



Lighting The Way To Success

Learning how to use the proper lighting techniques can really make the merchandise in your store pop.

By Joseph Weishar

The Aesthetics Of Merchandise Presentation

The July, August and November issues of *Lawn & Garden Retailer* will feature a series of articles excerpted from *The Aesthetics Of Merchandise Presentation* written by Joseph Weishar. This 3-part series will cover general merchandising ideas, ideas for better lighting and a wealth of other information that will really open your eyes to how non-garden center retailers make their stores pop.

Joseph Weishar is the founder and president of New Visions Studios in New York City. For the past four decades, New Visions has created a niche for itself in retail design and training. Weishar believes the simple rules of consumer behavior are essential to achieve the best opportunity to sell. Weishar has been involved in many different retail operations from department stores to boutiques to garden centers.

Many years ago when I was working as a stage designer creating scenery and lighting for Broadway, film and television, I saw a production of *Hamlet* that changed my entire approach to the profession of commercial design. Richard Burton was Hamlet, Hume Cronyn was Polonius and a roster of incredible talents filled the other parts. The stage was a bare, gray series of platforms. The actors wore black leotards, and the lighting was magnificent. The play was a great success, and audiences filled the house until the run was over. I was convinced that with a great script, great actors and great lighting (without elaborate costly scenery) a production could still be successful.

It was a turning point in my career, and it was one of the deciding factors that made me consider adapting my schooling and talents to another area — customer behavior in a retail environment of my making. I wanted to equate the scenic, visual and lighting effects of the stage to a store: Both are platforms for presentation.

Top: Hicks Nurseries, Westbury, N.Y., opening evening of the Spring Show. The touch of the artist is apparent in laying out the pathways, plantings and sculpture both carved and created from natural materials. Although this is under a roof, the spotlights come to great advantage to romantically and dramatically light the scene. **Bottom:** English Gardens' (with locations throughout the Detroit area) endcap in the greenhouse. The beginning of all aisles is the key to what is behind on the tables, and it certainly expresses the presentation abilities of the staff. The quality of the arrangement reflects well on the intrinsic quality of the merchandise. The flood of daylight is most important to the ambience.

Lighting Design Technology

The technology of lighting design and equipment changes rapidly, so I would rather present

the theories and numbers that relate to levels of customer perception than list specific lamp numbers or colors. Some trends in lamp making and fixturing have been

popular and then discarded in favor of new developments. The energy cost for lighting is an increasing consideration. Heating and air conditioning equipment are important factors in setting levels of intensity and the color of the illumination itself.

There are companies and individuals whose prime business is lighting and others whose work centers on energy savings. Engineering firms are another resource. International electrical and lighting corporations will gladly give you free information to encourage you to use their products. However, I recommend that anyone interested in having current, efficient and cost-saving lighting done for a retail store contact design sources with retail business experience and compare their credentials. The best judgment of their work will be made when visiting sites they designed.

Lighting design for stores is an art. The main purpose of lighting in the store is to properly (aesthetically correct and acceptable for

specific expectations) illuminate all products and simultaneously highlight the featured items. Architectural and engineering thinking alone can miss the point of the retail purpose. This is not always the case but something to be aware of. From my experience, I have noted that some architects do a fine job of dramatizing the interior, and engineers do well to light the general space evenly. Both are necessary but not to the exclusion of directing the focus of the customer to the merchandise.

I don't want to see more light on the walls, ceiling or behind the valance than I do on the items at the front of the department. I care more about lighting merchandise than having overhead lamps in a neat pattern that creates dark alleys among fixtures. I don't want to see that the floor has spotlights focused on the marble rather than on the display near the aisle nor do I wish to pump in more wattage because the floor is a dark color and absorbs light rather than reflects it. ▀



This visual merchandising of pots, cache pots and cut flowers works well through intuition and good taste at Martin Viette Nurseries, East Norwich, N.Y. When you ask a customer if she likes to shop in a certain area or store, all you need to hear is, "I like it." If they like your work, they are said to have good taste. The combination of adventurous buying and setting the items on the floor for sale is the real art of presentation.

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COLOR — THE FIRST ISSUE OF CUSTOMER SIGHTING

"Every color goes with every other color." That is a quote from the internationally renowned colorist, painter and teacher, Josef Albers. No color can be independently judged without reference to another. It is either more intense (hue), more of a tint (lighter), more of a shade (darker) or more or less of any added color from the spectrum.

There are many scientific studies about the human physiology and the effects of color, as well as an enormous amount written on the psychology of color. Most are valid for our retail purposes, and some find changes in preference through geography, age and culture. But the real issue for retailers is current color selection for product and presentation. Retailers must resolve how color in pigment and light creates the ambiance proper to sell the merchandise in the store.

