



Master

If investing in yourself is the best financial decision you can make, then design studio **Hambly & Woolley** is rich. Because with a rock-solid creative team in place, the work always follows

Class



CULTURE. It's a word that gets tossed into the mission statements of companies both corporate and creative, and yet so few seem to actually deliver. (Going out for a drink with colleagues after finishing a project at 11 pm doesn't count.) So what does it even mean?

For long-running design studio Hambly & Woolley, culture means weekend getaways for the staff, barbecue lunches and meetings on a sunny terrace, cooking competitions, bowling and ping-pong tournaments. (Yes, there's work, too—a lot of it. Keep reading.) It means that in over 25 years of business, the small staff has had little turnover. It means people care.

No one more so than partners Barb Woolley and Bob Hambly, who have, in addition to landing accounts such as University of Toronto, Harry Rosen and Peel District School Board, made relationships their top priority—whether with staff or clients.

Four years ago, Hambly and Woolley moved their team to a single-level building in Toronto's trendy Leslieville neighbourhood to promote more communication throughout the day. At their former downtown location, most employees had separate offices. "The only time you would interact was lunch, meeting at the printer, or making a mock-up," says Woolley. "Moving to a more open plan has changed the tenor of the office."

Their current building, originally a horse stable built in 1912, was most recently an architectural lighting studio. So it's every designer's dream—painted almost entirely white (with hits of lime green), clean lines, concrete floors and interesting light fixtures, including recessed white lights in the walls of the boardroom.

Creating a place where people want to come to work in the morning is just another part of the culture at Hambly & Woolley. "We want to make sure the staff gets recognized for all they do," Woolley says. Enter the "class trips." In 2000, she and Hambly flew the staff to New York City for a three-day jaunt. For the studio's 20th anniversary, they spent a weekend in Niagara-on-the-Lake. And for the 25th anniversary last year, the whole staff went to Chicago for a three-day excursion.

"We did some stuff together, like an architectural boat tour. But people had time to do whatever they wanted," explains Hambly. "And it was really cool to watch. People were bonding. They were going for walks, taking pictures, and trying to suck in as much as they can. It was really encouraging, because that's what sparks creativity—going to a new place and just absorbing it."



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 “We’ve pushed some of the school pubs to use imagery that’s a little more provocative,” Hambly says. “Alumni are by and large savvy people, so why shouldn’t the imagery be challenging?”



1983, when they were just Bob Hambly *and* Barb Woolley, Hambly was hired as a freelance illustrator for a job Woolley art directed at Saturday Night Publications. “It was love at first sight,” she says simply. They married in 1986.

She went on to a three-year stint at Spencer Francey Group, while Hambly continued his freelance career. “She’d come home exhausted from a hectic schedule, and I would be dying to talk because I was alone all day. I’d drill her asking what she was working on,” Hambly explains. “She’d tell me to calm down so she could relax—”

“—Yeah, it was like, where’s my cheese board?” Woolley laughs.

Inevitably, Hambly would procure the details about Woolley’s current projects, and start sketching and brainstorming ideas to help her. Roger Martin, a friend who later served as the dean of the Rotman School at the University of Toronto, was the one who encouraged the pair to go into business together.

Hambly & Woolley opened up shop in 1990, with Woolley’s brother Gord joining them as a designer. “We started with no clients. We made a vow that we would never poach, or never call anybody who was in my prior life [as an art director],” says Woolley. At the time, the economy was in recession. “People were looking for smaller—let’s call it less expensive—work, and they called us.”

The phone never stopped ringing. “We’ve turned down work just to remain a certain size. It’s never been our goal or interest to be a large company,” she says.

They’ve topped out at 14 staff now, and Hambly reiterates that the number won’t be fluctuating much. “We’ve found the balance where Barb and I can still be involved in the work and not *just* be managers. We still do ‘classic’ managing and client relations, but we’re very attached to every project at some level,” he says. “I think if we got bigger than now, we would lose touch with that. And that’s not why we started this business.”

“Hambly & Woolley has helped ‘harry’ become recognized as a world-class menswear publication. They are great strategic partners and keep our magazine relevant and fresh. What a delight they are to work with.”

LARRY ROSEN, CEO AND CHAIRMAN, HARRY ROSEN INC.

“Harry Rosen is owning its Canadianness amid the incursion of places like Nordstrom or Saks,” says Woolley. “They’ve amped up their thinking about the Canadian consumer, from regions to weather to who shops where. They’re really tactical, and we’ve learned a lot from them.”



flywheel 

“The logo mark for Flywheel encompasses the firm’s holistic approach. “Flywheel offers robust development and social media strategy as well as the smart architecture of user experience,” says Woolley, “while we offer a lot of savvy on the front-end design.”

Woolley heads up most of the print and document work, while Hambly oversees the brand identities. Each works with a small team that stays with the project. “We try to build a lot of knowledge around each client and keep them having a consistent experience,” Woolley explains. “We’ve always been geared to individual needs rather than applying a house style. We want to make sure that client looks like that client. The level of service is really important to us because we’ve had some clients almost as long as our company.”

