

MAKING FUN FUNCTIONAL: TRANSLATING ENTERTAINING DESIGN INTO EFFECTIVE FIXTURING

By Jo Rossman

For M&M's World's second store in Orlando, Fla., Columbus, Ohio-based design firm Chute Gerdeman translated the M&M's brand into an entertaining retail space. Because the store design needed built-in flexibility, Chute Gerdeman envisioned a wall-and-floor-fixture system that would allow for seasonal merchandise changes and brand-evolving updates.

The design team turned to B&N Industries, a Burlingame, Calif., fixture company. Chute Gerdeman and B&N spent four to five months developing the fixture concepts to produce prototypes. "We worked closely with the Chute Gerdeman team to develop fixtures that executed their design intent and provided the functionality required for the store," says Kathleen Carlson, responsible for B&N's business development.

The design called for a combination of stock elements and customized fixtures based on B&N's existing Sorbetti fixture system. Says Brian Shafley, president of Chute Gerdeman, "The system was right for the iconic, modern look we were creating, and its minimal profile allowed us to put the colorful merchandise first visually. Also, the system's available display accessories worked well with the diverse merchandise assortment we needed to present in this store."

The Chute Gerdeman team designed new custom elements such as slatwall brackets with a detail inspired by the shape of the "lentils"—insider terminology for the M&M's chocolate candies. The brackets can be used interchangeably as faceouts or as shelf or hang-rail brackets. "We used the same system on the



Chute Gerdeman designers worked for several months with B&N Industries developing fixture concepts and prototypes before coming up with these innovative wall-and-floor-fixtures for the M&M's World store in Orlando. The designs incorporate a combination of custom and stock elements.

perimeter and the floor and were able to swap shelves, brackets, and other accessories as needed," Shafley says.

Stock elements were used to full advantage. For instance, M&M's printed graphics were inserted into the clear Sorbetti Sliders, which have an elliptical shape that complements the brand's iconic lentil shape. "While the slider shape is not a custom feature developed for this project, it really contributed to the branding of the fixtures for M&M's," Carlson says.

A new floor fixture developed for the Sorbetti system includes several versions of a custom, rolling base that can support up to three Sorbetti uprights. The base is designed to mimic the candies, both in shape and

color, with a rich, chocolate-like woodgrain. For the curved base, B&N partnered with another NASFM member company, an associate member that specializes in making components. The curved wooden bases were constructed of membrane-pressed woodgrain laminate over an MDF core.

Around the store's perimeter, slatwall panels are supported between Sorbetti uprights, tied back to the wall for stability. Where walls were straight, B&N's standard hardware was used. Curved walls created engineering challenges, and special hardware was developed to allow the panels to follow the wall curvature.

Another challenge was the weight of the merchandise

Building Functional Fun

B&N Industries helped Chute Gerdeman bring this entertaining retail space to life by:

- Meeting short lead times by adapting stock fixture systems.
- Working with the design firm to create new custom elements.
- Making fixture accessories and elements "swappable" between floor and wall fixture systems.
- Outsourcing components for complementary expertise.
- Engineering fixtures to hold heavy merchandise loads.

that the fixtures needed to support. While the chocolate candies can be heavy en masse, the bigger challenge, Carlson explains, was supporting the weight of the glassware and other M&M collectible items. "Floor fixture stability and strength were enhanced by the use of Sorbetti Spanning shelf toppers across the length of the fixtures and ensuring the Sorbetti uprights were securely fastened to the bases," she says. "Merchandising decisions also varied depending on the weight load. Very heavy merchandise was supported by shelves hung off the Sorbetti poles rather than the slatwall, as the aluminum extrusions are stronger than slatwall panels."

After the prototype phase, to meet the three- to six-week delivery window for each fixture piece, B&N simultaneously manufactured all confirmed fixture elements while fine-tuning the design of remaining pieces. Floor fixtures were shipped assembled and blanket-wrapped. ■

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