Color preference varies by age from decade to decade. We can even put specific reference down about chronological ages, calendar eras and sex by color. The era of the Sixties was defined by psychedelic colors and phosphorescence. Victoriana might take on a mauve cast. The Art Deco era was predominantly black, metallics and other colors as accents. Home and clothing are definable by color reference. Light tinted blue or pink are associated with male and female babies. In Western cultures, the color blue has been associated



with seniors (55 and over). Referring to life changes and menopause there was evidence that the color preference until 55 tended to be red but then changed to blue. However, since the early 1990s there is evidence that blue has also become a color to signify youth.

Many stores and manufacturers used the color in promotion and in stores to associate their product and surroundings with an age group of 25 and under. However, if you ask today what the most fashionable color is, especially in highly developed societies, the answer is black; this has been the case for the past decade.

The color of an area affects how merchandise is perceived. The task of color selection is both fun and difficult. Retailers have to continuously look for new merchandise to keep current while still maintaining consistency in basics. Whether preferences have changed from brown to black in shoes and leather, or whether home merchandise has taken on Victorian hues, retailers have to be ready to make area changes. The changes are not only in the hue, but also in the tonality—the range from dark to light. Radical colors can be featured for limited periods of time. However, black, white, grays, tints and shades of earth tones (or tertiary colors) will dominate the areas of merchandise at most stores.

— Joseph Weishar

This is not a philosophical treatise on lighting psychology. It is a practical approach to extract the best, most coordinated lighting system for the price point of the store and for the expense of installation and maintenance. Neatness and conformity are fine in general but should never override the necessity to be flexible during presentation changes.

The Art Of Lighting Design

In very specific terms, the store is a stage for merchandise. As such, it is lighting that makes the entire space come alive. The height and proportion of store space must be a consideration for the size of the instrument used. Today, high-end specialty shops use recessed, focusable lighting for general and ambient sources. Some stores use small lamps and fixtures. Showrooms with a ceiling height of 10 ft. or less may use these units effectively. Using them in a larger space presents a problem. These lamps put out a decent amount of light but are expensive and have a relatively short life. There is nothing wrong with larger fixtures that house larger lamps when they provide better light and are less expensive. The fixtures themselves are also a design element on a sales floor. And it still takes a combination of a merchant/designer/technician to achieve spatial visibility and theatrical excitement.

Lighting is absolutely an emotional factor. We respond to specific colors and intensity of light in culturally defined parameters. The brighter the intensity and the more general the overall light, the more we think of value and price. The softer and warmer the lighting, the more we start to add fashion and exclusivity into the mix. Levels of light intensity, colors of light and movement of light are creators of feelings and responses. The seduction of customers starts here.

Shelf Lighting

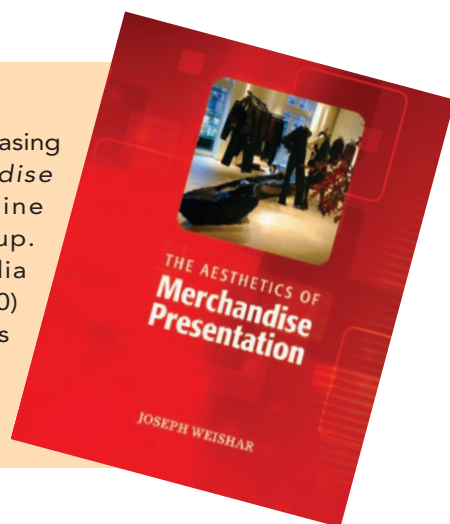
Essentially, there are two means of presenting merchandise: hanging or shelving. Hanging departments need flexibility both in inventory and in the ability to change the focus of spotlights. Shelf units are hardly ever moved, but spotlighting on end caps gives premium items more punch. I



This is the entry into the Martin Viette Nurseries, East Norwich, N.Y., annual area. The eye travels from point to point. There are no long aisles ending in a door to the office or the bathroom. There is a sensitivity to the floor layout and to the use of overhead hanging units to give coziness. The daylight streaming in from the roof area does not blind the vision since there are so many hanging plants that finish the 3D sculpture.

Book Purchasing

If you are interested in purchasing *The Aesthetics Of Merchandise Presentation*, visit ST Online Bookstore at www.stmediagroup.com/stbooks or call ST Media Group Customer Service at (800) 925-1110. The book is \$75 plus \$4 for shipping and handling (within the United States).



have seen many innovative ways to light merchandise on shelves to give the face of each item sufficient light. There are examples of vertical tube lighting on posts at regular intervals to light the shelf grouping. Although this may be efficient in terms of cost, the actual results show a splash of light at the ends of the shelves and a drop off of intensity at the center.

