



## A Case for Raw Beauty.

**A new jewel box on Boulder's Pearl Street Mall keeps its gems hidden inside watches and nestled among more wood than velvet.**

Wenger, maker of "Genuine" Swiss Army Knives (its sister company, Victorinox, uses the descriptor "Original") was understandably selective about the location of its first retail outlet in the United States. Eschewing more obvious picks such as New York, L.A., or San Francisco, Wenger chose Boulder. With its dramatic topographic beauty and a metro-area population gaga over outdoors gear and gadgetry, Boulder was deemed a natural fit for the long-lived Swiss brand.

words: Kimberly MacArthur Graham / images: Blake Mourer & Bonnie Sen

**THE NEW WENGER** store, 3,200 square feet coaxed in less than five months, seems the physical completion of that connection.

Before she knew what she wanted in a design team, Wenger Marketing Manager Melissa Page knew what she sought in a space. An East Coast native, she has an "affinity for things that are real, authentic, and untouched." When she saw the Pearl Street Mall space, she glimpsed great possibilities beneath the layers of accumulated finishes. "I thought: What can I take away? 'Cause the bones are great!"

In December of 2009, she selected international architecture and interiors firm Gensler to lead the project, and the team immediately set to work. Time was short. From the first visioning sessions at the end of 2009 to the store opening on April 23, 2010, the fast-paced schedule allowed only eight weeks for design and documentation and ten for construction.

One of the very first tasks for the design team was understanding Page's respect for the raw space and reaching consensus upon what needed to be saved, uncovered, or tossed. Page's penchant for spare and salvage had a huge impact on the design direction. "The client loved the look of the space as it was, so we wanted to re-use as much of the envelope as possible," says Project Designer Jenny West. Leaving intact the floors, brick and stone walls also helped "green" the project.

West adds that both the brand and the surrounding landscape swayed the materials palette. "For finishes, we used less laminate and metal, and more wood.

One of the main goals of the space is to create brand awareness for Wenger's new line of footwear and technical outdoor gear. Part of that strategy was tying the new items to the already familiar knives and watches. All are beautifully displayed, showing off their forms in the open air in a way that makes it easy to imagine owning them.

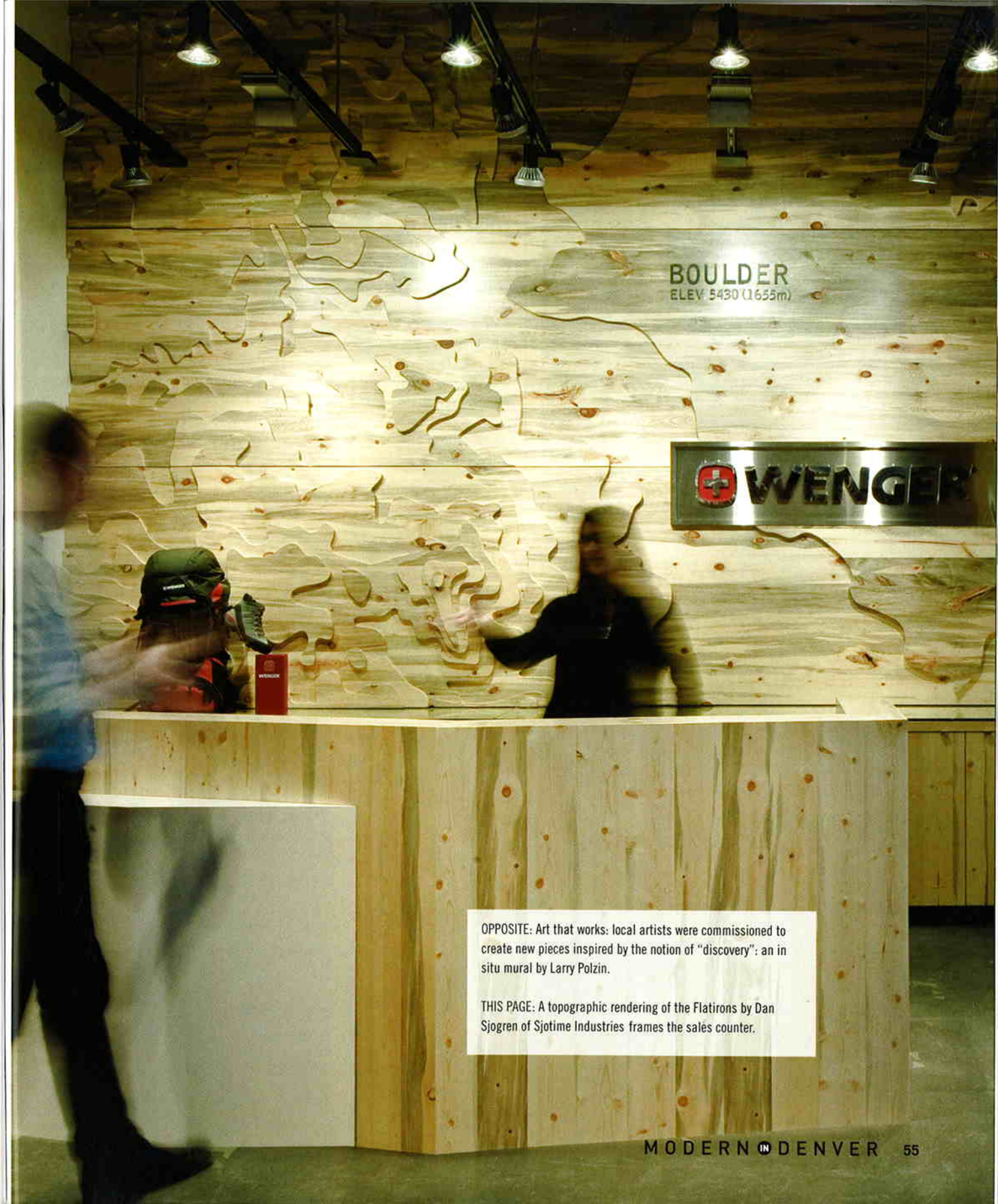
Here the watches are shown as they'll look strapped to a wrist: face forward, no packaging, no glass. Customers interact with them, try them on. For obvious safety reasons, knives cannot be handled so openly, but are displayed to their best advantage, pinned like exotic metal insects on a pristine ground. West says, "It was interesting for us, working on a really small scale. We had to figure out how to give reverence to the objects, by not having customers looking down. We also played with the repetition of multiple forms."



