



Creating New Mall Experiences

By Anshuman Bhargava

Retail is undergoing tremendous transformation. Many factors are impacting the way we shop and where we shop. Malls because of the convenience they offer have become our first preference. However, malls too are evolving to be in sync with changes in our lifestyle. So what would a mall in the future be? Why and what kind of innovations will we see in the coming times? How is mall design evolving?



Why change in the first place
Economy has been down since 2008 and dampened consumer spending. Costs have risen all round. So infrastructure now costs more. Shoppers prefer shopping online (More than 25 percent of shopping is done online these days). The mobile will be the next game changer for retail. The millennial generation is less interested in “stuff” and more interested in “experiences.” New materials are being developed and old materials are being used more innovatively. So how are mall developers and retailers responding to these challenges when it comes to mall design?

The impact
Smaller Stores
Retailers prefer smaller stores to lessen rentals and maintenance

charges. Hence they prefer to have smaller stores in select locations. Retailers compliment the smaller and less stores with an aggressive online selling strategy. According to analysts retail will only get smaller in the near future.

Multi-use Shopping Centers
As real estate gets more expensive and travel costs more, developers are building shopping centers that have a good mixture of places to eat, live, work, play – and of course shop. We see an increasing number of apartments and offices in the same building as malls. To attract customers, bars, live entertainment hotspots, “feederies” (or eateries and themed restaurants), gourmet restaurants – are being added to the shopping center mix to keep customers from straying.



More focus on the male shopper than before



The emergence of high-end malls

To make malls an integral part of the surroundings, developers are de-malling” – or adding outside entrances so as to avoid the traditional central courtyard concept. To avoid spending too much on new construction, retailers are creating new shops in old buildings.

Retrofitting of shops is becoming more common place. To enhance the sense of relation to place, the old structures with its natural textures are exposed.

The Emergence of Themed Malls

Themed malls are gaining popularity by the day. The concept is already well established abroad. The biggest advantage themed malls or specialty malls as they often called, provide, is more choice and variety of related goods or services under one roof. It is the place where you know what you want and you are almost sure to get it.

The idea is to bring focus and convenience to the attention deficit customer. India is yet to fully explore the themed mall concept, barring a few odd instances. Countries like China and US are well advanced in this mall format.

The Rise of High-End Malls

Affluent consumers have seen their incomes grow rather sharply since the recession and are benefiting from rebounds in the stock market and home prices, analysts say — while the rest of the population is still battling back. Hence the

wealthy have more discretionary cash to spend.

It’s led to a wide gap in performance between Class A malls, the ones that sell the most per square foot and tend toward luxury, vs. the others. Analysts call it the ‘wealth’ effect. Even high-end retailers are doing much better than the middle and lower end retailers.

So we see the Premium mall rise – with more emphasis on touch and feel and luxury.

Malls as Museums

Since people want to do more shopping online, from the convenience of their homes, malls have to be more than just simple shopping places. Concept of a mall is being redefined as more of a museum or a learning center or a school perhaps.

Heritage, skills development, amusement, entertainment are thought to be key differentiators as experiences different from online shopping. So malls will have more concept stores, lifestyle stores and experience centers than normal shops per se.

To pass on more data about the project, information kiosks, directories, story telling booths try to engage the shopper.

Personalisation and Customisation

Online shopping has made shopping very personalised and customised. Amazon.com is a great example of this. Not



The Future of the Shop front

- The shop front is one of the most important elements of a mall. With technology affecting everything, shop front design is also evolving and innovating to create interesting design elements.
- Shop fronts of the future will be what are termed as ‘technology enabled’ shop fronts – they allow you to buy merchandise even when the shop is closed – perhaps online from the shop’s websites.
- The window displays would be more interactive – some even remembering the preferences of the shoppers.
- Case in point: Passersby of a real estate office, explore property listings using touch-based kiosks that work through double-pane insulated windows even when the real estate office itself is closed for the day.
- Case Study – 2 : Actual full size movable and scalable images of the merchandise being displayed on the shop front glass for an apparel retailer.
- 3D Holographic greeters with built in QR codes being used at store entrances. The QR codes pass on coupons to shoppers that pass by the store – hence act as an concierge / curator.

So you have

- The mobile as a major driver to enable such personalisation.
- Mobile is linked to the wifi of the building / store – enabling retailers/ developers to track the movement patterns of the shopper. Services like Meridian and Internal Atlas use this data to build up analytics on the shopper and push coupons along their paths.
- It provides valuable data to the developer to track walk ins and optimise mall / store layout. So you get more value for your buck.
- Research shows that 80 percent of shoppers use their mobile device in mall / store to enhance their shopping experience and 39 percent use it while in-store to search for product reviews.
- Once the data is tracked, recorded and analyzed, deals / offers / new developments can be pushed onto the shoppers’ devices for future visits.
- So the mobile acts like an internal GPS to make the shopping experience more personalised and customised. Future devices like Google Glass also offer amazing opportunities to enhance the digital retail experience.



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only does it remember your personal preferences, amazon.com recommends other products that you may be interested in. So customers are treated as individuals rather than as part of a mass market. Hence more customer engagement and a fuller one on one experience.

Retailers and mall developers are trying to replicate this unique personal connection through their stores and buildings in general.

Innovation Galore

Besides the above major ongoing developments, other signification innovations that could affect mall design are: More focus on the male shopper than before. Key data reveals that more and more men are involved in buying for themselves than was the case before.

With malls growing in size, innovations are happening in shopping cart design as well. So you have motorized carts to foldable ones to self driven vehicles. Some retailers are experimenting with shop formats with either no personnel or robotic systems. However the idea of robots replacing sales persons is still far fetched for now.

ATMs are being innovated to provide more privacy and security to users. So you have ‘ lie detecting ATMs’. To make carrying shopping bags easier, innovations like PVC shopping grips or stainless steel knuckle holders – termed as ‘shopping helpers’ – are being seen in increasing numbers in malls abroad.

Organic forms and reflective surfaces are being used more and more as wall paneling materials to provide differentiation and focus elements. Colour is a major design element now days. People are bored of black and white colour schemes. Fluorescent, saturated colours are in use more and more. Designers and retailers are using colour psychology to build schemes that promote buying.

The Future Has Just Begun ...

The future of retail is exciting. As more and more innovations make the shopping experience more deeper, richer and personal, mall and retail design is in its infancy in a sense. The long road ahead promises a bright, exciting and soulful journey. ●



Sustainability

- As global natural resources decline, buildings / interiors are more environment conscious.
- So mall designs try to optimise water, natural light and heat.
- Waste management is another critical aspect.
- Mall common areas and outdoor courts try to incorporate more green elements into spaces -- trees, lawns, potted plants, water bodies etc.

About the Author:

Anshuman Bhargava is Director and Creative Head (Interiors) of The Blue Leaves Design Group.