

# INTEGRATING YOUR MUSEUM'S MISSION IN YOUR STORE DESIGN

BY JERRY GELSOMINO, FISP

Sharing the passion for a selected collection forms the mission for your museum. Whether to protect ideas or items from extinction or celebrate a unique assortment of items, that mission creates a definitive brand identity in a world full of competitive alternatives.

Supporting that mission through your store extends the museum's message and also ensures the museum's continued fiscal success. It is important to remember that only in your store can customers handle and purchase items that are reminiscent of the displays they viewed in the exhibit areas. Sitting in someone's collection curio, the purchased item will stir recollections of a day at the museum.

The environment of your store, as an extension of the museum's interior décor or theme, also plays an important role in reflecting the museum's mission. To illustrate that point, here are overviews of three museums, each with a different history, size and budget for integrating the mission into store design.

## I spy

The International Spy Museum, which opened in July 2002, has a clearly defined mission: "To educate the public about espionage in an engaging way and to provide a context that fosters understanding of its important role in and impact on current and historic events."

The museum carries through on its promise by creating true-to-life environ-

ments that track espionage throughout the ages. Or as described by the museum, this is "The Secret History of History"—the never fully told stories that helped shape events.

At the exit, the controlled lighting of

the exhibitions gives way to a flood of natural light that fills the museum store.

First impressions conjure up a storehouse of spy gadgets that rivals the lab of 007's Q. Design firm FRCH (based in Cincinnati, OH) was challenged to create a layout that encouraged browsing while giving ample exposure to the merchandise.



At Taliesin West (above) custom-built tables are used to display books on the life of Frank Lloyd Wright.

One of the International Spy Museum store's focal fixtures (right) is "Command Central" — a tower of suspended glass and cabling surrounding a plexi map of the world.



## The Wright way

Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin West at the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation in Scottsdale, AZ, can best be described by quoting the architect himself, "Our new desert camp belonged to the Arizona desert as though it had stood there during creation." Ensuring that Wright's design philosophy endures and is communicated to future generations is the mission of this facility.

In a reflection of Wright's concept of organic architecture and human values, the store has been designed to place the inhabitant in the center. Perimeter walls neatly display apparel, Wright-inspired art and art prints. Books and stained-glass windows are displayed on long, low tables that segment the space and yet seem nonintrusive. ➤

## The new zoo

San Diego's world famous zoo store has proven highly successful in the application of the zoo's mission and is a resounding financial success. The Zoo Store has accomplished what many museum stores desire from museum management: recognition that the store is a viable profit center as well as a marketing tool for the entire facility.

The Zoological Society of San Diego is a conservation, education and recreation organization dedicated to the reproduction, protection and exhibition of animals, plants and their habitats. The store's goal is to support that mission, selling merchandise that enhances the society's image and cultivates an abiding respect for nature.

The restored historic building offered constraints of numerous oversized columns. FRCH's Steve McGowan noted that the firm used these columns to create a labyrinth of spy rooms that segments product categories, creating a multi-path traffic pattern for visitors that is reminiscent of the layout on the museum floors.

Other attributes related to the museum's mission applied in the store include the use of brushed metal, glass and a cool finish material color palette, which mirrors the high tech theme of the spy tools on display in the exhibit areas.

Most of the graphics in the store consist of silk-screen on brushed metal panels with content that replicates the mysterious, hidden message theme evident throughout the museum. These signs are fun, and thankfully not too difficult for the customer to decipher.

Finally, the distinctive logo and corporate colors have been tastefully and frequently used as a signature, just to

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remind visitors where they are.

Retail content specialist Joan Stanley, of JG Stanley & Co., New York, was equally challenged to develop enticing products for purchase. "Visually, many of the items in this museum were small, black and hidden," says Stanley. However, her team developed content that mirrors many of the subjects covered in the exhibits, from disguise to communications devices, with a reasonable assortment of spy fashion and fun souvenirs included.



**A striking bamboo wall under a skylight canopy acts as a visual focus at the entrance to the San Diego Zoo store.**

Since Wright's time, store design standards have evolved tenfold. The original application of the museum's mission to store design, while still successful, may not be able maintain effectiveness to an ever-increasing customer base. Elisabeth Lynn, vice president of retail for Taliesin West, is challenged with determining how best to update and expand the space for that need.

What we can learn from Taliesin West, however, is that customers are willing to accept elementary methods of product display if such a display is in keeping with the philosophy of the museum.

With a natural scheme to the store's color and material selection and a consistent fixture system that provides infinite flexibility, the recent award-winning remodel of the two adjacent zoo stores has accomplished almost all of the retail team's goals.

Marge Sheldon, director of merchandising, shared specific design objectives that were set and how they were accomplished:

- **Enhance "Zooness," that is, bring the feel of the zoo into the store, incorporating real flora and fauna:** A graphic mural was incorporated onto the perimeter soffit that replicates the bamboo feature at the store's entrance.

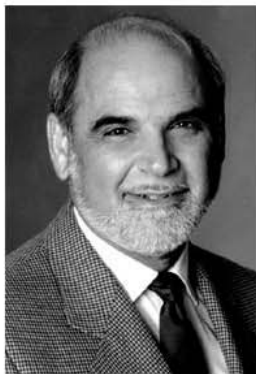
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- ▶ **Present an authentic appearance; avoid hi-tech and “edgy” design:** In-store entertainment and animal presentations occur on special occasions; fixtures selected were nondesigned, catalog type.
- ▶ **Be hospitable to large and diverse crowds; be accessible:** Plenty of room is allowed to maneuver between fixtures; merchandise categories are clearly segmented, promoting a wide assortment of products that are enticing to elders, teenagers, families, toddlers and adults; ramps for strollers and wheelchairs in split-level store.
- ▶ **Present a strong merchandise concept:** The store stocks the best selection of animal- and plant-themed merchandise (while maintaining a strong conservation

theme); special store sections and promotions for unique ethnic crafts.

With a typical peak season attendance of 20,000 per day, the zoo stores are the visitors' last experience of the museum. Therefore, the final goal of the facilities is to encourage them to visit again, and often.

These stores have the benefit of enlightened merchants at the helm who have learned how to attract and entice the customer to the museum's brand of merchandise, whether they are operating out of an ideal facility or not. ■



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