

A frequent visitor to India over the past decade, I've noticed a marked growth in the traditional shopping malls. It's difficult to travel more than a few miles and not run into a shopping mall or arcade, in many parts of India. In my view there is nothing negative about the mallification of India. The concept of the shopping mall is a Western innovation in that they were a response to the exodus of the urban centre and rise of the suburban way of life. Shopping structures are also by no means unique as bazaars have been

success as measured by number of retailers and foot traffic will follow." In this phase the developer's bet is that the grandeur, location, and style of the mall coupled with the brand pull of the anchor tenant should be enough to rope in foot traffic and that in turn should allow enough sales volume for the retailers to make a decent return on investment. However, for long-term profitability and sustained returns, malls have to move to the second phase in their life-cycle where the retailers need to play a more active role in attracting shoppers. And this is where the right architecture and design of the stores is possibly the most important leg of the stool. The retailer in this phase needs to create an environment wherein the shopper comes to the mall not because of the mall, its

create an experience for the shoppers making them forgo shopping in the more convenient, and at times cheaper, virtual world.

Here's an example of the owners of a "green" spa and salon in New York City who believed their business was performing below expectations and determined that the spa's ambience needed improvement to increase foot traffic and sales. Happy to have a client that understands a business can be improved through good design, I visited the spa and salon as a paying customer. Yes, the ambience of the spa and salon was overdue for improvements, but the bigger issue was their belief that they were a "green" business which they were not and of course, the savvy New York spa-goer realised this.

Mallification of India

By Nadine Homann

India is experiencing the phenomenon of mallification, and is on its way to reinventing this iconic genre.

a tradition in India and Egypt for over five thousand years. In Europe, merchandising outside city walls began in the middle ages where traders set up established markets outside city walls to avoid the urban congestion. Today, the phenomenon we are seeing is how many iterations of the mall India can sustain.

Developer-Retailer Equilibrium

There is obvious tension between the developers of a mall and retailers who rent space in the mall, however, there is an equilibrium point with a win-win for both. To better understand that equilibrium point one needs to understand the life-cycle of the mall business. In my view, the business has many phases. In the first phase, which I believe most malls in India are in now, the developer develops a mall with as much a grandeur and style as the budget permits. The thesis is, "build it well, get an anchor tenant, and

location, style or the anchor tenant but because of that particular retailer in the mall. Now, the question is: how does the retailer do that?

Pointers for Retailers

A successful retailer is an honest retailer; one that listens to and adapts to the wants and needs of their clientele. The modern customer is savvy and intelligent enough to see through faulty sales tactics.

In addition to being honest to the product, the retailer has to ensure that the retail space reflects the psyche of the product and not the other way around. A good architect or designer designs a store around the product; any other way is a recipe for disaster. The world is ultra-competitive these days and it's only going to get tougher. A retail outlet not only has to compete with other retail outlets in the vicinity but also with the virtual shopping world. Consequently, it is aesthetically superior design that will

Following an honest discussion about what "green" design truly means, the owners realised that not only was the design of their spa and salon not "green," even their marketing efforts were out of sync. The design success of any space comes from being a true reflection and extension of the business model. Eventually, not only the design of the space but the entire business model was revamped. as a sustainable business; changing practices, habits, and commitments. The design was to then become an interpretation of the "new" business.

The new design sought to maximise natural light in the space, thus allowing the use of efficient light fixtures and reduction of power consumption by a sizable margin. The hair styling and spa station furniture was built using wood recycled from a local barn. This design element added visual warmth to the space and enhanced the serenity of the spa.



Not surprisingly, the turnaround has become a success story. Having worked with a variety of clients globally, the resultant moral to architecture and design story remains the same – Be honest and true to yourself and your products.

Malls in India

India has become outgoing and ambitious with its retail real estate space and by all accounts, very successful in finding its design voice. Malls are everywhere and have reenergised areas like Malad and Lower Parel. While malls took a long time to come to the country, they have become destinations and the centre of action for many families in most urban cities. Eventhough some Indians would still prefer trips to Singapore or Dubai to experience shopping under one roof, as the mystique of shopping abroad is an experience that is hard to replace, it is a trend that is reversing.

The quality of mall architecture and design in India is extremely impressive. Malls that I have visited in India are architecturally and design-wise as good if not better than most malls in the US and Europe. At the end of the day, a mall needs to be designed so as to make shopping a recreational activity. Mall designers should consider themselves successful only if their mall can draw out the recreational aspect of shopping and create an escape cocoon for a shopper. And I think many malls in India have achieved that. ●

About the author:

Nadine Homann is an associate and director of interior design at Meridian Design Associates, Architects, P.C., a leading architecture firm based in New York City, USA. She has previously worked for Skidmore, Owings and Merrill LLP (SOM) and Eisenman Architects, two of the world's largest architecture firms. Over the years, Homann has been part of large scale commercial and residential projects across the globe. Her clients include Turner Properties, Godiva Chocolates, Charles Schwab, Goldman Sachs, CNN Time Warner, Disney ABC, FOX News, UBS Warburg, World Wrestling Entertainment and the Plaza Hotel.

