

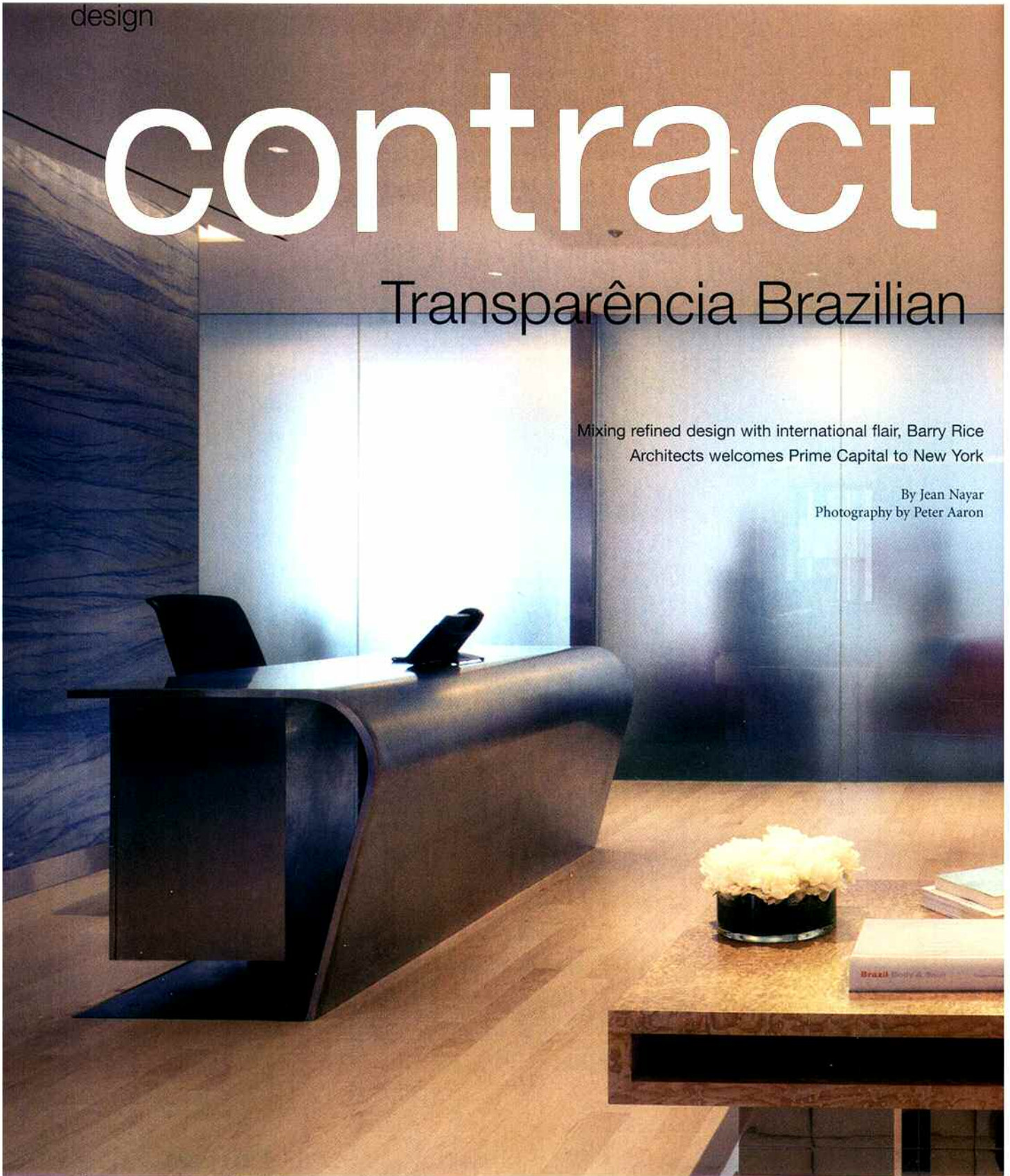
design

# contract

## Transparência Brazilian

Mixing refined design with international flair, Barry Rice Architects welcomes Prime Capital to New York

By Jean Nayar  
Photography by Peter Aaron







In 2001, just as a lot of other companies began to collapse, Prime Capital was on the verge of starting up. An investment advisor company with Brazilian roots that provides wealth management services to high net worth individuals in Latin America, Prime Capital's principals knew that to achieve their goals they knew they needed to build a base in New York. "By being close to the most important financial center in the world, we would be able to have better access to the resources that enable us to provide our clients with the best products available," says Miriam Saintive, Prime Capital's CEO. And so, despite a rocky business climate, Prime Capital found an optimal location on Madison Avenue and enlisted New York-based Barry Rice Architects to design offices that would help the firm establish its presence there.



