

# A Sense+-ory Experience

PAVE exhibit at GlobalShop to provide immersive experience by Gail Deibler Finke

**G**lobalShop attendees will see an evolution in PAVE's 3D student design challenge this year. A way for design students to work with fabricators on a real project, the competition has introduced young talent to the industry since 2010. Now known as the PAVE Retail Sense+-ory<sup>3</sup> Design Project, the competition has been expanded exponentially, with four partner schools, four partner clients, four manufacturing partners, four complete spaces, and two new dimensions: scent and sound.

## More players, new ideas

This year at GlobalShop, a self-contained, 22-ft. by 16-ft. booth will give visitors a complete sensory experience. The glass-enclosed booth designed and built by SO Showcases is divided into four quadrants,

each a floor-to-ceiling creation by design students for a different retailer and built by a different manufacturing partner. Each also features custom sound by PC Music and a custom scent created to match the student work by Nose Knows Design.

"We're all visual, we all love to shop, we all love the experience," says Ken Stolls, president of New York-based Global Visual Group. "But no one on the show floor brings all the elements of a design together. The student project will be an environment—everything from soup to nuts."

For Stolls, who helped develop the project idea, new perspectives and new ideas are integral to the revamped student challenge. SO Showcases' designer in chief, Neal Claasen, wanted to bring something different to it when he thought of the booth, Stolls says.

Likewise, for his own firm's retail partner, Stolls suggested a new product whose inventor he knew personally—the iThigh. A woman's fashion/electronic device accessory, it could be a blank slate for student designers from LIM College to interpret. Long-time PAVE challenge participant Sephora and high-end jeweler Citizen Watch gave their partner schools an established brand look and feel to reinterpret. The fourth retail partner is another unexpected addition to a contest that typically features fashion-related products. Boating accessories retailer West Marine was brought on board by Robert Reeve Frackelton, president of Pico Rivera, Calif.-based Reeve Store Equipment.

West Marine CEO Dean Iwata treated the project as an opportunity to consider long-term concepts, so he asked students

*FIT and Direct Embed collaborated in the PAVE 3D Student Design Challenge to create luxury fixtures in an open-sell plan for Sephora.*



**Experience the results with your own senses at the PAVE Retail Sense+-ory<sup>3</sup> Design Project, booth M2 outside the exhibit floor next to registration.**

**QUAD 1**

brand: Sephora  
 manufacturer: Direct Embed  
 school: FIT

**QUAD 2**

brand: West Marine  
 manufacturer: Reeve Store Equipment Co.  
 school: FIDM

**QUAD 3**

brand: iThigh  
 manufacturer: Global Visual Group  
 school: LIM College

**QUAD 4**

brand: Citizen Watch  
 manufacturer: SO Showcases  
 school: Humber College

to create a new fixture for one of its oldest products—sailing rope. The product had been merchandised the same way for years, says Frackelton. “They looked at the competition as a chance to say, how could we do it differently? They’re looking at it like a car show where you have all these concept cars, very futuristic, and maybe you’re not going to roll them out next year, but you’ll see pieces of them here and there in years to come,” he explains.

**Exposure and education**

FIDM’s Cynthia Patino says the opportunity to work with West Marine was a great experience for her students, and space in the new booth gives them great exposure.

“For me, the most exciting thing about this new challenge was that it would be at GlobalShop,” she says. “It’s the premier show in our industry. We teach students skill sets. When we take them to GlobalShop, you see light bulbs go off when

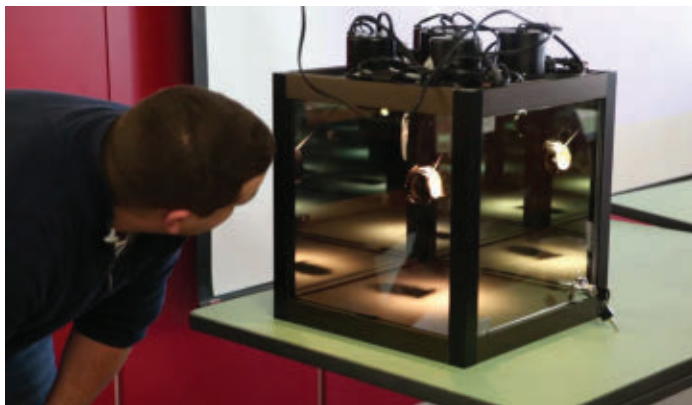
they go from booth to booth and see that the skill sets are applicable to so many careers in the industry. And now, they get a quarter of a booth! Instead of seeing others, people see them.”

