

Ohlson Lavoie Collaborative

Chris Petersen



A good workout normally doesn't mean just one type of exercise – cardio training should be balanced with strength training. Likewise, a healthclub can't rely on just one feature to make it successful.

For example, all the best equipment in the world won't matter if patrons have to work out in an uninspired space like a dank basement or a windowless attic. **Ohlson Lavoie Collaborative (OLC)** President Hervey Lavoie says his firm is an essential part of its clients' success for just this reason.

"We believe that our work as designers can enrich the members' experience," he says. "But even as we push the envelope in design, we understand that we're only part of the success story of a club. Management and programming are also key to business success."

It's a story that's being told around the globe, as OLC delivers its services as a specialist in the design and planning of leisure properties including athletic clubs, spas, wellness centers and aquatic centers. The Denver-based firm has offices in Tokyo and Cairo to serve clients in Asia, Europe and the Middle East.

Collaboration is Key

Lavoie says everything clients need to know about OLC's methods can be found on the firm's letterhead. "I think it's best represented by our name, 'Collaborative,'" he says. "We think of ourselves as collaborators with our clients. We do not come to the table with preconceived notions about style and theme. We're not known as modern designers or postmodern designers or eclectic designers."

"From a philosophical point of view, the theme and stylistic side of our business is very much a case-by-case determination with each client," Lavoie adds.

This does not mean, however, that OLC merely takes orders from its clients. Rather, Lavoie says the firm practices "client-centered creativity," drawing from the client's needs. "We really need to feed off both the expressed and unexpressed [needs of] our clients to lead them to the most effective and creative solutions," he says. "It's worked well for us, and we have many clients who respect this process and come back to us for repeat business."

Healthy Design

Designing for health clubs is OLC's main specialty, and Lavoie says it requires an understanding of the role those facilities play in patrons' lives. "The thing we really love to do is design clubs," he says. "We generalize those to be athletic sports facilities, but we really think of them as vital to the lives of members, and we cut our teeth on this whole club mentality."

Designing for health clubs means having a solid understanding of more than just what patrons want them to look like.

"There's a mix of practical, functional considerations that you have to pay attention to, and there's all sorts of intangible and aesthetic factors that you have to pay attention to as you target a specific market," Lavoie says.

Changes Ahead

Lavoie says that although the economic climate in the United States is stormy, the fact that OLC is a global company is helping it weather the changes. And even though things in North America are slow, the firm's Cairo office is currently busy.

"We have the opportunity to share some of the Egyptian load by filling in with our Florida support, and we have the systems in place to do that," Lavoie says.