

Photo: Takumi Ota



THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

Lighting's job in retail is complex. Refurbishments offer the opportunity to let it shine by enticing customers into the store or shopping mall, writes Francis Pearce.

Lighting is a vital aspect of real world retail design and a key element of any refurbishment regardless of scale, from refreshing the displays in one small shop to regenerating an entire town with a new retail quarter. Attracting customers, keeping them on-site and ensuring that they want to come back are important as understanding their wants, needs and habits.

Lighting affects all of these on the physical and psychological level, by highlighting goods and increasing their appeal but also by enabling customers to find what they want and to shop at a pace that suits them. In addition, brands need refreshing, interior designs and displays become tired or clichéd and layouts may require altering to improve the flow of customer traffic or to accommodate new product lines or concessions.

The need to save energy and expense

by using more efficient light sources was once a lesson that lighting designers and facilities managers had to drive home. With the dominance of LED lighting, in particular, and the outlawing of some other types of lamp, these are now a given: the focus has shifted to issues such as consistency and colour rendering, which enables shoppers to judge the real appearance of goods from fabrics to fruit.

Lighting consultant Mary Rushton-Beales of Lighting Design House has tackled refurbishments of every size and says that large or small they offer a second chance 'to change the lighting to what it should have been in the first place.' She

Main image: Inverse Lighting's scheme draws customers in at Siam Discovery in Bangkok.

adds that they are also an opportunity 'to install or prepare to use new technology.'

With retailers looking for ways to make the shopper's experience more enjoyable and worth a return visit, lighting increasingly has to encompass forms of video or screen-based 'retailtainment' that, introduced willy-nilly, can unbalance the lighting mix in a store, adding glare or distracting shoppers unhelpfully. If demand is changing, there is also supply-side pressure on retailers: lighting has become so reliable and efficient that the lighting industry has had to find new things for lighting to do, for example, monitoring purchasing habits and steering shoppers towards 'personalised' offers. But before the lighting can do that, it has to help draw customers into the space, in the first place.

The London and Hong Kong-based consultancy Inverse Lighting provided one >

Right: Gold-finished geometric 'kites', up-lit with spotlights, designed by Lighting Design International at Sunset Walk. Centre:MK

Below: PJC Light Studio seamlessly integrated lighting into the architectural language of the 16th-century Fondaco dei Tedeschi in Venice, home to high-end retailer DFS.

of the most stunning, recent examples of how this can be achieved with the renovation of a dark, narrow-fronted shopping centre in Bangkok, now known as Siam Discovery. Japanese architect Nendo opened up the frontage to create a light-filled, high-spec retail space. Inside, the circular atriums dotted throughout the building were turned into one big elongated canyon-like space nearly 60m long. Along one side of this new atrium there is a wall of some 200 frame-shaped boxes with video monitors, digital signage and displays: part artwork, part directory for the self-curated retail space that fills the majority of the interior.

The new frontage has a double skin of layered glazing incorporating lit frames designed by Inverse to draw customers into the centre. The arrangement of slim, rectangular frames, whose size and density varies, exactly matches that of the light boxes within. The combination gives the building depth and dynamism that has transformed it from a dingy block into an inviting emporium.

Closer to home, the refurbishment of Sunset Walk at Centre:MK in Milton Keynes, a grade-II listed building with daylight arcades and a mirrored façade dating from 1979, provides another example of a scheme that creates a destination. 'Having the right shops is only half the attraction: consumers want the overall experience to be one of visual stimulation and luxury,' says Lighting Design International, which paid special attention to the entrance atriums, emphasising their volume and giving the centre a strong and enticing visual presence when viewed from distance.

Gold-finished geometric 'kites', uplit with spotlights, lead the visitor to the lower ceilinged mall, where they are echoed in a total of 960 hexagonal, mirrored ceiling lights fashioned from stainless steel. Their auric finish evokes luxury but in addition to psychological comforts they provide practical benefits including high colour-rendering and luminous output, full dimmability and ease of installation and maintenance.



Photo: Andrew Beasley

Their six-sidedness highlights an aspect of lighting that is rarely commented on: the shape of fittings – usually oblong and flat or approximately spherical and pendant, if not a line of spotlights. Their hexagonal design means they are tessellated to give even, shadow-free light. But they also fit with the space. Mark Ridler, head of lighting at BDP, has remarked that one of the reasons that circular or doughnut-shaped fittings are so often used in refurbishments is that they look right in awkward shaped or linking spaces.

In addition to ensuring the right quality of lighting, professional lighting designers aim to respond to the architecture and the fabric of the site, a task made all the more complex with buildings of architectural or historic importance.

Situated next to the Rialto Bridge, the four-storey, 16th-century Fondaco dei Tedeschi in Venice, is one of the city's most historically significant and largest buildings. In 2009, the Benetton family commissioned OMA to restore it and transform it the 9,000 sq m building into a department store. It was subsequently leased by Hong Kong-based, high-end retailer DFS, which brought in Jamie Fobert Architects to design the interior spaces. As Phil Caton, founder of PJC Light Studio, remarks, 'the combination of two architects, the local preservation authority and effectively two clients made this a very politically sensitive

project to work on with many barriers to cross and approvals to gain.'

The brief was to seamlessly integrate the lighting into the architectural language to provide the correct balance and quality of light for a large, prestigious retail environment, plus the flexibility to respond to any changes in layout required by individual brands. Visual appearance of the lighting was to be discreet with a high quality of detailing, integrated concealed light details into the furniture design to enhance the visual interest of each space and bring maximum focus to the product displays. The eventual design included a pendant lighting solution spanning the whole third-floor Beauty Hall: the subtle integration of lighting into furniture and the development of a complex ceiling duct pattern to house the high level lighting without detracting from or disturbing the architecture.

Often, though, on smaller projects, budgets and ambitions are limited and changing the layout and wiring of lighting systems may not be possible. Lighting design is a job of the experts but on the simplest level, Rushton-Beales advises, but retailers can draw inspiration from the design of the freestanding displays used by concessions – especially perfume and cosmetics companies – which often make use of integrated, well-focused lighting, to 'get the look.' **RF**



Photo: Stuart Woods/SW Photography