

# Lighting Retail: Ambient vs.

LD+A surveys today's retail store lighting trends—more light on the merchandise, less operating costs and rethinking the role of ambient illumination

BY VILMA BARR

**W**e are a nation of shoppers. An estimated two-thirds of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product is generated by retail consumption, making it the prime driver of this country's economy. In 2009, retail sales reached \$2.96 trillion, excluding food service, cars and auto parts. E-commerce accounted for \$145 billion of that year's total. How much we spend, which type of products we buy, and where they are purchased is tracked by the U.S. Census Bureau. The Department of Commerce then analyzes the results and issues its analysis.

The brick-and-mortar retail store is still the prime purchasing destination where buyer and seller interact. Merchants utilize an array of print and electronic media to stimulate customer traffic

into the store. And once those shoppers come inside, merchants encourage purchasing through lighting—and how it enhances the merchandising point-of-view shows up on the bottom line.

With long business hours throughout the year and even more extended store operating schedules during the fourth quarter, lighting can account for approximately 50 percent of a retailer's total energy bill. To learn more about today's retail lighting practices and insights into future lighting applications, LD+A surveyed lighting designers and store designers to get their ideas on ambient illumination, accent lighting and energy usage. What is the status of ambient light for the selling floor? What techniques are favored to accent the merchandise? How can a high-quality result be achieved with a lower energy load? Our panelists weigh in.

## Ken Nisch, JGA

Nisch, CEO of the international retail store planning and design firm JGA, made the following observation: "I believe that ambient lighting for stores will decrease significantly or be eliminated by many stores. Instead, with higher performance luminaires and lamps, sufficient overall illumination can be provided by accent lighting within display fixtures and built-in recesses, plus architectural lighting for coves, uplighting, etc. Lighting will be increasingly task-based rather than ambient, considering macro factors such as the rising cost of energy around the world. Retailers must be open to innovation in the design of their retail environment and merchandise presentation."

For a Tashi shoe store in Mumbai, India, designed by JGA, Nisch recounts how the store's owner told a trade conference



Uplight, backlight and underlight help customers decide on bedding at this Sleep Number store in Oakbrook, IL.

# Accent vs. Energy

**Emily Monato,  
Cooley Monato Studio**



“Store lighting must intentionally be on the architecture or the merchandise,” says Monato. “To create a productive selling environment, all the fixtures specified take into consideration the products being sold, the client’s needs and the geometry of the space.

“There are various tiers of retail from big box to boutique, with different needs for different markets,” she adds. “I’ve noticed an increased awareness and responsiveness on the part of the shopper to well-lit environments. Some of my own family’s shopping is at the local Costco where strong ambient light is needed for their product display. But now I’m aware that the CRI has changed. It’s not just same, all-over, uninspiring flat light level. Now they have eat-in-store places that are lit differently. The strategy is: ‘Stay and eat...then revitalize and continue shopping.’ It’s the old retail axiom: The longer customers are in the store, the more they will buy.”

Monato reports that for cases and display fixtures for retail installation her firm specifies built-in fittings “almost exclusively with LEDs.” She also points out that she is “ready to make a leap onto the ceiling with LEDs” after



Photo courtesy Cooley Monato

The vast Mall of America in Minneapolis exemplifies the macro and micro challenges inherent in retail lighting.

learning of a new product that will provide the quantity of light needed to effectively reach the selling floor. Her firm’s current retail projects include four locations for Nike, Mall of America, Michael Kors, Giorgio Armani and Barneys New York.



Photo courtesy JICA

earlier this year: “All lighting is designed to highlight merchandise. The store was designed to comply with LEED for commercial interiors and IES recommendations. The results achieved are 25 percent below ASHRAE limits for LEED retail saving 50 percent on consumption.”

Meanwhile, Sleep Number’s prototype bedding

store in Oakbrook, IL, used task-based lighting to create architectural and environmental effects through “glowing surfaces.” Uplight, backlight and underlight are used in a store where shoppers try out beds on their backs looking at the ceiling. (The retailer categorizes 1,000 pressure points between the customer and the bed’s surface.)