

Contemporary Visual Merchandising



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CONTEMPORARY VISUAL MERCHANDISING

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P REFACE

The world of visual merchandising continues to provide excitement for today's retailers. With competition at an all-time high, the job of those responsible for visual presentation has taken on greater importance than ever before. The creative accomplishments of the professionals in the field contribute a great deal to the success of the company. While few will argue that the proper merchandise is key to any retailer's success, the manner in which it is featured on the selling floor, in display windows, and in interior arrangements gives it additional interest to motivate shoppers to become customers. With innovation and creativity at their command, visual merchandisers are able to transform the most pedestrian environments into exciting shopping arenas.

In the past, the emphasis of the display person, as visual merchandisers were referred to, was on window display. Today, the scope of activities in this field has been significantly expanded. Visual merchandisers no longer just trim windows, but are involved in store design and layout, fixture selection, lighting design, the direction the store's visual program will take, and the planning and execution of displays.

The second edition of *Contemporary Visual Merchandising* retains all of the important practices and procedures of the field that were in the first edition. There are however, many significant additions to this edition. They include:

- A wealth of step-by-step illustrations depicting exactly how displays are developed, beginning with the basic elements and concluding with the finished presentation.
- A detailed illustrative presentation on how to produce the alternative mannequins that are being used by many contemporary retailers.

- A new chapter on facilities design that features the latest innovations used by retail organizations.
- A new chapter on point of purchase displays.
- A list of important terms of the trade at the end of each chapter, to help the reader develop a visual merchandising vocabulary.
- All new photographs throughout the text.
- Numerous visual projects, complete with the forms necessary to complete them.

The chapter sequence of the first edition has been retained except for the inclusion of the two new chapters. All the materials have been updated to reflect what is happening in today's retail environments. Each chapter concludes with a listing of terms of the trade (a new feature), discussion questions, case problems, and exercises.

When all of the materials have been carefully digested and applied to the exercises presented, students will have a better understanding of the role played by the visual merchandiser in contemporary retail settings. Those who desire to enter the field of visual merchandising will have the tools necessary to get a foot in the door.

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Chapter 1

THE VISUAL MERCHANDISING CONCEPT IN A CONTEMPORARY ENVIRONMENT

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this chapter, the student should be able to:

1. Discuss the various aspects of visual merchandising that are important to creating and installing modern visual presentations.
2. Describe the different environments in which visual merchandisers operate and the different demands of each.
3. List the different categories in the visual merchandiser's budget.
4. Explain the importance of safety in the installation of visual presentations and the precautions necessary to avoid mishaps.
5. Describe the elements that contribute to the success of window and interior displays.
6. Contrast the emphasis placed on mannequin design today with that of years past.
7. Briefly discuss the lighting changes that have taken place in the industry.
8. Tell about the various types of careers available to someone pursuing entry into the field of visual merchandising.

INTRODUCTION

The world of visual merchandising as we know it today is one in which artistic talents play a major role in creating an atmosphere that motivates shoppers to become customers. Unlike the fine artist whose creativity is a statement of feelings, or yesterday's window trimmer

whose goal was to just to produce a pretty display, today's visual merchandiser must create displays with an eye on function, artistic expression, and the ultimate goal of increasing the store's profitability. The practice of concentrating a store's display budget on windows replete with costly props and backgrounds is the exception rather than the rule in today's retail environment. While some flagship stores such as Macy's Herald Square in New York City and Neiman Marcus in Dallas still feature exciting, costly displays, especially at times like Christmas, their branch stores are often in windowless structures or buildings that utilize a minimum of windows for display. In shopping malls, the major retail venues in the United States, the traditional windows have been replaced with wide-open entryways through which shoppers can view a large portion of the main selling floor. In these environments the store itself is the display, and it must be effectively enhanced to attract shoppers and stimulate sales.

With the emphasis on the whole store rather than on the windows that display personnel used to be responsible for, display people have become visual merchandisers, teams that specialize in the entire store's visual appearance. When one enters a Disney store, for example, the experience is unique. The total environment or theme concept immediately captivates shoppers, in particular children, who are quickly motivated to buy a variety of tempting items. With the animated figures encircling the sales arena, the giant screen that features Disney videos available for sale, and the mounds of stuffed animals heaped in an inviting fashion, a magical moment in shopping is achieved.

