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A shining moment in history

Bloomington's transforms a threatened Chicago landmark into its new Home Store

Vilma Barr, New York Editor

JUNE 01, 2003 -- It was a leap of urban faith that encouraged Bloomington's to see beyond the gritty façade of the shuttered Medinah Temple and visualize the architectural wonderland that is the new Chicago Home Store. Located at 600 N. Wabash Ave. at E. Ohio Street, the exotic Thousand-and-One-Nights-style brick and terracotta building with its 4,000-seat auditorium is capped by bright new onion domes. Previously, the building was owned by the Shriners, who staged humanitarian fundraising events with performances of the circus and rented for events such as graduations and concerts.

Built in 1913, the temple's use has significantly decreased in recent years despite its location in the midst of a booming area of new high-rise condominium buildings. When a local developer proposed to buy the building for \$22 million from the Shriners and erect a 400-room luxury hotel and a 40-story residential condominium tower, demolition loomed. Mayor Richard M. Daley stepped in and ordered the temple's demolition schedule aborted. He turned to developer Albert Friedman of Friedman Properties, who has a history of renovating several historic buildings in the city's River North neighborhood.

Friedman, in turn, proposed to Bloomington's parent company, Federated Department Stores Inc., Cincinnati, that the temple be turned into a home furnishings store. "We had been looking for a site for a home store for some time," says Jack Hruska, Bloomington's New York-based senior vice president of visual merchandising and store design. "Actually, we had been looking at a site that is kitty-cornered to the Medinah building. When the Medinah Temple itself became available, we went for it."

It was an ideal location for Bloomington's on at least three counts. New condo towers surround the four-level, 125,000-sq.-ft. store, providing a built-in market of new homeowners. The freestanding store has become its own high-visibility "brand," a one-of-a-kind destination that's a "must see" for tourists, conventioners and locals alike.

"Many people came up to me on opening night and said, 'I went to the circus here,' or 'I graduated here,'" Hruska reports. "We didn't let the city down. Today, we have to be much more community-minded," he continues. "We have to be in partnership with the communities where our stores are located in many ways and show, as we did here, that we are good neighbors." Hruska notes that a new kind of urban renewal is underway. "There is a revitalization of cities now occurring around the country."



Photo by: Jon Miller, Hedrich Blessing, Chicago

Collaborating with Hruska and the Bloomingdale's design team to transform a grimy urban eyesore into a dynamic retailing environment was Chicago-based Daniel P. Coffey & Associates Ltd., the architect for the exterior and interior renovation, and New York-based James Harb Architects, who designed the store interior.

Barbara Horton, president and CEO of New York-based Horton Lees Brogden Lighting Design, says her firm's illumination program responds to the modern shell that James Harb, principal of James Harb Architects, created within the original structure and works around some restrictions imposed by the existing architectural frame. "Jim brings us in early in the planning process so we can get an idea of the openness that he has in mind for the space, and the ceiling heights we will be encountering," Horton says.

Before the renovation began, the building was a sorry sight. "Its exterior was covered in soot," Dan Coffey, principal of Daniel P. Coffey & Associates, says. The building's beauty treatment began by cleaning the brown-gold, wire-cut brick facing and replacing damaged sections of the brown terracotta. New copper onion domes were constructed and lifted into place.

"We extended the original frames of the first floor windows downward to the sidewalk level to create large display windows," Coffey explains. Lighting and signage are integrated with the architectural details. Blue, red and gold glazed terracotta frames the main entrance with interlocking ornaments.

Inside, the former auditorium was stripped down to the load-bearing walls. Harb's interior program was based on a circular plan around an open atrium capped by the building's dome. "Essentially, we inserted a four-level interior into a shell, so that the store became a building within a building," Harb points out. The high degree of contrast between the fanciful exterior's deep rich brown materials and the bright, open, sleekly-modern interior produces eye-widening "Wows" from visitors.