Transparency was the operative word among financial institutions amid the confusion of 2001, with the debacle of the accounting industry and all that followed," says architect Barry Rice, who founded his own firm in 2000 after working as a project architect and associate partner for Robert A.M. Stern for 12 years. "Because Prime Capital's business was new, the aesthetic image of the office was the overriding issue for my clients, and creating a sense of openness was important to them." Since technology is an indispensable part of Prime Capital's ability to do business, designing a cutting-edge context that would be flexible enough to adapt to ever-changing communications and data transmission systems was another key element. The principals also wanted their relationship with Brazil to be evident in the design. "They were erudite and informed about design issues and very specific about what was appropriate," Rice explains.

As a taste for modern design prevails in Brazil's larger cities like Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo (where Prime Capital has an affiliate company) Rice created a sleek international flavor for the company's New York offices, with refined details that subtly reinforce its Brazilian connection. The offices

*In Prime Capital's reception area (left), echoes of the principals' roots are reflected in material details like the azul mekur stone on the face of the freestanding wall and the custom coffee table of Brazilian burl. At the opposite side of the reception area (above), maple paneled walls and a leather banquette establish a sophisticated ambience. An antique map of Brazil mounted on the wall reinforces the company's relationship to Latin America.*





occupy 5,000 sq. ft.—the entire 26th floor—of an older building that overlooks Central Park. “They’re in an A location with less than A-grade utilities,” says Rice. Particularly vexing, says the architect, was the fact that the space was “vertically challenged”—the slab-to-slab ceiling height was only 11 feet. The challenge, he says, was two-fold: to create a sense of spaciousness and to address the views, which, from the lobby, were partially blocked by a structural column.

To expand the sense of space, the architect opted to lower the ceiling height in the reception area, which is divided from the work space by a freestanding, monolithic stone wall. He also raised the ceiling up to the slab in the work area, where the open offices and a conference room positioned along the perimeter wall get a glimpse of the park. “By changing the height of the ceiling, you give the impression of greater height in the office areas,” says Rice. His design team also opted to use indirect lighting throughout, which brightens the ceiling and enhances the feeling of spaciousness, and they defined the two enclosed offices around the perimeter with sandblasted glass, allowing daylight to permeate the entire floor. To give visitors a

glimpse of the view upon entering the reception area, a sliver of the perimeter was left open and the column near the reception area was wrapped with an oval-shaped steel casing. It becomes a sculpture-like focal point, drawing the eye toward the view path leading to the beautiful vision of the park beyond.

Although the open work area now accommodates 10 employees, including both traders and analysts, the space was designed to accommodate up to 20 workers. “The conference table occupying the corner can be removed if the company grows,” Rice says. The Unifor workstations, designed for clusters of four people, are compact yet offer plenty of desk space for the multiple computer screens needed by traders. To address the Securities Exchange Commission’s new regulations stipulating that research areas and separated from trading areas, the architect installed a glass panel to divide the four stations dedicated to research from the balance of the stations along the Madison Avenue perimeter wall. According to Rice, the workstations were chosen as much for their flexibility as for their design. “A couple of muscley guys could easily reconfigure them on a weekend,” he says.





*Just beyond the reception, a conference table and workstation clusters occupy the open office area. Computer screens and shelving are built in to the anigre-paneled wall that defines the space (opposite). Outside the elevator lobby, inlaid mats made of cocoa and hemp can be easily removed for cleaning (above, top left). The large, enclosed conference room includes a table with sliding pockets that conceal CD, DVD, and telephone devices within the table (above bottom). Sandblasted glass walls define the two enclosed offices and permit daylight to filter through the low-ceilinged space (above, top right).*



**Barry Rice Architects** 48

With a passion for both traditional and contemporary architecture and a history of practicing in London, Sydney, and New York, Barry Rice established his own design firm in 1999. Training in classical architecture led his company to adapt forms and details that will stand the test of time, and an example of this type of work is featured in the design of *Prime Capital* in New York.

**CR Studio, Architects** 58

Designers and architects Lea H. Cloud and Victoria A. Rospond founded CR Studio, Architects after meeting at RISD in 1996. The partners are committed to creating architecture that gives form to the client's vision so that it becomes a physical component of their beliefs and aspirations. Their work for *American Museum of Natural History* is featured here.

