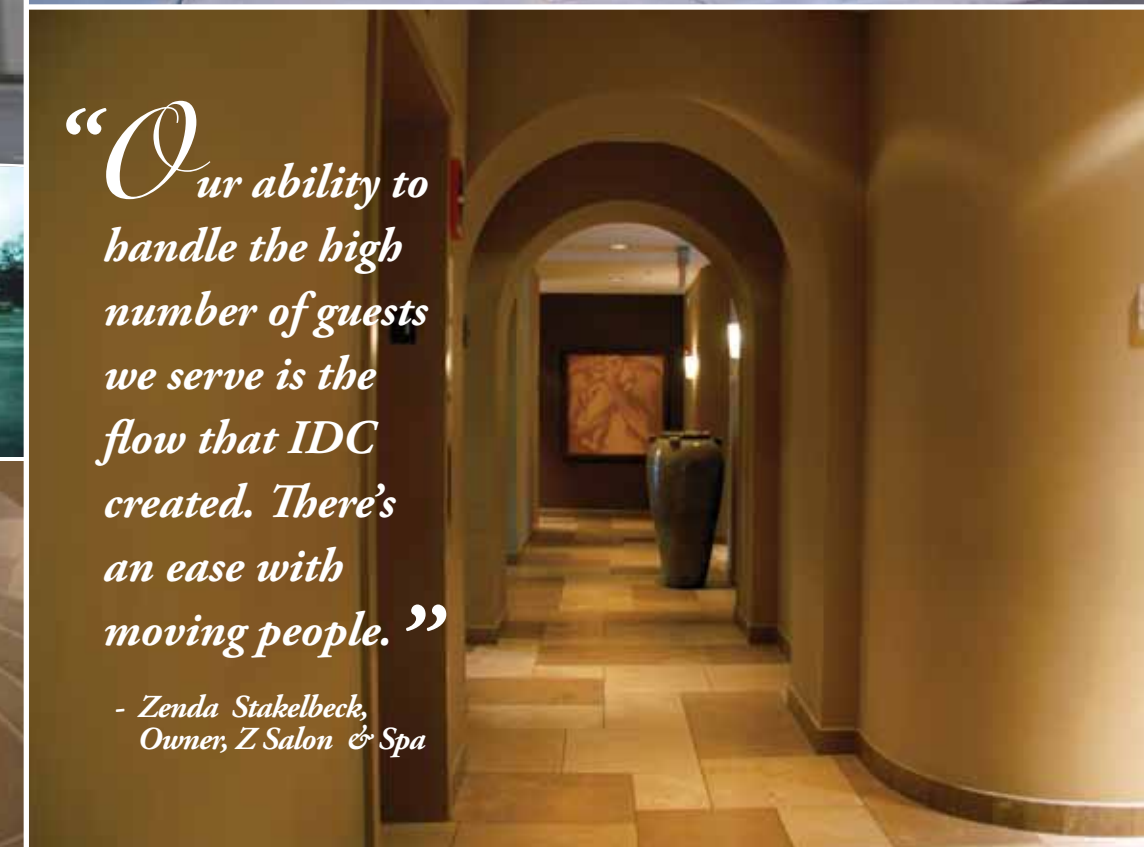
Before: Original restaurant site



Grand circular stairwell



Signature horse purchased at charity auction Gallopaloosa



"Our ability to handle the high number of guests we serve is the flow that IDC created. There's an ease with moving people."

- Zenda Stakelbeck, Owner, Z Salon & Spa



Elegant entrance to the second story



Mens' lounge



Color-in-the-Round

IDC services:

- Design and development of 3.2 acre site. Expanded existing 9,000 sq.ft. facility to 21,000 sq. ft.
- Theme development & conceptual renderings
- Landscape designs, parking, exterior lighting.
- Complete design and architectural package: exterior and interior elevations, sections, and floor plans. Designed custom casework and finish selections.
- Mechanical package: lighting, plumbing and electrical positioning, reflective ceiling
- Coordination with local architects, contractors and engineers



Couples' treatment room

They also discussed esthetics. "I needed to know what she liked," said Michael. "And what she didn't like."

