

# VM+SD

VISUAL MERCHANDISING AND STORE DESIGN

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## THEMES TO MAKE SENSE

*Selling delight as well as the product*

BY W.S. MOORE III, CONTRIBUTOR

It's no surprise that contemporary retailers are placing new emphasis on the experiential nature of bricks-and-mortar stores. The reason is as simple as a point and click. As e-commerce consumes more and more of the retail pie, traditional retailers have to find new ways to draw shoppers into the store.

One way of getting shoppers to drop the mouse and pick up the car keys is to offer some kind of entertainment. Trite, true and often doomed to fail – but when it's done well, it's something to behold.

One place where it has consistently been done well is in the restaurant business. But restaurateurs are now discovering what traditional retailers have

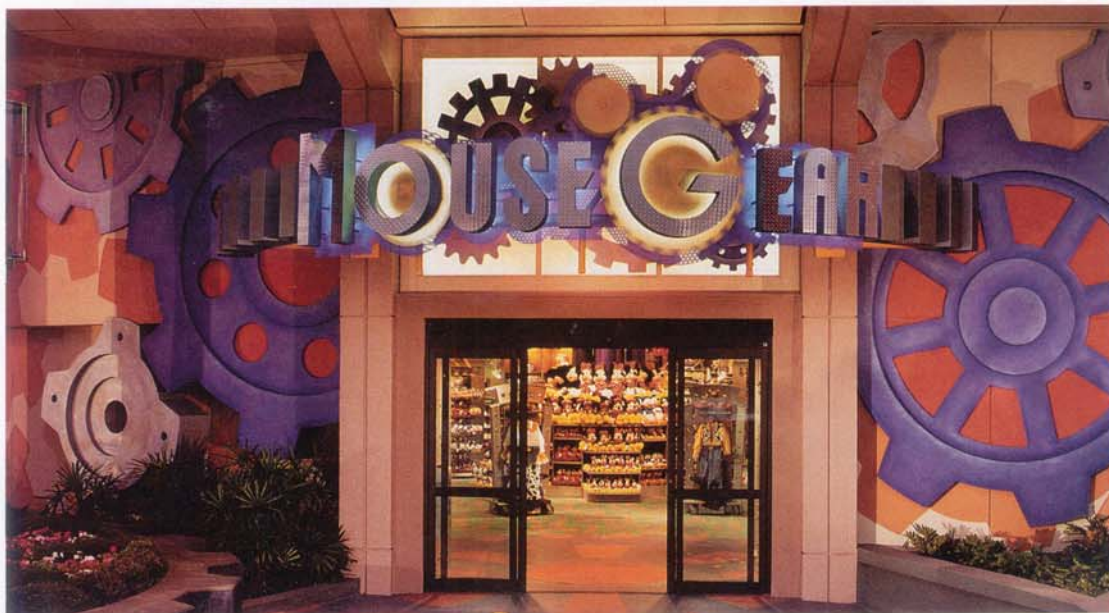
already learned: A high concept isn't enough. Planet Hollywood and several of its brethren are painful examples.

"Today's customers won't fall for glitz for its own sake," says Richard Lewis, international president of the Institute of Store Planners (ISP) and president of Los Angeles-based TSL Design. "The effort must be authentic." Or, as J'Amy Owens, president of Seattle's The Retail Group, says: "The age of seductive eye candy is over."

Driving the need for substance are retailers' tighter financial margins. Lewis says contemporary retailers are placing more emphasis on return on investment than before, a trend he believes will only

intensify. Some of that intensity will come from the heightened challenge of e-commerce, so Lewis anticipates that the successful themed retailer of the future may adapt to the Internet, using the store as a sort of stage set/display case that customers can visit to check out the goods, and later place online orders. The stage sets/display cases will include such entertainment components as animation, movement, color and sound.

But until that time comes, we're likely to see more and more stores reaching for their customers' imaginations as well as their wallets. Here are a few of the latest examples.



Mouse Gear, the 25,000-sq.-ft. retail outlet that recently opened at Disney World's Epcot, has the look and feel of a giant wind-up toy. Themed elements range from animated, gear-like entry signage (above) to a 35-ft. rotating magic wand and details like Mickey ear-shaped wingnuts on fixturing (opposite page).



**DESIGN:** Walt Disney Attractions, Lake Buena Vista, Fla. — Anthony Mancini, vp, retail store development; Johnnie Rush III, director, design and store planning; Tony D’Orazio, manager, merchandise presentation, creative; Jon Hoskinson, manager, merchandise presentation, operations; Dan Queri, manager, retail project services; Todd Taylor, manager, store planning; Osman Baig, senior store planner; Skip Harrington, retail project services manager. Walt Disney Imagineering, Glendale, Calif./Celebration, Fla./Lake Buena Vista, Fla. — Eric Jacobson, senior vp, creative; Mike Montague, project manager; Agnes David-Hoffman, art director

**SUPPLIERS:** Evans Forrc, Orlando (fixturing); Mohawk Commercial Carpet, Kennesaw, Ga. (carpet); Sun Works Plastics Inc., Clearwater, Fla. (fixture accessories); Look, New York, and Excell Store Fixtures, Etobicoke, Ont. (fixtures); Seven Continents, Toronto (fixtures, shelving, props); Creative Arts, Pinellas Park, Fla. (specialty fixtures, display windows); Westco Inc. (specialty fixtures); Crystalon Inc., City of Commerce, Calif. (hardware); IlluminArt, Ypsilanti, Mich. (lighting); Sparks Exhibits & Environment, Orlando (props); Walt Disney Imagineering, Lake Buena Vista, Fla. (signage)

## MOUSE GEAR

**EPCOT, LAKE BUENA VISTA, FLA.**

If you’ve been entertaining the world for decades, amusing shoppers is just another thing you do well. That shows at Mouse Gear, the new Disney store at Walt Disney World’s Epcot, Lake Buena Vista, Fla.

Designed by an in-house team, Mouse Gear has the look and feel of a giant wind-up toy, incorporating both a gear motif and the most famous round ears in the world.

Starting at the exterior, signage and features are animated, adding interest to the façade of the 25,450-square-foot store (the largest theme-park retail site in the world, according to Disney).

The store’s real show-stopper is inside: a 35-foot armature/magic wand rotating overhead along a gear shaft, seemingly directed by Mickey’s four-fingered glove. The wand moves in tempo with lighting changes and a themed, gear-clanking soundtrack. Ten-foot-high Disney characters with moving eyes and sound effects line the store’s perimeter, cheerfully clicking and whirring their way through the day. More than 470 linear feet of conveyors and catwalks support the factory fantasy.

But designers didn’t stop with the big picture. The theming permeates even the most minute of details, including gear-shaped exterior planters and Mickey ear-shaped decorative wingnuts on modular fixtures — all at a level of detail we’ve come to expect from the masters of retail-tainment.