Case in point: the studio has worked with upscale men’s fashion retailer Harry Rosen since 1999 on everything from a brand identity refresh to digital marketing to internal collateral. But Hambly & Woolley’s primary role is to provide the art direction and production of the biannual *harry* magazine and two annual fashion guides.

“We’re always thinking about ways to present their merchandise where we can tell a story. It’s not just a fashion presentation,” says Woolley. They present two discrete concepts for every issue to CEO Larry Rosen and marketing director Sandra Kennedy, who they’ve been working with since the beginning.



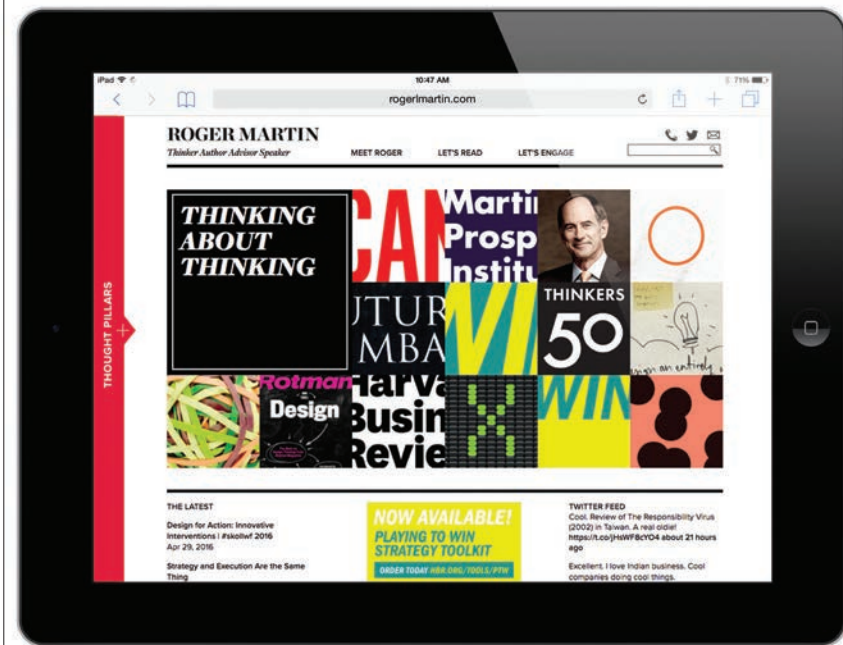
Hambly & Woolley is well-known for its magazine projects—in some cases, like for *Today’s Parent*, *CPA Magazine* and *PROFIT Magazine*, the studio is brought on only to redesign; in others, like for *harry* and many of University of Toronto’s publications, the studio art directs on an ongoing basis. At U of T, the studio has tackled everything from alumni magazines to reports to general marketing pieces for all three campuses—Scarborough, Mississauga and Toronto. The challenge, Woolley says, is to create individuality for each campus. “They don’t want to look cookie cutter, but at the same time, the university is the brand. So we have to be creative within those constraints.”

The studio has worked with a number of other education clients, including Greenwood College School and Ryerson University. In 2005,

A common space at the Hambly & Woolley building features inspiration boards and current projects.



→ The studio's refresh on Hans Kleefeld's (p. 22) iconic Toronto Zoo logo subtly extended the deer's antlers to the edge of the mark. "It's very difficult to come in on something that is such a strong asset and so public facing," says Hambly. "We wanted it to be an evolution of what he'd done."



← "With multiple channels now, we create assets for digital, outdoor, video, collateral, social," says Woolley. "Everything has to be considered with a 360-degree view."

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BARB WOOLLEY

Peel District School Board, Canada's second largest, contracted Hambly & Woolley to develop a brand identity. "Although all school boards have some sort of visual identity, most people don't associate them with putting a concerted effort into a brand," Hambly says. "Because it's public, people worry about how much money is being spent, and if it will be beneficial."

But the partners say the effect was just the opposite. The brand, which turns Peel's initial letter into part of a smile, connected with staff and students. "It created a profit centre," says Woolley. "Teachers got so excited about it that we started creating product. And they were selling lunch bags, courier bags and water bottles. They were so proud to be associated with that school board."

For longtime client Quadrangle, a Toronto-based architecture studio, it was an unexpected project that breathed new life into its brand. For the past six years, Hambly & Woolley has produced a notebook for

Quadrangle to send out as a year-end gift. The 2016 edition marks the firm's 30th anniversary with a blast of bright colour. Dominic Ayre, creative director, says the positive response to this year's design will be influencing the brand going forward. "We're taking all those patterns and applying them to the graphic standards manual because the team wants to start using them in their marketing materials. It's allowed us to liven up their brand, which has always been 'classic architecture' in that it's very controlled and stripped back."

