

THE REAL DEAL

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At the Desk of: Lou Switzer

The interior designer on his 'worthless' Joe DiMaggio autograph, his suspenders habit and reimagining spaces for the likes of Citigroup and EMI

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By [Claire Moses](#)



Lou Switzer (Photo: Max Dworkin)

Unless you're a building owner or a company with a large New York City office-space footprint, you've probably never heard of Lou Switzer. But his eponymous interior design firm has reimagined spaces for the likes of Citigroup and entertainment giants like EMI (which broke up in 2012). The 51-person firm, founded in 1975 — the largest minority-owned firm of its kind — did roughly \$11 million worth of business in 2014. Most recently, Switzer, 66, completed IBM's new 150,000-square-foot [Watson headquarters](#) at the newly constructed [51 Astor Place](#). The Switzer Group is also working on a 60,000-square-foot [Williamsburg headquarters for Vice Media](#) and will soon redesign [AMC Networks'](#) 350,000-square-foot headquarters at 11 Penn Plaza. The firm's projects range from 50,000 to 500,000 square feet. For his own office at 3 East 54th Street, he asked for the worst space in the building, then spruced it up. "We ripped it apart and redesigned it," he said.

South Carolina

A native of Orangeburg, South Carolina, Switzer moved to New York straight out of high school in 1966. A year later, he enrolled in night school at the Pratt Institute, where he studied design. Today, he brings his children to visit family in his home state every Thanksgiving.



Joe DiMaggio

Roughly three decades ago, Switzer designed the Bowery Savings Bank's offices on 42nd Street. At that time, retired Yankee slugger Joe DiMaggio was a spokesman for the bank. Switzer met the Hall of Famer at a meeting. DiMaggio autographed the picture for him, but "it's worthless," Switzer said, noting that he made it out to "Lou."



Rocking Chair

A gift from the Young Presidents Organization, an organization that brings together young business leaders. In 1999 he received the customary rocking chair from Barbara Corcoran, who was then the president of his chapter. "We got booted at the same time," he said, noting that they aged out of the group together.



Suspenders

Switzer is known for his signature colorful suspenders. He wears them in homage to Bob McCain, who gave him his first job in 1966 at Sherbourne, a now-defunct interior architecture firm. While he started in the mailroom, Switzer quickly worked his way up. Switzer said McCain was always elegantly dressed. "He had on these bright red braces, silver white hair and a silver beard."



Hole in One

Switzer was playing in Key Biscayne, Florida, in 1996 when he accomplished every golfer's dream: A hole in one. "I remember that day," he said, recounting his friend enthusiastically yelling and rounds of high fives after the perfect swing. As for the vital stats on the lucky shot: He was on the eighth hole and used a pitching wedge to make the 148-yard ace.



Michelle Obama photo

This photo was taken at a friend's house for a 2008 fund-raiser before Barack Obama was elected president. Obama, traveling in Europe, wasn't present at the intimate gathering. The future first lady had left, but returned to pose for the shot.



Ashtray from China

One of Switzer's employees brought this amber-colored ceramic ashtray back from a recent trip to her hometown in China. Switzer doesn't smoke, but keeps it on display in his office. Switzer himself visited Hong Kong when it was still under British leadership.



Jets Helmet

Switzer bought a New York Jets helmet with an autograph by Joe Namath. One day, Joe Klecko — another Jets alumni and friend of Switzer's — stopped by the office. Switzer wasn't there, so Klecko scribbled his own autograph on the helmet, claiming that one "Joe from the Jets" wasn't enough.



Artwork

Above the couch in Switzer's office hang three paintings by Charles Biederman, a well-known abstract artist who died in 2004. Switzer owns works by a number of artists, but has a penchant for colorful abstracts.



by Taboola

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