

GREENING THE RETAIL LANDSCAPE

Responding to Retailers' Calls for Environmentally Friendly Stores

by Jo Rossman

Green is the new black. Everyone wants to wear it. When the environmental movement is so pervasive that even the Oscars have gone green and the concept is being touted to the public by a Brad Pitt-narrated TV series and an Oscar-winning Al Gore film, it is beginning to be felt in the retail environments industry.

"About 90 percent of our clients are asking for green or sustainable materials," says Bob Welty, director of integrated prototype solutions for WD Partners, a design firm in Dublin, Ohio. Indeed, 80 percent of designer members surveyed by NASFM earlier this year had received requests from retailers for green designs, and 90 percent found retailer interest increasing.

Even so, Sandie Pope, associate principal at Seattle-based Callison design firm, says retailers have been slower than other building industries to embrace the concept. "For many retailers, the decision is driven by budget. That is changing as costs are coming down for building materials, HVAC systems, and recycled and reclaimed products," she says.

When NASFM recently surveyed member design firms, all respondents said the retailer interest in green involved general attempts at environmental sensitivity and/or social responsibility, and 60 percent said the interest also involved a desire for LEED certification (See sidebar: Getting Staff Up to Speed on Green.) Driving retailer interest in green issues, according to respondents, are:

- Corporate philosophy—80 percent
- The ability to market goodwill to consumers—70 percent
- Savings on energy and other costs—70 percent
- Factors such as a moral imperative, branding, and customer demand

About 50 retail projects, including mixed-use projects with a retail component, have been LEED-certified. Sixty percent of designer members surveyed had been involved in green retail interior projects, and another 20 percent in green retail projects of some type, though not necessarily interiors. This year for the first time, NASFM's Retail Design Award winners included a LEED project. Stratus Vineyards in Niagara-on-the-Lake near Toronto was certified LEED Canada Silver by the Canada Green Building Council.

But getting retailers to see the green light isn't always easy. Says President Terry Carpenter of Edwards, Colo.-based design firm Atlantis, "We try to incorporate green building philosophy and products in most of our projects. However, we still meet with resistance

from retailers/owners/operators if this means a higher initial cost for the project. Green practices have been most successful in situations where they are required or encouraged/incentivized."

IMPLICATIONS FOR FIXTURE, DISPLAY, AND MATERIALS VENDORS

Boston-based Bergmeyer Associates recently completed two L.L. Bean stores—in Burlington, Mass., and Central Valley, Pa.—that received LEED certification.

"To date, we have not looked to the fixturing, displays, or visual presentation products to help a project be considered for LEED certification, but when we create a green interior, we look for the materials used in these products to be consistent with the look and feel of the store. For instance, at L.L. Bean, all wood in the fixtures is specified to be reclaimed/resawn lumber," says Senior Principal Joseph P. Nevin Jr.

Bergmeyer's search for vendors for those wood fixtures suggests that fixture firms that haven't made a serious commitment to green products may be at a disadvantage for

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This retail store for a sustainable winery, Stratus Vineyards (above) in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, earned LEED Canada Silver for its use of environmentally sound materials and other design elements. Photo by A-Frame Inc., Toronto. Seattle-based Utility Inc. created this green store for Clarks shoe retailer (top right). Madix's (right) patented Lumishelf™ features LED-lit acrylic shelving.

getting such business. Explains Nevin, when the millwork contract for these stores was put out to bid, a number of large, well-established fixture manufacturers responded, but plant visits revealed that the portion of their plants that would handle this type of work—the hand shops—were small. The contract was awarded to a small firm whose entire shop is dedicated to handling such work—a larger production capacity by comparison.

Joseph Pettipas, vice president of HOK Canada, a Toronto firm that has been honored for its 15-year commitment to sustainable design, notes that designers developing specifications for a green project consider four areas in the evaluation process:

- the products' green qualities, such as recycled content, rapidly renewable materials such as bamboo, low-emitting materials such as low-VOC finishes, and salvaged materials such as reclaimed barn wood;
- the origin of the product and its components, such as sustainable forests and the local region (ideally, manufactured within a 500-mile radius as well as extracted, harvested, or recovered within 500 miles);
- the installation process for the products; and
- the reverse logistics—what happens to the products when they're removed at the end of their useful life.