Interior demolition required removal of all seating, two balconies, the organ's pipes and the original floor. "At one point, the inside was just mud, rock, bare walls and the dome," says Coffey. Two new columns using spread footings were added to the four existing reconstructed columns to help support the building's new incarnation as a 21st-century hub of fine products for residential living. The former auditorium's first floor was excavated nearly 5 ft. below to install the store's new lower selling level.

Bloomingdale's Home Store gives new literal meaning to the axiom that "shopping is theater." The ceiling dome, plaster coffers, stained glass windows and the intricate stage proscenium arch and smaller flanking organ prosceniums were preserved. Harb gave the dome and the ellipse-shaped atrium the leading roles in the dramatic tale of the building's adaptive re-use, and made them the stars of the space. The proscenium arch is now covered by a silvery synthetic curtain and washed with computerized theatrical lighting that creates a shimmering dramatic effect. In the center of the space is a glass elevator with an exposed structural frame rising from the lower level up into the dome. Crisscrossing escalators are tucked behind the big, open space.

"We wanted to remember and honor the original theater's design," affirms Hruska. "The design direction was determined by the unique setting." A color palette of white, off-white, silver and celery green emphasize both the surrounding architectural frame and the merchandise on display.

The ground level has three entrances leading into the marketplace atmosphere of the housewares department. Housewares, which communicates both decorative and fashion components, was the category of choice to introduce visitors to the store. "With its demonstration kitchen, it becomes an activity center that can quickly change focus," Hruska says. Black-and-white checkerboard flooring angles in the direction of the proscenium to draw customers inward.

Following a semi-circular plan on the lower level are the domestics department and the bath shop. The main aisle gently curves around the floor, focusing in the direction of the proscenium arch and the former stage. A more leisurely shopping pace is a byproduct of adapting the merchandise layout to the temple's unique dimensions, Hruska points out.

Tabletop accessories are on the second floor, with stained-glass windows as a stunning backdrop to the table settings. "The ceiling plane does not connect to the exterior wall," Harb says. "A slot is created that features the beauty of the restored stained-glass windows and the daylight patterns that are formed through its colored segments." Place settings, wall-mounted shelf units and freestanding displays are arranged to permit views of the windows that draw customers through the curving aisles to examine merchandise throughout the department.

The third-floor Furniture Gallery has an upbeat residential quality throughout. Customers can browse in room

settings that have an open and airy quality rather than a series of enclosed cubicles, a pattern followed by most home furnishings stores with traditional rectilinear footprints. Individual pieces take on a sculptural quality when seen against the store's open atrium, an effect that can be compared to seeing an exhibit at Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum in New York.

"There is no daylight entering the interior from the stained-glass windows on the ceiling dome," points out Doug Russell, HLB associate. "We created the illusion that the stained-glass windows were actually functional by backlighting them with fluorescent lamps to produce a soft sunlight effect. The three top floor domes—the central dome and two smaller flanking domes—have fluorescent fixtures within hidden coves surrounding the domes," Russell says. Fluorescent lamps with a 3000K temperature were used.

To dramatize the exposed elevator cab frame, HLB recessed six fixtures from Erco at the base of the structure and beamed them upward. The fixtures have glass baffles and are lit with 39-watt metal-halide lamps. For ease of maintenance and for prolonged lamp life, lamp specifications were limited to five different styles throughout the store.

For the second floor's tabletop displays, Horton and Russell raised the level of accent lighting to maximize the sparkling crystal and glistening china. The registry area was embellished with circular glass covering a few inches from the recessed fluorescent ceiling fixtures. "They give a special feeling to the area where customers sit down to discuss table-setting ideas with their companions and the Bloomingdale's sales associate," Russell says. The overhead fixtures also help to define the main circulation pathway, he adds.

The lighting for the second level employs a triple system. Ambient lighting is produced from fluorescent fixtures recessed atop the 10-ft.-high partition walls, bouncing light off the 16-ft.-high ceiling and back down onto the selling floor. There is a first level of accent lighting from pipe-mounted theatrical lights that are attached to the ceiling's structural beams. Within the furniture vignettes, accent light comes from low-voltage cable lights spanning the partition walls. A space that formerly held the auditorium's pipe organ is now occupied by the design studio.