The important issue is to give light with equal intensity on each shelf. This can be accomplished in several ways: One is to put a lamp under the shelf edge at each level and keep the merchandise back from the edge. This allows the front to be lit and not the top of the item. This method has been refined to cut a trough on the top of the shelf to throw light up and down as well as act as a restraint to the placement of the items. Some supermarkets have already adopted this technique.

Sephora, a cosmetics/fragrance specialist, has gone one step further. The company uses a tube light placed 2-3 inches away from the shelf to light the items up and down. The tube is covered in black, except for laser-cut information applied to the tube, creating back-lit signage for every product. The lighting system makes sense for beauty products. With this method, more light is coming from the shelves and from sources below eye level to make the shopper feel as if there were footlights at the mirrors. This direction of lighting washes out the deep shadows, and the warm color enhances the healthy looking aspect of skin. It is not a bad idea for stores that sell beauty products to romance their customers. Whether you sell cut,

dried or potted greens, the entire visual ambience must be in a customer's value balance with their shopping perceptions.

The Dramatic Effect

Good lighting creates drama, and drama in presentation produces distinction and clarity (the goals of all presentation elements). Lighting forces us to focus by defining items with higher intensity or color change. The technical advances in lighting instruments, lamps and merchandise need change rapidly. Lighting has become a field of its own.

Lighting designers must now consider all of these advances and resolve the balance of intensity, color, heat and cost. Most design firms and stores either employ a lighting specialist on staff or hire a consulting specialist. The old idea of lighting theory was different: "Turn them on. Turn them off." It's not nearly that simple today. 🌿

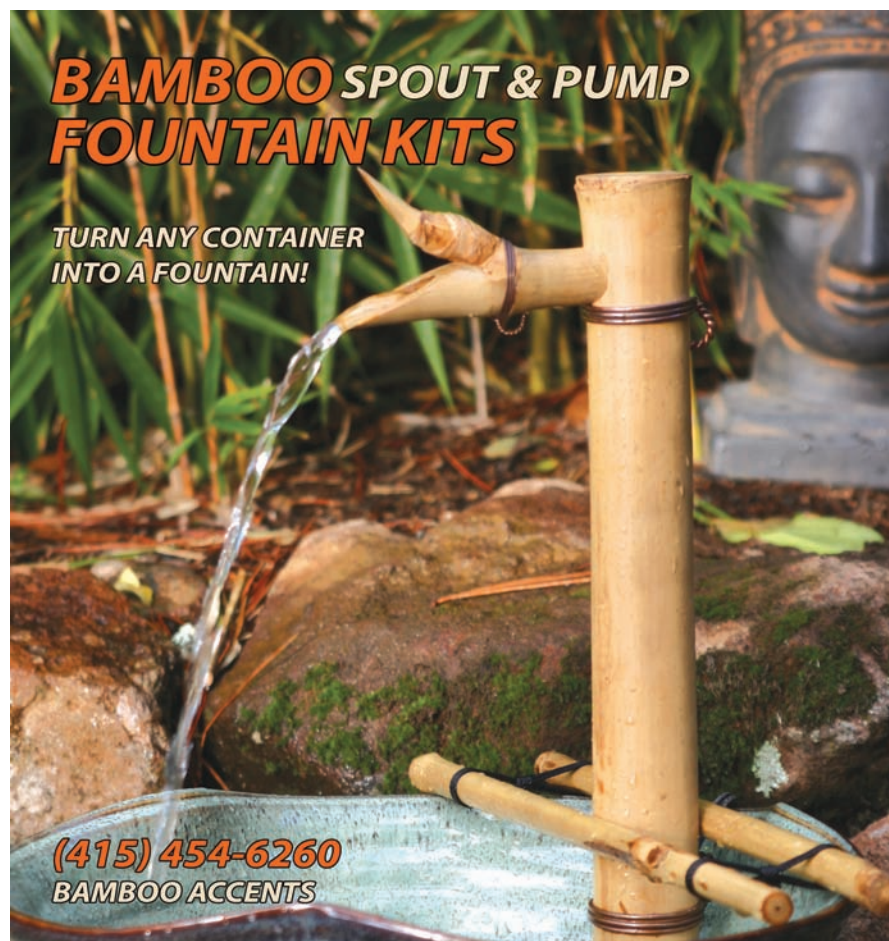
Joseph Weishar is the founder and president of New Visions Studios in New York City. He is a firm believer that successful stores have an intuitive aesthetic balance. No matter what the merchandise, seamless presentation is a reflection of the unity of all parts of the retail organization. He can be reached at newvisioninc@earthlink.net or (212) 686-7200.

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