More and more retailers are using this concept, which was initiated by Banana Republic. In their original stores, merchandise emphasis was on safari-inspired clothing, and the interiors were designed to reflect that image. Until the company changed its image and merchandising philosophy, the stores were replete with netting, jeeps, palm trees, bamboo, and anything that gave the impression of a trip to the wild. Companies like Nike in their Niketowns, Warner Bros. in their retail outlets, and Hanna-Barbera subscribe to this thematic approach to visual presentation.

Another departure from traditional store design and merchandise presentation is a concept introduced by Ralph Lauren. In his retail shops, antique and reproduction fixtures transform the environment into a home-like setting. Merchandise is featured in armoires and on tables that one would find in elegantly designed residences. Enhanced by fine art and beautiful home accessories, the magic begins as the doors open into the stores. Shoppers are made to feel that they are in a comfortable home rather than in a conventional store.

Borrowing from the retailers, restaurants have successfully adopted the thematic approach. The first was the Hard Rock Cafe, followed by Motown, Jeckyl and Hyde, and Fashion Cafe, each creating an environment reminiscent of an exciting setting. The latest and perhaps most visually exciting of these eating establishments is the Rain Forest Cafe, with branches throughout the country. As customers enter, the lush vegetation immediately sets the mood to whet their appetites. In addi-



Figure 1-1. The Rain Forest Cafe, in an exciting visual setting, is a new breed of business that combines dining out and retail space. (Courtesy of Rain Forest Cafe.)

tion to the food they serve, most of these dining emporiums feature boutiques offering a host of products bearing their logos, a marketing technique that adds to the bottom line.

Stores like The Gap with its functional fixtures holding carefully folded merchandise according to color, Williams-Sonoma with its enticing cooking utensils displayed creatively, and Crate & Barrel with its brilliant settings that make shopping an adventure, each add their own touches to make them distinguishable from other stores.

At the department store level, the lavish windows of the downtown flagships still generate a great deal of excitement. Particularly at Christmastime, stores like Lord & Taylor and Saks Fifth Avenue in New York City and Neiman

Marcus in Dallas still impress critics and customers with their imaginative window displays. Lines of would-be customers congregate to view the extravaganzas set forth by the visual merchandisers. Each year the presentations seem more elaborate than those of the previous year.

While these approaches are exciting parts of today's visual environments, they do not encompass all of the design directions taken by the retail community. The challenge to visual merchandisers is to continue to develop ideas that will present the entire store in its best possible light every day, to make certain that their companies get a fair share of the consumer market.

Students about to enter the field of visual merchandising must develop the knowledge necessary to create and install presentations of merit. Throughout the text, concepts and theories as well as a host of step-by-step display techniques and innovative projects are carefully presented to assist the reader in learning how to develop ideas and tackle the everyday problems associated with visual presentation.

THE VISUAL MERCHANDISER'S WORLD

Visual merchandising, briefly defined, is the presentation of a store and its merchandise in ways that will attract the attention of potential customers and motivate them to make purchases. The role of the visual merchandiser in this effort is to carry out the merchandising concepts that have been formulated by management. These merchandising plans include what items are to be featured and in which locations they should be housed. The visual merchandiser, guided by these decisions and using all of his or her creative talents, sets out to present the best possible visual effects.

A position as visual merchandiser involves a combination of skills. Of course, it requires creativity, but it also necessitates a sense of order, dedication to design principles, and the discipline to follow directions, stay within budgets, and complete paperwork. It involves artistic talent and training and also knowledge of tools, lighting, construction of backgrounds and props, and a complete understanding of store design. Other important areas include the ability to create signs, both hand-lettered and computerized, write copy, and create and choose appropriate graphics. On any day, the demands of the job could involve many other abilities.

