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INTERNATIONAL INTRIGUE





Catalyst  
Ranch

# a catalyst for thought

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Bright colors welcome guests to Catalyst Ranch, a unique event center in downtown Chicago. These doors open to the Mambo room, one of five separate meeting rooms that designer and owner Eva Niewiadomski (above right) named after high-energy dances.



Fueled by a fusion of cultures, colorful design sparks creativity at this Chicago event center.

Vintage furniture, bold colors and ethnic art mingle harmoniously at Catalyst Ranch, a place owner and designer Eva Niewiadomski calls “the antithesis of a typical hotel conference space.” This meeting and event center in downtown Chicago combines the powers of color and culture to stimulate creativity.

The list of clients who have thought outside the box at Catalyst Ranch runs the gamut from fashion companies to pharmaceutical giants, *Fortune* 500 companies to private parties. Even Benjamin Moore & Co. has joined the list, as it will host the Chicago 2007 Color & Design Forum on October 19 on one floor of Catalyst Ranch.



2076-30  
crushed berries

2026-40  
apple green

2031-40  
spring meadow green

2033-40  
lime tart

The appeal of Catalyst Ranch – and her firm Catalyst Ranch Design – is Niewiadomski's own unique mix of vintage Americana and ethnic art, a power combo that gets people talking, lightens the mood and helps the creative sparks fly.

"Even though there are so many beautiful pieces and unique elements, it doesn't feel like a museum," she says. With function as a top priority, Niewiadomski designed the space to be flexible according to the individual needs of her customers. For instance, in the Polka room (the largest of the five meeting rooms), a large Indian tapestry drapes the wall when the projector screen is not required.

The major influences behind Niewiadomski's design are her passion for travel and appreciation of other cultures. Most of the ethnic art and furnishings in Catalyst Ranch were handpicked by Niewiadomski during one of her many international trips to Tahiti, Australia, India and many other places in between. "I'm one of those people who is known for taking one big trip every year."

Incorporating ethnic art or costumes into her design is also Niewiadomski's way of placing value on other cultures. Guests at an Indian wedding, for example, were delighted to discover that the saris hanging on the walls had always been a part of Catalyst Ranch and were not just temporary décor for the event.

The fusion of cultures at Catalyst Ranch is particularly relevant to the Chicago area, a mixing bowl itself. Niewiadomski places festive Mexican costumes next to authentic Chinese masks. "You can start to see how different countries can complement each other," she explains.

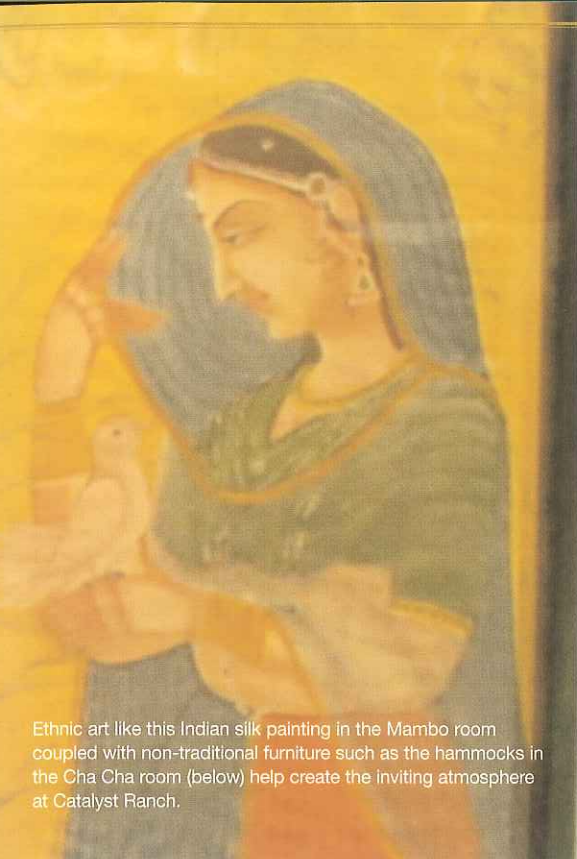


In the kitchen area of Catalyst Ranch, Eva Niewiadomski positions two antique cabinets – one from the Czech Republic and one from East Germany – near a ceramic sculpture from Oaxaca, Mexico.

