

## **LATIN AMERICA 2009 BY JAMES MARTIN, CMG, PRESIDENT**



I'm just back from the second CMG Latin America Meeting in Mexico City. Last year our first meeting was held in Buenos Aires, so this year we went to the north end of Latin America to include people who could not come all the way to Argentina. The group was predominantly Mexican but we also had attendees from Brazil, Colombia, and Chile, as well as the US.

Carol Derov, CMG, from Sherwin Williams and Erika Dominguez of Comex were the CMG member organizers. Our real hero was Laura Gonzalez of Comex who really did an outstanding job putting the whole affair together arranging the events and food, etc.

Comex Paint of Mexico City was our major sponsor and gave everyone a fantastic introduction to beauty and hospitality of Mexico. However, we could simply not have done without the other great sponsors, Sherwin William, X-Rite, NCS, and Landor, all of whom gave selflessly to ensure our success. And we cannot forget Jaime Stephens and Sharon Griffis our dedicated staff who put in hours and hours of time.

The workshops were very juicy. We had 33 attendees- a great turn out for only a second meeting and one in recessionary times. We split into three groups to discuss trends and drivers before getting down to the nitty-gritty of color selection. While a number of people were new to CMG and our process, they very quickly caught on and really got into voicing their opinions and promoting "their" colors.

On the second morning we finished our group presentations and spent the afternoon doing the steering session all together which was really fun and lively. Especially when it came down to giving the colors names in Spanish and explaining their aptness translating them into English for us Gringos.

The meeting began on Sunday evening with drinks and appetizers "tipico" at a neat, old downtown Cantina called La Terraza Los Grisoles. Our hotel and events were mostly in the Centro Historico, the historic downtown of Mexico City. Our speaker for the next morning, Carmen Valverde, walked with us to the restaurant and gave us an architectural history lesson on the way.

Monday's session began with Dra.Valverde's talk on Historical Mayan Architecture, a subject she is an expert on at the University. It was fascinating indeed. Following a coffee

break Renee Hytry Derrington, CMG of Formica Corporation gave a fabulous trend presentation, "Connecting the Dots, Trends in International Furniture Markets." As we all took copious notes, it pointed out to me one of the real benefits of coming to CMG meetings and that is access to insights you would have no way of making on your own. Her talk had so much pertinent information for everyone, it was a huge success.

Lunch was next and then onto the beginning of the Workshops. Concluding the day we all were treated to a bus ride to a fabulous restaurant right off the Zocalo, the ancient main square. La Casa de Las Sirenas (the house of the Sirens) is in a 400-year old building right behind the cathedral and overlooking the Templo Major- the remains of the Ancient Aztec pyramid which the Spanish destroyed when they took over. Dinner was incredible and generously furnished by Comex again. How wonderful to sit beneath the stars on the third floor patio with the beat of Aztec dancers celebrating in the plaza outside. Oh, yes, and the margaritas!!

Our speaker on Tuesday Morning had everyone excited. Senor Ricardo Seco, the quite famous Mexican fashion designer and currently the Creative Director for Converse Mexico. He showed us a lot of his current work and explained the process and inspiration for his creativity. We were all caught up in his work, especially some of his hand painted Chuck Taylors in traditional Mexican regional design motifs. Carol Derov is now the hippest gal in Cleveland sporting the pair he gave her.

Color Workshops continued in the afternoon and by the time steering was completed all the first time attendees were totally wrapped up in our CMG Workshop format. It never fails to amaze me just how jacked everyone is after the Workshops. Your creativity is just so pumped up you want to go home and design up a storm.

But first, Dinner at Frida Kahlos house!! Yes, Comex just blew us away with their graciousness. We took the bus and went for drinks, a tour, more cocktails and dinner at the world famous Casa Azul, home to Diego Rivera and Frida and visited by so many luminaries of the art and literary world including Trotsky himself back in the day.

Comex was nice enough to set up an interview for me with one of the most important Mexican home magazines to talk about CMG and my work, with a photo shoot and everything. It is great to be able to spread the word about CMG, but unfortunately I missed out on the tour of the house. Ah, the sacrifices of office.

Dinner was too good for words. We had a poblano chile soup which was the best soup I have ever eaten anywhere, just exquisite! And if the dinner was not enough, at the end came - The Mariachi's. If you are not familiar with this traditional form of Mexican music it is just too cool for words. Of course a couple of the very young Mexican girls attending didn't realize that yes, it's square. But it is so square it is cool. Everyone was singing along

even me to the few songs I knew. All and all an incredibly memorable night for a fiesta of color and culture that was the Latin American Meeting in Mexico City.

I can't thank everyone enough for showing us all a fabulous time and introducing us to the depth of the Mexican culture. Especially in these times of rabid jingoism in the U.S. it was so important to get a solid handle on the fact that Mexico is a very important country on the world stage and the Mexican people are so much more than migrant labor that all too often Americans in their ignorance dismiss them as.

For next year we have some offers for holding the meeting in Brazil and Colombia. It was made clear to us in no uncertain terms that Colombia was not the scary county it is made out to be. Just like a couple of reactionary CMG members (no names, please) sowed fear among the members that Mexico City was much too dangerous for Americans, it is important to look further than headlines to form opinions. No one had a minute's trouble or even difficulty on our trip to Mexico's Capital city.

Our decision will be made most likely around who can be on the ground and really put the Conference together for us as we have found it is very hard to do from afar and without local help. Wherever it is held, Latin America III will be a fascinating and culturally eye opening experience, so you might just want to start planning of attending.

Once again kudos to Laura for making this one of the most memorable experiences of my life. Viva Mexico! Viva CMG!