For millwork, for instance, Pettipas might prefer wheatboard over plywood, and for surfaces, he might use less plastic

laminates due to the adhesives used in their manufacture, he says. "We consider shipping costs and the mode of transportation. I won't specify from far away typically; for one thing, it's harder to regulate and measure a product coming from a Third World country," he says.

Shipping fixtures blanket-wrapped instead of in cardboard is a plus, adds Callison's Pope. And fabricators with multiple plants may be able to ship to stores in each region from a regional plant, she says.

Designers responding to NASFM's survey cite the following elements among what they'd seek in materials, fixtures, and visual presentation products for a green retail interior project:

- Rapidly renewable resources

- such as bamboo and cork
- Reusable/reconfigurable materials
- Recyclable materials and products
- Ability of fixtures to break down easily at the end of useful life
- Reclaimed lumber and other materials
- Repurposed materials
- A high percentage of recycled content
- Energy savings and life cycle costing
- Domestic sourcing of fixtures
- Glue and veneers that are environmentally conscious
- Carpet with green secondary backings
- Glass with UV protection
- Low-VOC paints and finishes
- FSC-certified and/or formaldehyde-free

blocking/backing

- High-quality, innovative materials that promote the green aspect while bringing something new to the project

And qualities such as consistency with the look and feel of the store, timeless aesthetic, multi-functionality, simplicity, durability, light weight, authenticity, and interesting textures and colors at reasonable prices.

Designers say they also consider the fabrication processes, but for this, they rely upon information from vendors. "If manufacturers can help us understand how things are made in a more benign way or will last longer, we can make a business case for using that product," Pettipas says.

In meeting the demand for green items, fixture and display suppliers should become familiar with the rating systems and learn to market their products accordingly, adds Mark Peternell, development project manager of real estate firm Forest City

Commercial Group and a member of the LEED Retail Committee. "It is helpful for the project trying to get certified if the manufacturers list on the cut sheet how that material would contribute to LEED credits," he says.

One company marketing in this manner is Lancaster, Pa.-based ECOsurfaces Commercial Flooring. An active member of the U.S. Green Building Council, ECOsurfaces offers an entire booklet, downloadable from its web site, detailing the environmental benefits of the company's flooring products, ways they can contribute to specific LEED points, and strategies for achieving LEED objectives.

MEETING DEMAND WITH GREEN PRODUCTS

NASFM members who provide fixture and visual presentation products are feeling the demand. Nearly two-thirds of those surveyed have received requests during the past year

for environmentally friendly products. Retailers and designers have asked for green floor fixtures, cashwraps, perimeter fixturing, P-O-P, hangers, adhesives, substrates, countertops, building materials, finishes, packaging, core MDF, and particleboard. Specific requests have included:

- Poster holders extruded in recyclable materials, and ideally made from post-secondary waste
- PVC-free edgbanding and bumper systems
- Biodegradable coatings on metal and wood laminates
- FSC-certified lumber
- Formaldehyde-free panels and finishes
- Powdercoated versus plated finishes
- Reduction of VOCs in contact spray glues for laminates
- Substitution of stock components for environmentally friendly ones
- Aluminum, packaging, and other materials with recycled content

- Elimination of wood pallets
- Reduction of packing materials

Some of those demands are already being met. More than a third of fixture and display providers surveyed market stock or semistock items for store environments as being environmentally friendly or sustainable, such as:

- Rose Displays' EcoGotcha signage holder
- International Hanger's bamboo hangers
- Our Country Home's antiques for use as display tables
- Boston Retail's ecoRigid PVC-free bumpers, bases, ends, and corners, and ecoFlex 85 percent recycled bumpers and 100 percent recycled bases
- McCue Corp.'s CartGuard Spectra™ wall-and-fixture-mounted bumper systems made from 100 percent post-industrial waste and 100 percent recyclable through McCue
- Madix Store Fixtures' Environmental Back Panels made

Deciphering the Green Lingo

What is LEED?