The specific duties depend on the arena in which the visual merchandiser works and at what level he or she is involved. Some positions require expertise in only one aspect of visual merchandising such as sign preparation or window installations, while others require a broader base so that all of the functions can be satisfactorily accomplished by one person. In major stores, visual merchandising roles tend to be specialized because there is often a large staff that carries out each project. When Macy's Herald Square, for example, plans and installs its famous annual Flower Show, scores of individuals with different talents undertake the task. On the other hand, a freelancer who creates backgrounds and props, installs the displays, and prepares copy must be a jack-of-all trades individual. Somewhere in between is the person who works for a small chain and, along with an assistant, is responsible for more than one aspect of visual merchandising.

Whatever the level of participation, each individual should understand the job to be performed and what his or her relationship is to the execution of the entire visual merchandising picture. Basically, there are three worlds in which people in the field are employed: department stores, specialty chains, and freelancing.

Department Stores

The major full-line department stores such as Macy's and the specialized types such as Saks Fifth Avenue employ in-house staffs to visually merchandise their premises. While key individuals operate from the company's flagship stores or corporate offices and are responsible for the direction of the visual merchandising philosophy and the creation of the concepts for the entire company, there are branch managers and



Figure 1-2. In department store flagships, in-house staffs design and install visual presentations. (Courtesy of Ellen Diamond.)

regional supervisors who carry out the company's plans. Since the role of visual merchandise director has become so complex, the position has been elevated in most stores to vice president and in some cases, senior vice president. In addition to being the central figure in planning window and interior presentations, the visual merchandise manager has assumed numerous other responsibilities such as store design, layout, fixture design and selection, signage direction, and lighting usage.

Other members of the visual merchandising team may specialize in one or more areas. They include signmaking, graphics, prop and background construction, and trimming. Generally, each member of the team has a narrow responsibility and contributes some particular expertise to the overall challenges conceived by the head of visual merchandising. A typical department store organization chart in which visual merchandising is a subdivision of the Promotional Division shows the various job titles involved. While this is a typical arrangement for large department stores, it should be understood that each company uses a structure that best suits its needs.

