

Canadian

# INTERIORS

CDN \$8.95  
MAY JUNE 2019 2019

Where  
Work  
Happens

Hit-makers in Milan,  
Cologne and Frankfurt





# A Good Sit

By Leslie Jen

A recent development from Toronto- and Hamilton-based architecture and design firm Bortolotto, the Shape Shift Bench makes its first appearance as an integral part of the firm's renovation of Lakehead University's Student Central in Thunder Bay. While the primary focus of the space is to provide students with information and access to services, the client brief specified the requirement of accommodating mobile devices such as laptops, tablets and phones while eliminating the potential tripping hazard caused by cords connected to power sources. Moreover, the space needed to be fully accessible, barrier-free, and capable of featuring a large LCD media screen for display and presentation.

The Bench packs all that into its definitively sculptural length, and represents an innovative response to a typical service counter that accommodates a variety of users. While its structure is comprised of wood and steel, the Bench is expressed in white Krypton and white oak laminate as an almost topographical landscape of staggered heights. The smooth, gleaming continuous counter surface is attractive yet low-maintenance, and provides a pleasing contrast to the warmth and tactility of the patterned wood grain. "An important feature of the design," says president Tania Bortolotto, "is that the Bench is powered through concealed cabling strung throughout its length," which then travels up to the ceiling when it reaches its vertical terminus – a wall which, cleverly, serves as a surface upon which to mount the LCD screen.

*An all-in-one integrated solution supports universal access and dignity.*

But most significantly, the Shape Shift Bench addresses the needs of a variety of differently abled people, responding to numerous height and mobility requirements, and preferred bodily positioning of sitting or standing. Bortolotto's all-inclusive design approach manifests most obviously in the provision of two different counter heights (165 and 84 centimetres) across its 10-metre length, allowing for numerous workstations on either side. A great deal of flexibility is available to the students, who may choose to stand or sit on bar stools at the highest part of the Bench, while those in wheelchairs can easily pull up to the lower counter. In the centre, the Bench drops to a height of just 50 centimetres, inviting those who just want to take a seat for an opportunity to read, rest or work in a more casual manner. It takes another dip as it terminates at the vertical wall, creating a tidy space in which to tuck a printer.

The Shape Shift Bench is not the first time that the firm has moved beyond the strict confines of architecture and interior design; the firm's portfolio includes examples of industrial, furniture and lighting design employed in previous projects. Bortolotto disclosed that her team is "in the process of determining the feasibility of mass production" to integrate the Bench in a potentially vast number of institutional and commercial settings. ■