Hruska gives credit to parent Federated Department Stores for its role in bringing the Medinah project to a successful conclusion. "These projects are difficult and complex, full of unexpected surprises," Hruska says. "Federated has great construction organization. It takes a big team to handle a job like the Medinah adaptive reuse. We all get satisfaction out of the drama of recreating a building like this."

PROJECT FILE

Bloomingdale's Home and Furniture Store

600 N. Wabash Ave. Chicago

IN-HOUSE DESIGN TEAM

Bloomingdale's New York

Jack Hruska, director, senior vice president, visual merchandising/store design

Shan DiNapoli, vice president, store design

Diane Koester, senior project manager, store design

Federated Department Stores Inc. Cincinnati

Robert Kapellas, vice president

Larry Calloway, director

Mike Pardee, project manager

Glen Winthrow, FDS site representative

Bill Stidham, construction coordinator

Ray Brunner, project coordinator (fixturing)

Interior architect & store design

James Harb Architects New York

James Harb, principal

Christine Wild, project manager

Hyung Chang, Kristin Mazzola, project team

Exterior and Base Building architect

Daniel P. Coffey & Associates Ltd. Chicago

Daniel P. Coffey, principal

Fred Romano, project manager

Jeff Pollnow, team leader

contractor

W. E. O'Neal Chicago

lighting design

Horton-Lees Brogden Lighting Design New York

Barbara Horton, senior principal

Doug Russell, associate

Structural ENGINEER

Tyik, Gustafson, Reckers, Wilson, Andrews LLC Chicago

MeCHANICAL ENGINEER

JEK Inc. Northbrook, Ill.

Ceiling Systems

USG Chicago

Armstrong Lancaster, Pa.

DISPLAY fixtures/Millwork

Goebel Fixture Co. Hutchinson, Minn.

Northwestern Van Nuys, Calif.

International Woodwork Corp. Colorado Springs, Colo.

Geron Torrance, Calif.

JP Metal Montreal

Pacific Coast Payallup, Wash.

Chelsea Furniture Hicksville, N.Y.

FABRICS

Creation Bauman (proscenium drapery) New York

Pollack & Associates New York

Kravet New York

flooring

Karastan Contract/Durkan Commercial (carpet) New York

Mannington Commercial (custom) New York

Buell (wood) Dallas

Innovative Marble & Tile Inc. (stone) Hauppauge, N.Y.

Nemo Tile (ceramic tile) New York

FURNITURE

Bernhardt Design New York

Gordon Intl. New York

HBF New York

Barrett Hill New York

LIGHTING

Sterner Lighting Systems Inc. Eden Prairie, Minn.

Indy Lighting Fishers, Ind.

Altman Lighting New York

Lightolier Fall River, Mass.

Lightron New Windsor, N.Y.

Lutron Coopersburg, Pa.

Bruck Lighting Costa Mesa, Calif.

Times Square Lighting Stony Point, N.Y.

METAL, GLASS & SPECIAL FINISHES

North American Metalcraft Toronto

Universal Toronto

Sun Architectural Systems Atlanta

Glass Solutions Inc. Elmhurst, Ill.

Auto Fina Chemicals Philadelphia

Twin City Creative Mirror Burnsville, Minn.

pAINT FINISHES

Benjamin Moore Montvale, N.J.

Pittsburgh Paints Pittsburgh

plastic Laminates

Formica Cincinnati

Pionite Auburn, Maine

WALLCOVERINGS

Innovations New York

Anya Larkin New York

Wolf Gordon New York

Signing/Graphics

Universal Tampa, Fla.

SOUND SYSTEMS

Thorburn Associates Inc. Castro Valley, Calif.

SPL Rolling Meadows, Ill.

Pioneer Long Beach, Calif.

Bose Framingham, Mass.

Information in the Project File is provided by the retailer and/or design firm.



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