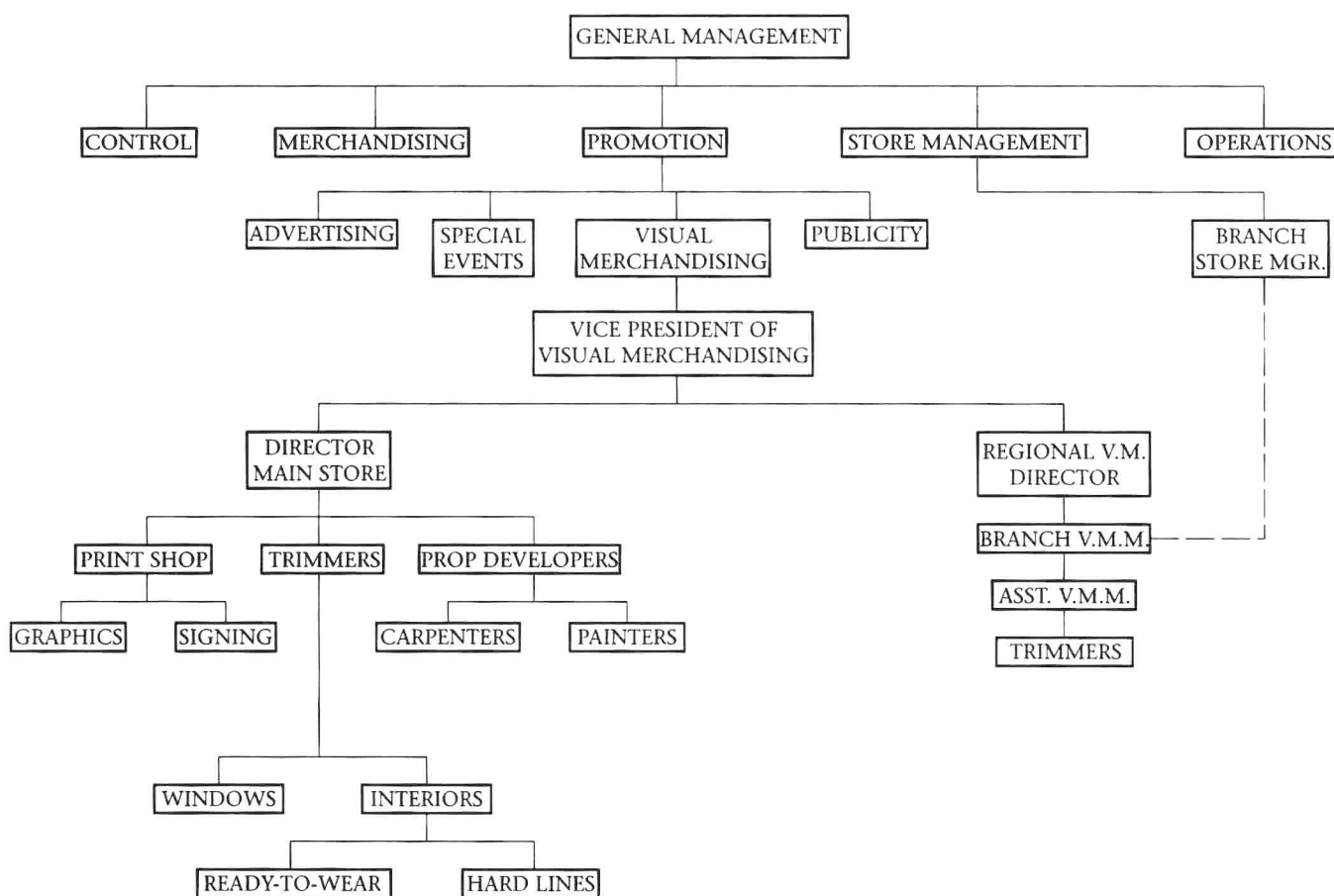


Figure 1-3. A typical department store organizational structure shows the visual merchandising department and its job titles.

Specialty Chains

Unlike the department store base of operations that generally locates management in the company's flagship store, the visual merchandising manager in chain organizations usually operates from central headquarters where all other top managers are based. The responsibility at this level is to conceive a visual concept with what is generally a small staff of designers who disseminate the ideas to those responsible for the individual stores' installations. The plans are carried out either by trimmers who travel within a particular region of the stores or by the individual store managers. In more and more companies, specific plans are set out in mock windows and interior settings in the company's headquarters and are photographed for copying by the stores. A more detailed presentation of this centralized approach appears in Chapter 2.

Freelancers

Individuals who operate their own visual merchandising businesses and provide their services to clients for a fee are called freelancers. Generally they concentrate on window presentations for independent retailers, and sometimes involve themselves in interior presentation if the store requests it.

CREATING EFFECTIVE VISUAL PRESENTATIONS

The visual merchandiser is largely concerned with the creative aspects of effective visual merchandising and the presentation of the store's merchandise in settings that will maximize sales.

The job involves the coordination of all the components of the windows and interiors, and the production of displays that will enhance the store's image and set it apart from the competition. To achieve this goal of creating an inviting environment for shoppers, a number of tasks must be performed, such as selecting the appropriate props and mannequins to enhance the merchandise. Once these ingredients have been determined, consideration must be given to sound principles of design, color conceptualization, lighting that both illuminates and creates dramatic effects, and signage that is pertinent to complete the story. The finished product should be one that attracts shoppers' attention and transforms them into customers.

TRENDS

As merchandise offerings change, so does the environment in which the goods are offered for sale. Walking through a store or past its win-

dows, one can get a feeling about the company's image and direction. A quick look also immediately reveals whether or not the company's approach is fresh. In today's competitive marketplace, tired, shopworn mannequins, lighting that merely illuminates with no dramatic effects, fixtures that signal a time gone by, and a generally outdated appearance simply won't do. These are telltale signs that the store's efforts are stale.

There are many approaches used by visual merchandisers today to transform the selling floor and windows from ordinary to exciting. A visit to the vendors in the trade or to trade expositions will give a retailer sufficient ideas to make minor and major miracles. Through careful examination of trade periodicals such as *Visual Merchandising & Store Design*, the visual merchandiser can keep abreast of industry directions in store interiors, mannequin usage, lighting, and other areas. The latest trends, complete with pictures, are highlighted in these publications.