**Avery Brooks & Associates** 66

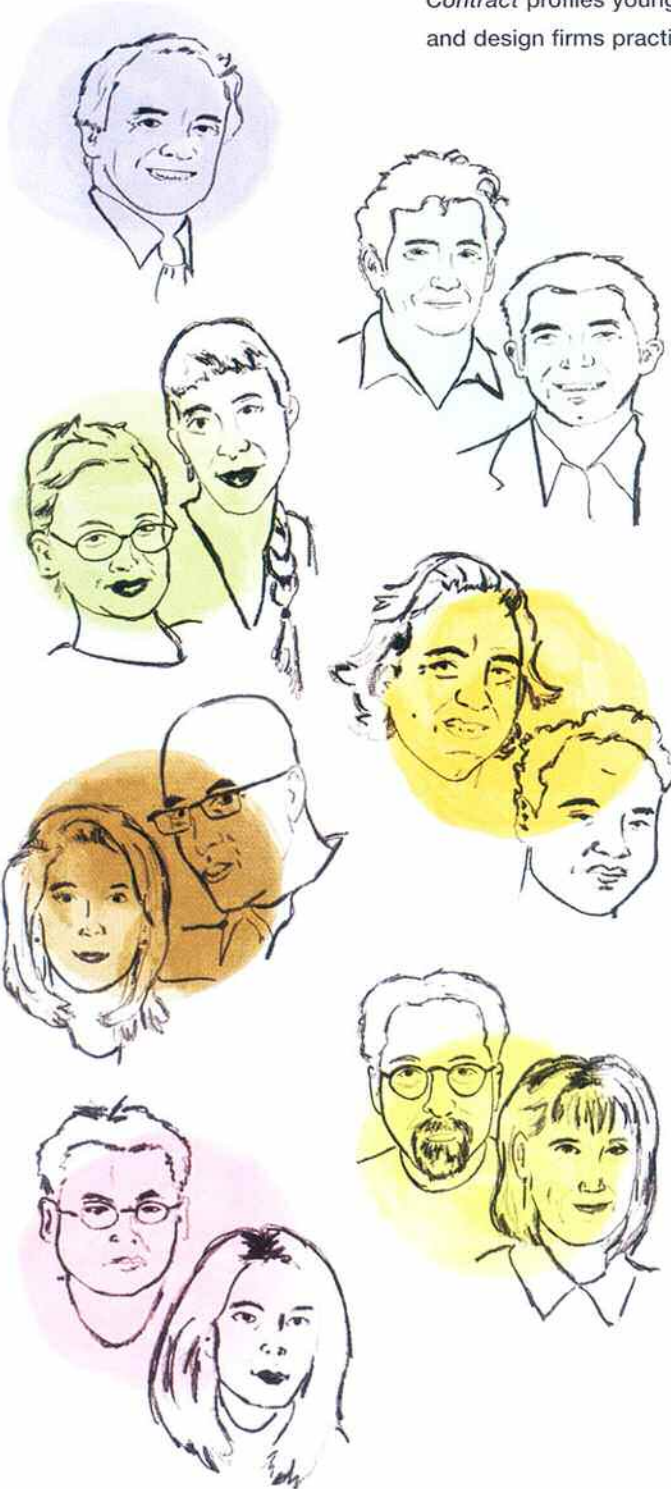
As a former interior designer for Walt Disney Imagineering, Todd Avery Brooks was well poised to start his own hospitality design firm, Avery Brooks & Associates (ABA), founded in Las Vegas in 1999. Kimberly Trueba also joined the firm from Walt Disney Imagineering that year. Showcasing a host of international talent, the firm's expertise reveals itself in the designs of its own ABA offices, featured here.

**Team HC** 74

Interior designer Hannah Lee and her architect husband Clarence Chaing Jr. comprise the talented Team HC, based in Hong Kong and Los Angeles. With their interior architecture characterized by clean lines, perfect angles, neutral palettes, and subtle Asian influences, the five-year-old design firm is gaining world-wide notoriety with projects like the redesign of the landmark Roosevelt Hotel in Hollywood and the *Frank Muller* flagship boutique in Hong Kong.

## blooming talent

Contract profiles young designers and design firms practicing 10 years or less



Three years after graduating from the Southern California Institute of Architecture in 1995, Michael Ferguson and John Hirsch founded Los Angeles-based Space International. Today, the five-person firm is part of the HEDGE design collective, a multi-disciplinary design laboratory whose goal is to continue a free exchange of ideas, influences, and resources. Featured here is Space International's design for

**Studio GAIA** 62

Established in 1995 as the brainchild of principal architect Ilan Waisbrod, Studio GAIA is actually named for his own child. Anurag Nema joined the firm as a partner in 1999 with experience from The Rockwell Group. Waisbrod's studies at Tel Aviv University and Politecnico di Milano School of Architecture afforded him a broad scope of restaurant and hospitality design expertise, as evidenced in the firm's completion of W Hotels in Mexico City and Seoul, and Michael Jordan's "23" restaurant and *Wave* both in Chicago.

**Richard & Bauer** 70

Founded by James Richard, AIA, and Kelly Bauer, IIDA, in 1996 and joined by Stephen Kennedy, AIA, in 1999, Richard & Bauer design studio in Phoenix, Ariz., focuses on library, higher education, retail and residential work. Offering unique quality of service and attention to detail, the firm's extensive portfolio includes *University Community College's Student Services Building* shown here.

Illustrations by B. Croshaw