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# Seeing the Light

Store lighting design can benefit from smart technologies, integration into architecture

by Beth Feinstein-Bartl

**AS** the market continues to evolve swiftly, lighting designers find themselves seeking fresh ways to assist retailers. These strategies are a varied lot, from integrating lighting with architecture to embracing smart technology. All have one thing in common, however: to keep shoppers engaged.

Many shoppers need a new reason to step into a store. Lighting works with merchandising efforts to set a new stage, says Jered Widmer, principal at The Lighting Practice, a Philadelphia-based lighting design firm.

“Technology has pulled many shoppers away from the brick-and-mortar store shopping experience,” Widmer says. “Shoppers need to feel like they are in a relevant place—somewhere that is enjoyable. Lighting helps tell that story.”

## Layering for effect

Sean Hennessy, principal at Hennessy Design, a Portland, Ore.-based lighting design firm, believes the best designs integrate lighting into architecture and product displays.

“Our work is increasingly becoming integrated and layered,” he says. “The ones we’re most proud of is where you see a careful mix of display and decorative, where the lighting doesn’t feel like an afterthought.”

A prime example is the jewelry segment. Lighting is needed everywhere in jewelry stores, so the design must tailor all light fixtures to each application. It all comes down to contrast, Hennessy explains.

Layering often includes placing lighting at product level, where customers interact with the product. For instance, grocery stores with cosmetics and health products have more lighting at the shelf level. The higher the price point, the more layers of lighting, Hennessy says.

Most retail lighting is best with a combination of ambient and accent lighting. Too much ambient makes the space too uniform. Accent lighting provides punch and contrast to the displays, adds Maureen Moran, principal at Washington, D.C.-based MCLA Architectural Lighting Design.

“The lines are becoming blurred because we are all dependent on each other for results. This gives the design more impact.”

— Moran



PHOTOS: PAUL WARCHOL



*In-case lighting requires thoughtful planning in conjunction with other light sources, as at this David Yurman in New York City with lighting designed by Cooley Monato Studio.*

## Providing focus

Integration of lighting into the architecture and fixturing also makes for cleaner composition and fewer distractions, enabling lighting to provide focus and to direct the customer journey. For example, cove lights or backlit walls can be more effective than penetrating a flat ceiling with downlights, Moran says.

A key component for integration into architecture is the collaboration between designers, architects, and electrical engineers. “This is becoming the norm,” Moran says. “The lines are becoming blurred because we are all dependent on each other for results. This gives the design more impact.”

Whether it’s backlighting advertising/signage panels or undershelf display lighting, the integrated lighting approach better illuminates graphics and merchandise to attract the eye. It creates exaggerated contrast in the environment that naturally draws people, Widmer says.

“We see this in a lot of applications, including the candy and magazine racks at grocery stores,” Widmer says. “The small scale and low energy consumption of LED technology has pushed this to the forefront.”

## Leveraging smart technologies

LEDs continue to be preferred in retail for their energy savings. Brands are taking the lead on sustainability initiatives, Hennessy adds.

“We’re seeing more awareness on their part,” he says. “They are educated and want to be ahead of the curve. They are meeting growing demands from customers, who are seeking companies that give back and embody certain values.”

But these days, advanced lighting can do much more for retailers and brands than just save energy. Lighting is becoming more intelligent and reactive; indeed, lighting promises to be key to the Internet of Things (IoT) infrastructure. LiFi and other smart technologies can enable retailers to employ lighting systems in their quest for brand engagement, longer dwell time, and higher sales per square foot.

“Several lighting manufacturers have developed lighting that can track shoppers, merchandise, and/or employees,” Widmer explains. “The technology is still evolving, but retailers can now collect even more data than before, at a higher level of accuracy and in real time.”

This allows retailers to not only get a better handle on loss prevention, but also look at employee productivity, stock inventory, shopper habits, and traffic flow. This data can help optimize their performance, Widmer says.

## Vetting expanding product lines

With retail's short lead times, the growing product availability can be a blessing and a curse to lighting designers.

"Retail moves so fast," Hennessy says. "You find the perfect fixture, but if it's not available for 12 weeks, then it's not feasible."

The huge range of lighting products on the market gives designers plenty of choices, he says. But it also means designers must spend time vetting products and becoming familiar with their features in order to determine which work best where.

"It's a huge, complex industry and there's a need for experts," Hennessy says. "That's where lighting designers come into play. Clients rely on us to steer them to the best products."

Emily Monaco and Renée Cooley, principals at Cooley Monaco Studio in New York, agree. "Everything seems to be at risk of being copied for less money and shorter lead times, but not necessarily the same quality," Monaco says.

## Communicating emotions

Monaco and Cooley believe lighting should communicate the emotions of the architecture and the essence of the brand. Advances in technology, including smaller LEDs, are making this easier, they say.