Some of the trends in several areas of visual merchandising are presented briefly here. More detailed explorations of these trends are presented throughout the remainder of the text.

Store Design

There is no longer a typical store design. Merchants employ the services of architects and designers who, along with visual merchandisers, create environments that are both unique and functional. The space that was once allocated to store windows has been minimized and replaced with more selling floor space. In place of the traditional windows, large panes of glass are used to allow shoppers to see a large portion of the store. The interiors range from natural settings using stone and hand-hewn woods to elegant environments with atriums, majestic staircases, marble flooring, and other touches of grandeur. Many of the major department stores are reducing the appearance of vast selling floors with the construction of individual shops or boutiques to house their special designer collections. This approach gives the customer the feeling of shopping in smaller stores rather than the cold feeling of the large department store.

Food stores are abandoning the sterile looks long associated with them in favor of surroundings that feature espresso and juice bars, preparation areas that allow shoppers to see how the products are prepared, and a host of kiosk fixtures scattered throughout the store.



Figure 1-4. This mini train station setting with boxcar fixtures builds on Osh Kosh B'Gosh's origin as a maker of overalls for railroad workers. (Courtesy of FRCH Design Worldwide.)



Figure 1-5. Stylized mannequins are being used in many fashion forward environments. (Courtesy of Ellen Diamond.)

Mannequins

While traditional mannequins are still featured by many retailers, other types have been chosen to replace them in many stores. Wire mannequins, soft sculptured types, stylized forms, and motorized models are just a few. With the cost of traditional mannequins increasing in price, many merchants have opted for forms that represent mannequins and are created by visual merchandisers. The creation of these representational mannequins is fully explored in Chapter 4, including step-by-step instructions on how to build them.

Props and Materials

The list of materials and props used by today's visual merchandisers seems to be endless. Although conventional store-bought props are available at various resource centers, more and more retailers are making use of things found in nature, such as tree branches, rocks, and sand; and found objects once reserved for the junk pile, such as old chairs, worn picture frames, and rusty farm tools. With fresh coats of paint and new finishes, they can be used dramatically in displays. Antiques and antique reproductions are also being used extensively, a trend started by Ralph Lauren.



Figure 1-6. Tree branches create a visually appealing setting inexpensively. (Courtesy of Lord & Taylor.)

Of course, at Christmastime, animated displays and glittery props are still of paramount importance. Shoppers line up along the major department store windows to enjoy the creative offerings of the visual merchandisers.

Lighting

Although fluorescents are still used by retailers like supermarkets and warehouse clubs for general illumination, this form of lighting is no longer in great prominence in most retail stores. Today, halogen and quartz lighting and high-intensity discharge lamps are the products of choice. They not only serve the functional needs of illumination, but offer the user ways in which to achieve dramatic effects.

A variety of cans or holders are being used to house these lightbulbs, supplying a variety of looks to augment the numerous types of store fixtures.

Graphics and Signage

Although traditional two-dimensional signs are still used abundantly, signage and graphics have taken on new looks. Airbrushed murals celebrating local landmarks, multilevel murals featuring a variety of montages, animated cartoon characters that move throughout the signage, backlit transparencies, and huge photographic blowups are just a few of the exciting approaches now used in retail environments.

The use of electronics continues to pervade the retailers' premises. Fashion designer Norma Kamali began featuring each season's collections on numerous television screens in her New York City store windows. Today, the trend continues with major retailers all over the country, such as Carson Pirie Scott, Dayton-Hudson, Bloomingdale's, and Macy's, using television monitors throughout their stores to show vendor collections.

In addition to in-store video, other electronic formats are used by retailers to capture shoppers' attention. One is *Voila!*, a system by Advanced Interactive Video, Inc. of Columbus, Ohio, which is an interactive directory for use in shopping malls. The system highlights store sales and promotions and gives previews of upcoming events. It also automatically dispenses individual retailer coupons.

Instant Imagery by R.D. Button Associates, Inc. of Randolph, New Jersey is a computerized system that enables customers to



Figure 1-7. Television monitors in stores bring live action to the shopping environment. (Courtesy of FRCH Design Worldwide.)