PREVIOUS SPREAD: One of a kind. The Guinness World Record Knife on display at the new store. Rare Porsche Design pieces are also on display in the store.

OPPOSITE: Natural materials and raw finishes highlight the store's outdoorsy feel and complement the precision of Wenger products.





OPPOSITE: Art that works: local artists were commissioned to create new pieces inspired by the notion of "discovery": an in situ mural by Larry Polzin.

THIS PAGE: A topographic rendering of the Flatirons by Dan Sjogren of Sjotime Industries frames the sales counter.



A peek at Wenger's new line of footwear.

Taken as a whole, the store design was conceived of as a tangible realization of Wenger's dual brand concepts of authenticity and multi-functionality. Strategies such as re-using select portions of the original building as a backdrop for high-tech gear illustrated concepts important to Wenger, such as the connection between "man-made precision" and "natural ruggedness."

Local artists were engaged to create site-specific works to enliven the long, narrow plan and draw visitors into the back space, which will be used for programming such as guest lectures. On a perforated wall that divides the front and back areas of the store, Larry Polzin's hand-painted mural so convincingly incorporates retro advertising style and color that it seems unearthed rather than created.

Inside the back space, Patrick Marold's sculpture of hand-cut branches of beetle-kill pine, wrapped in twine grows in one corner. Not only does it relate materially to the Wenger brand, but it's slated to become "a collector for stories and journeys as visitor's stories and images are tied to the wall."

Commanding great attention behind the point of sale is a visually compelling topographic rendering of the Boulder Flatirons by Dan Sjogren.

Wenger's Page is very happy with the store's marriage of old and new, technology and nature, and she is pleased that the building's bones were preserved. "The building just did what it needed to do: It stood for itself."

## WENGER & VICTORINOX

Say "Victorinox," and people's eyes light with recognition. "Oh, the Swiss Army Knife people!" Say "Wenger," its sister company, and get a blank stare.

### WHAT GIVES?

Victorinox and Wenger emerged from two competing companies contracted in 1890 and in 1893, respectively, to supply the Swiss Army with a multi-purpose tool incorporating a knife, a screwdriver, a reamer, and a can opener. Wenger's parent company was in a French-speaking region, while the company that would become Victorinox was in a German-speaking area. In 1908, to soften discord between the two, the Swiss government decided to use both suppliers - each for half of its order. By mutual agreement, Wenger advertises as the "Genuine Swiss Army Knife" and Victorinox as the "Original Swiss Army Knife." Both, however, manufacture to identical specifications and, in 2005, Victorinox acquired Wenger, though it has kept both brands intact.

### GENSLER DESIGN TEAM

Blake Mourer - Design Director  
Glenna Tyndall - Project Manager  
Jenny West - Project Designer  
Harry Spetnagel - Graphic Designer  
JD Praeger - Project Architect

### CONSULTANT TEAM

Sand Construction  
Greenlight Engineering  
R&L Woodworks & Design

### SPECIALITY CONSULTANT TEAM

Patrick Marold - Woven Wall Design and Installation  
Larry Polzin - Mural Art Installation  
Dan Sjogren - Sjotime Industries, Topo Wall



The beauty of repetition: a fleet of knives displayed artfully, in their fully opened glory.