Point sources must be accurately matched with linear sources to highlight in-case shelving lines. "The smaller the source, the greater the opportunity for optical control," Monaco says.

At the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minn., the firm's design contributes to the customer experience in the center's avenues by organizing and enhancing the lighting with such fixtures as coves, chandeliers, and underlighting bridges. This decreases the visual noise and creates a relaxing, invigorating environment where people easily move throughout the space, Cooley says.

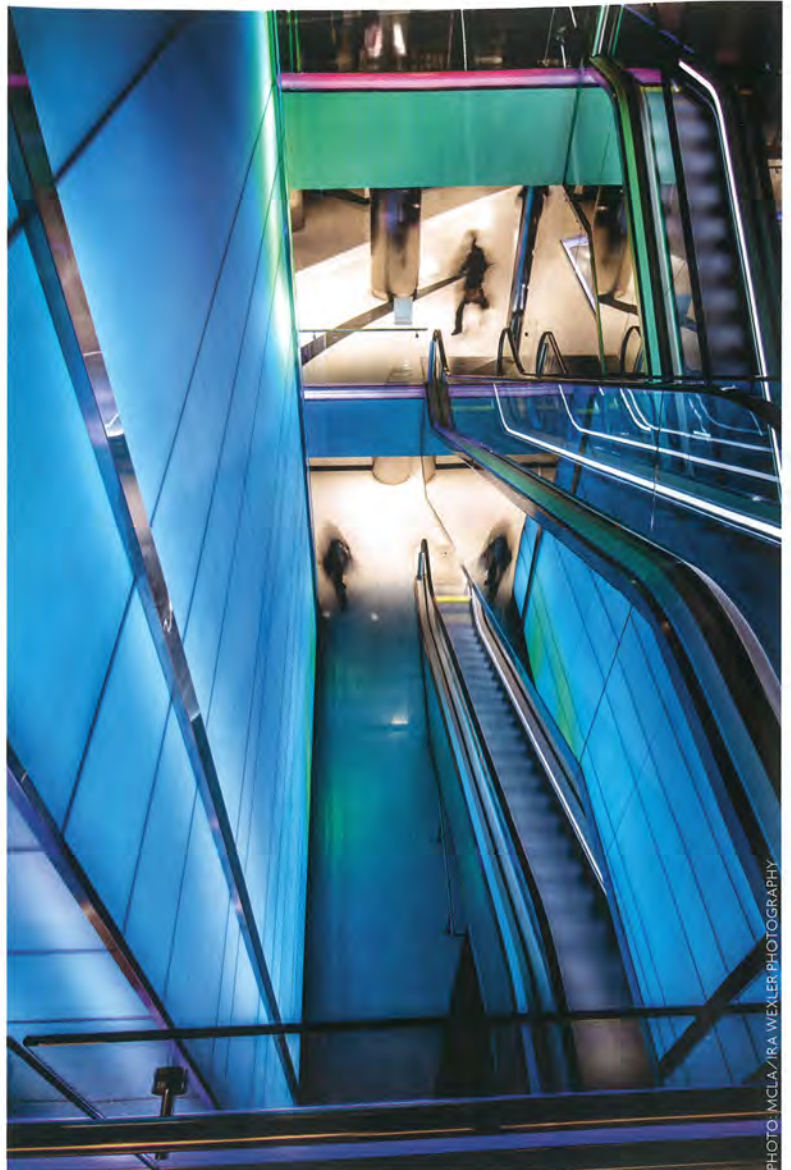
"Brands want to be associated with lifestyle through multisensory identification," Monaco adds.

## Setting the world aglow

Some of the most challenging strategies stem from deploying designs on a global scale. Most designers agree color temperature preferences vary by country. The U.S. market tends to like warmer color temperatures. Asian countries prefer cooler temperatures.

"Of course, it is dependent upon what materials and surfaces are being lit and the presence of daylight," says Moran.

Hennessy adds, "Even if we're doing a store internationally, it comes down to the core customer. As often as we can, we seek consistency in all markets. It takes a lot of planning, R&D, and manufacturers."



At Chevy Chase Pavilion in Washington, D.C., MCLA Architectural Lighting Design integrated lighting into the architecture, creating a beacon for escalators.

## It can be a delicate dance.

"There's always going to be a home base—a branding with a particular market in mind, says Monaco, whose firm has designed lighting for global rollouts for Michael Kors and Tiffany's. "We're having to design to that kind of headquarters point of view, as well as our own aesthetic, and hoping we are striking a middle ground."

*Beth Feinstein-Bartl is staff writer for Shop!*

For more lighting strategies, attend LIGHTFAIR International, May 9-11, 2017, at the Pennsylvania Convention Center in Philadelphia.