Ayre and his team also re-launched the Quadrangle website this spring with a multi-dimensional dashboard, large typography and images, and responsive design. It was one of the first projects to go through Hambly & Woolley's recently announced digital arm, Flywheel Strategic. The addition of Flywheel creates a more robust brand and interaction offering that Woolley says is more attractive to clients. Previously, much of its digital work was outsourced to a firm called Trioro. "They developed, we designed. We got along very well," Woolley says, which led to the decision to partner full-time. "It just seemed like it was a natural fit, and we've since won projects on the basis of now being an integrated company." Trioro has fully adopted the Flywheel Strategic name, and serves its legacy clients as well as Hambly & Woolley's digital needs—and there are of course many. "After being in the business for 25 years, and witnessing the shift to digital, it was time," Hambly says. "It's important for our younger associates to know there's good growth for them at Hambly & Woolley."

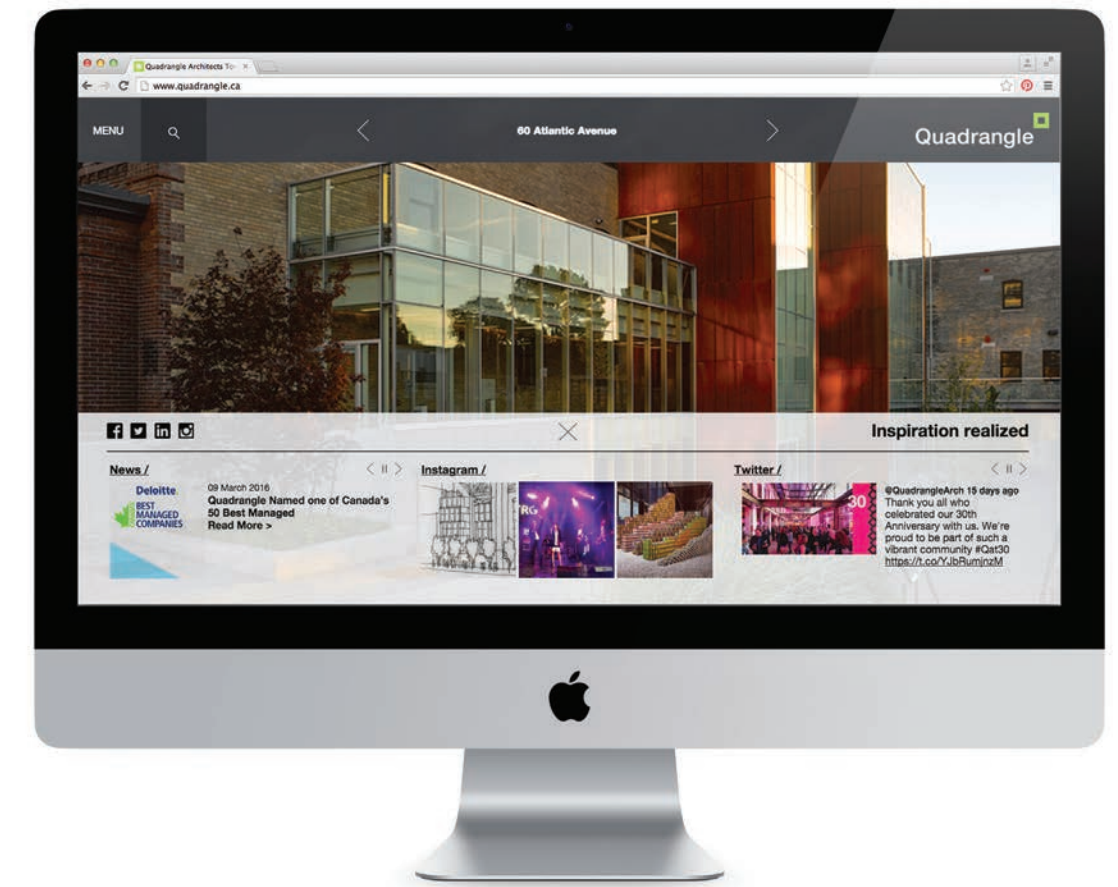
The studio's set for the future, but what about the named partners? "We have really good people here, so the studio will always keep going. But we're in no rush to hang up our hats," says Woolley. "Bob and I still get excited to come into work every day because every project offers a new way to learn. No matter what happens down the road, we'll always be doing creative things. We're not retiring to Boca."



→ "The client said, 'We really need the 'p' in the logo,'" Hambly says. "How do you take a problem like that and make it universal, so that it appeals to kindergarteners, new Canadians, high school students and staff alike?"



← Creative director Dominic Ayre says Quadrangle's 30th anniversary notebooks "built something we weren't expecting—they elevated the identity." The annual print run is 2,500 with leftovers—but four months into 2016, they'd already run out.



→ The new Quadrangle site, developed via Flywheel Strategic, not only meets accessibility standards but exceeds them as part of Quadrangle's Accessibility Advantage division. It's also set up to eventually toggle between multiple languages in anticipation of the firm's international expansion.