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'Left-Hand-Man' in San Jose provides space to create

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Step inside the slate blue exterior of 99 Wilson St. and you enter an olive green lobby with owner Brent Haley's very vivid purple office visible in the rear.

But what excites most of the people who find their way inside this single-story, 7,500-square-foot cinder block building across from Cahill Park, is the 4,000 square feet of black and white open studio space.

Add more than 400 feet of black theater curtains hanging on overhead rods, movable backdrops of brick, white, metal and textured surfaces, along with three movable stages and a metal door that rolls up to admit daylight, and you have nirvana for photographers and videographers.

It's all deliberate design by Haley, who with his wife, Mitzi, and two investors optioned the building in 2006, closing escrow in January. The Haleys have spent the last two years transforming it into a creative studio for their own businesses and rental offices for others.

"We promote ourselves as a dry studio, which means we don't provide any equipment or lights," Brent Haley says.

"Come in and use the space for a small meeting or a video shoot or to shoot head shots. We're

trying to make it palatable for the small, creative person, instead of big huge production crews."

The studio area is rented out on a half- or full-day basis, and the rental offices come with shared access to the studio, the lobby, a sound room for making recordings and a conference room.

The Haleys say they looked at many properties before finding one that fit their needs.

"It was the location and the building itself," Haley says of the space at the corner of Wilson and W. San Fernando Streets. Over the years, the building has housed a vending machine business, a telemarketing firm and a meat distribution business.

"Due to our business, we needed something that could be very soundproof, and we wanted to have a free-standing building for isolation from outside noise," Haley says.

"Plus, we wanted something we could upgrade and eventually develop."

Haley's company name is Left-Hand-Man Productions, which he founded in 2006 after close to two decades working in creative marketing for major firms, including Adobe, Pantone and Apple.

Although he still regularly consults for past employers and clients, Haley is focused on new businesses as well.

"We specialize in developing sales and marketing online videos," he says.

"We help a company develop their online visual presence. The first point of contact for companies in the future will be via the web, so when you first go to a Web site, you will see a video of the CEO or whoever they want to be the face of their company,

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not just a static site.

"We train and teach companies to use video as a medium to get their message across."

"We're specializing in the video genre that is great with You Tube and Google Video, but we do it from a business perspective. It's something no one else out there is doing right now. It's a very new thing."

Mitzi operates her Buyer's Eye company out of one area of the building.

It looks like a furniture warehouse, which is essentially what it is, as Mitzi's company stages homes for sale. It's a business that has grown over the past decade as research shows that professionally staged homes sell more quickly and for 10 to 15 percent above prices paid for empty houses.

Haley points out that if a client shooting a video in the studio needs a living room setting, Mitzi's inventory is right there.

Two years ago, photographer Amy Lynden joined the business mix at 99 Wilson.

Lynden, who lives in Willow Glen, says she found the building attractive on several levels.

"The rents around here are so expensive, it's a great way to have an office and access to a very large studio, as well as a conference room and kitchen. Paying for each of these independently would be very costly," Lynden says.

Almost as big a plus, she says, are Haley and Mitzi.

"They're excellent landlords. They're trying to create a community of creative types.

We've all referred business to each other. There have been projects where I've been able to help them out and vice versa," she says.

Lynden says in addition to her office space, which doubles as a gallery of her photographs of children and families, she has a certain amount of studio access time built into her lease.

If she needs additional time, it is available, but thus far she says it hasn't been necessary.

Lynden says she's also benefited from the technical expertise of Haley and fellow tenant Karl Thomas, a computer consultant specializing in Apple systems.

Haley says he hopes to rent the remaining office spaces to creative people, who will be able to interface and handle freelance assignments from him and other building tenants.

In transforming the building into office and studio spaces, the Haleys have worked to make the building as green as possible.

Mitzi points out that the Icenyne insulation they used is eco-friendly.

"It's closed-cell so there's no mold and no allergens," Haley says.

"It's very popular on the East Coast, but we're one of the first to use it here," Mitzi says.

The Icenyne, which is blown into place and then expands, is very visible in the lobby area's textured ceiling. It's impossible to see in the large studio area because it's been painted black to blend with the walls.

Another green move was putting a special film

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coating on the windows that has eliminated 70 percent of the glare and 80 percent of the heat.

"In the summer it was like a hot box, but now our heating bill for the entire building is half what we pay to heat our home," Haley says.

The Haleys have also wired the building for full wireless and 10-gigabit ethernet.

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