**Below:** The walls at Catalyst Ranch are adorned with an antique Indian wall hanging (left), a beaded curtain and a traditional goatskin Day of the Dead costume from Oaxaca, Mexico.







Ethnic art like this Indian silk painting in the Mambo room coupled with non-traditional furniture such as the hammocks in the Cha Cha room (below) help create the inviting atmosphere at Catalyst Ranch.



In the Mambo room, Eva Niewiadomski often uses Moroccan rugs as a colorful way to anchor furniture groupings and energize the space. Below, the hallways come alive in colors inspired by Mexican haciendas. When leaders from a Mexican non-profit group attended a training session at Catalyst Ranch, they immediately recognized the color scheme and appreciated the homage to their culture, according to Niewiadomski.



Benjamin Moore's Seaport Blue 2060-30 serves as a backdrop for this Indian nightstand and Haitian flag decorated with hand-stitched sequins.



The Polka room spans 3,250 square feet, making it the largest room at Catalyst Ranch. Eva Niewiadomski gave it the name Polka because the dance itself requires a lot of space.



2012-10  
tawny day lily

2011-30  
hot spice

2026-50  
fresh cut grass

2017-30  
tangelo

## Colorful Beginnings

In 2002, Niewiadomski had only five weeks to transform the bare bones of a former herring packing warehouse into Catalyst Ranch, making it suitable for its first customers. Wall color was one of the first elements she established. The challenge was to choose separate palettes for each room that would not only be bright and inviting but would work well with her eclectic furniture and art, knowing that the collection would continue to grow.

When it came to choosing colors by Benjamin Moore & Co., Niewiadomski had no trouble finding options that aligned with her preference for crisp, refreshing colors.

One of her favorite palettes is in the Jitterbug room – Tawny Day Lily 2012-10, Hot Spice 2011-30 and Fresh Cut Grass 2026-50. The tonal differences between the orange and coral highlight the richness of the Brazilian cherry hardwood floors and add warmth to the 1,400-square-foot room.

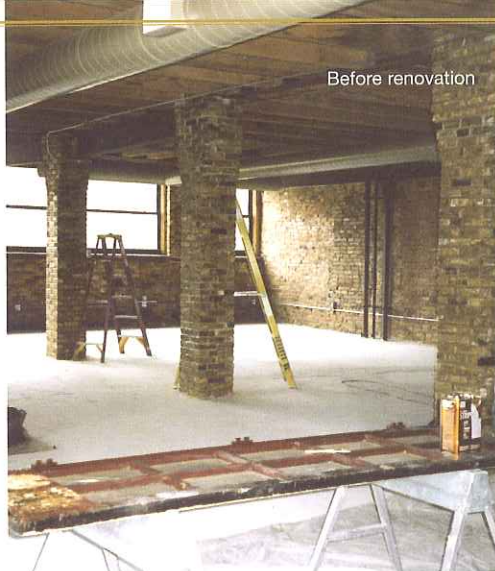
In the hallways and common areas where there was no natural light, Niewiadomski chose a palette inspired by traditional Mexican haciendas. A combination of Tangelo 2017-30 and more Tawny Day Lily 2012-10 rejuvenates guests during breaks in their meetings.

While hundreds of guests come and go – and the furniture moves from one room to another depending on the day – one thing remains constant and always works well for Niewiadomski: “We did not change a single wall paint once we put it up!”

*For more information on Catalyst Ranch and Catalyst Ranch Design, visit [www.catalystsranch.com](http://www.catalystsranch.com).*

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Before renovation



Antique Mexican marionettes add a playful touch to this hallway area. Designer Eva Niewiadomski infused the common areas between meeting rooms with extra pizzazz to energize her guests during brainstorm sessions.