Working with West Marine enabled students to apply the skills learned in class to a product and market most knew nothing about, Patino says. FIDM offered the challenge as an extra-classroom opportunity for six students nominated by their teachers and chosen after interviews and portfolio reviews. The students worked in teams of two to create a concept for a new rope wall as well as a second fixture and a store environment.

The students scheduled meetings with Frackelton and with the retailer, and visited two West Marine stores and several marinas. “They watched people with boats to find out what they look for and where they shop,” Patino says. Several introduced themselves and their project, doing their own consumer research. The three teams presented their designs in a video conference with West Marine, and the retailer and



SO Showcases and Humber College worked with Citizen Watches on the PAVE 3D Student Design Challenge.



*The group explores ways to create a wow factor. You'll have to visit the booth, M2, to see how it turned out.*

manufacturer together chose the design that best fit West Marine's objectives.

### Real clients, real needs

The draw for school partners is more than just the thrill of having winning designs fabricated. It's also the opportunity for students to experience what it's like to be professional designers, from initial meetings with clients to making design presentations.

"The most important benefit from my perspective is the opportunity for students to be involved with industry," says Zaiba Mian of Humber College, who had 11 students working on the competition as a project outside the classroom. "Working in collaboration with a real client—Citizen Watches, in our case—who has real parameters gives students incredible insight into the design process."

At Humber, five student teams competed for the final design, which was chosen by the retail partner and SO Showcase. Mian says the internal competition is important for students, who will soon deal with competing with other design or design/build manufacturing firms for jobs. The expanded scope of the competition, including the scent and sound additions, gives them a better idea of how real spaces function, she adds.

"The sound and scent components are new for our students, as they've never designed a sensory retail space before," she says. "They liked the challenge of integrating the senses and the added depth it brings to the project."

Sephora's requirement for luxury fixtures in an open-sell plan emphasizes

the need for the design to address both functionality and aesthetics, notes Kate Holekamp, senior director of store design project management for Sephora. "We fail if the fixtures don't work," she says. "If the customer picks up an eyeliner and can't find a mirror, she's going to put it down and go to another fixture—or another retailer."

**"That's what the industry gets: new people trained to work with very specific requirements."**

*—Kate Holekamp, Sephora*

### Advantages all around

Holekamp was impressed with the FIT students working with Sephora this year. "We had seasoned designers and really experienced fixture manufacturers working with them—people with 20 years of experience. And they were getting ideas from the students! That's exactly why we do this. That's what we get out of it, and that's what the industry gets: new people trained to work with very specific requirements."

All involved agree that the expanded project is also an expanded opportunity for the industry as a whole. Students gain valuable professional experience from the chance to create more in-depth designs after consulting with manufacturers and retailers. Retailers gain fresh perspectives

on their products and stores from students. And the booth at GlobalShop gives the world the chance to see what happens when manufacturers build the results.

"I'm passionate about supporting students, and not just because my father was a founder of PAVE," says Stolls. "I have lots of interns, and I have groups of students in here all the time. I can't hire them all, but I can help the whole industry by training them."

Patino says she's proud to be involved with PAVE, which helps train many future designers through its funding programs and challenges. The new booth will showcase the kind of student-manufacturer-retailer collaboration that has been going on at a smaller level for years, says Mian.

Frackelton agrees, saying the new format is a great way to welcome young talent to the industry. The design work FIDM students provided was on par with what his firm receives from professionals, he says.

### Future employees, partners, clients

"This is the future," Frackelton says, urging all who visit the booth to talk with the student designers—not just for the students' benefit, but also for their own. "They're going to be working with us. They're going to be working for us. And in some cases, we're going to be working for them!" 🌍



**Gail Deibler Finke** is a Cincinnati-based writer specializing in design topics.