Zenda took Michael on a driving tour of the city. She pointed out styles, colors, and architecture that caught her eye, exploring everything from other spa businesses to the city library.

Location, location, location

In addition to physical size requirements, Zenda's vision required an ideal site in a natural, yet highly visible location where Z Salon and Spa could establish a permanent, physical brand. To make her own powerful statement, she needed a freestanding building, away from other businesses.

Michael and Zenda reviewed several potential sites and chose a former restaurant on a site backing up to the green University of Kentucky campus, yet highly visible from a busy thoroughfare. The building's cinder block core walls were strong enough to support a second story to expand the space. IDC's value engineering enabled 65% of the mechanical systems to be reused, a sustainable solution.

Creative trust

IDC Managing Director Michael Effler knew the project would be special. "Zenda's high degree of trust created the potential to develop a truly spectacular place," said Michael. In return, IDC created a working sculpture to house Zenda's dream, including these key components:

Curb appeal: Zenda needed the power of classic design to command authority. For that unforgettable "wow" effect that can't look like anything else, IDC refashioned the pedestrian restaurant façade into a distinctive contemporary fusion.

Sense of arrival: To create a powerful sense of entrance and heightened experience, Michael designed a grand entry with

spiraling staircases, with Kentucky light falling from tall windows. Because the 'extras' - private suites, training rooms, offices and booking areas - are housed on the second story, the first floor is exclusively for guests.

Major retail component: IDC opened up the front of the building to allow a large area for visual merchandising, visible 24 x 7.

Private Twin Towers: To provide a unique space for weddings and groups, IDC created twin tower rooms above the spa's public space. With service areas for lounging and taking food, the two suites create a private world with private entrances, showers and balcony. Flanking a majestic staircase, twin fireplaces offer a warm invitation to relax.

Green Ambiance: To capitalize on the facility's green setting, the IDC team added outdoor cabanas for specialized services in a garden area, creating a special sense of privacy and ambiance.

For Men Only: Z was one of the first spas to create a separate treatment and service area for men, offering a rich, warm experience in a guys' lounge with manicure and pedicure.

Educational Platform: The facility was designed for educational operations, allowing high-performance staff to oversee the more junior team members. In line with Zenda's spirit of service and going beyond the usual spa, a theater-in-the-round was added for group presentations and classes for her staff. This upstairs rotunda is now a sanctuary area with 17 loungers.

Ergonomic Color-in-the-Round: IDC designed special spaces for hair processing and chemical components, including a separate dispensary for color that creates a smooth workflow so the maximum number of clients can be served.

Smoothest Guest Experience: Zenda imagined smiling staff opening the door for each guest, and roving 'problem solvers' to answer questions. Additionally, telephone work - scheduling, general inquiries, following up after services - should not be visible. Zenda didn't want the spa's 'back end' to disrupt the guest experience.

Staff Savvy: IDC designed a separate room dedicated to phone and scheduling, including the necessary electronic and telecommunications infrastructure. Noting how many employees would be required, IDC reconfigured the entire staff area to accommodate a larger staff.

Success story

Z Salon and Spa has achieved Zenda's highest vision: to stand out among all competition. After becoming an Aveda facility, the national producer listed her on its website as one the twelve "best in the industry." Z is number 3 among all Aveda salons. Noted in business journals and recognized with industry awards, Zenda set a high bar for other spa owners, not just in her region, but also around the country.

And now, more than ten years after opening, every guest coming through the Z Salon doors knows they've arrived in a very special place. Because of Zenda's enduring commitment to excellence, each guest is a winner, too.

For more information on Z Salon & Spa: zsalon.com

For more information on IDC: idc-design.com

Photos provided by Dudgeon & Co.

Z's secret weapon

Zenda knows how to put people first. She's committed to nurturing her staff and honing their ability to connect with people. She offers salary as well as choice incentives for every milestone. She encourages continued education, because she herself is always learning and growing. Two of her original team are now partners.