If you're confused by "green" terminology, you're not alone. Even some designers have said they'd like to see LEED-certified materials. There's no such thing. Only projects can be LEED-certified, and only people can be LEED-accredited.

The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System™ is a nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction, and operation of high-performance green buildings developed by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC). LEED addresses a variety of buildings and building project types through individualized rating systems. Each system identifies criteria for credit points in six areas:

- sustainable site development
- water efficiency
- energy and atmosphere
- materials and resources
- indoor environmental quality
- innovation and design process

The number of points a project earns determines the level of certification the building will be awarded, if any. There are four progressive levels of certification:

Certified, Silver, Gold, and Platinum.

The current system in use for retail projects is LEED Retail for New Construction. The program has been piloted for three years. Mark Peternell, development project manager of real estate firm Forest City Commercial Group, was involved in the development of the system. "We tried to make the criteria for this rating system adaptable to different types of retail," he says.

While no LEED system certifies materials or fixtures, LEED recognizes certifications indicating the sustainable benefits of materials and products (*for a list of certifications that may be available for materials and products, check the NASFM web site*). "It's not a prescriptive menu as in one point for a certain type of cabinetry, but it will influence credit in a number of areas. LEED looks at recycled content in all materials used in a project overall, for instance. A project gets an overall average for all materials," Peternell explains.

In addition to the new construction system, a new rating system under development is LEED for Retail for Commercial Interiors, which has just begun pilot testing. "This program will be useful

for the retailer whose scope of work is limited to tenant improvements, therefore not holding the retailer directly responsible for scope that the developer is responsible for. The system will only rate the tenant improvement scope of work. It will have more emphasis on FF&E, finishes, and so forth., and will relate more directly to fixtures," Peternell says.

Both programs should be ready for public use by the end of 2007, according to the USGBC.

Designers agree that LEED certification is not the only goal of green retail projects. "Unless there is marketing value in LEED certification, most retailers wouldn't do it. There's an expense to the process of getting certified such as documentation expenses," says Joseph Pettipas of HOK Canada. "But by doing something green in even a non-LEED project, retailers are spreading the message."

A retail project need not necessarily achieve LEED certification to achieve a green consumer perception, concurs Sandie Pope of Callison. "You can take the sustainable items and do the best thing for each category," she says.

of recycled materials with a low-VOC coating and patented Lumishelf™ LED-lit acrylic shelving

Pompano Beach, Fla.-based holiday display producer Brandano Displays took a different tack. Its introduction of a leasing program extended the useful life of its products by enabling products to be used multiple times by different clients rather than being disposed of after one client's promotion.

More than half of the fixture and display survey respondents have created custom products with a green or sustainable element, such as cashwraps with wheatboard countertops, cabinets made of recycled or reclaimed wood, a snowboard merchandiser using water-based coatings, and millwork made of wheatboard, bamboo, and sunflower board. To make store environments products more environmentally friendly, fabricators have turned to materials such as powdercoatings, bamboo, FSC-certified board, no-added-formaldehyde board, water-based glues and finishes, formaldehyde-free finishes, VOC-free inks, and recycled-content steel.

NASFM member materials suppliers also have been affected by the growing interest in green. Most of those responding to a survey earlier this year said they had received requests for green or sustainable products, with specific requests running the gamut from higher-efficiency ballast/lamp combinations to bamboo and coconut palm flooring and plywood.

"We are experiencing a wave of general interest in certified lumber and millwork, and we expect it to carry over to store fixtures and retail environments," says Tom Murray, sales manager of Rex Lumber Co.

Two-thirds of the materials suppliers surveyed currently market products as environmentally friendly. Half of the respondents plan to introduce new green products, while nearly half plan to begin mar-

keting the green aspects of products they already have on the market. Half plan to seek certifications for products they carry. Among the store environments materials cited as green:

- TIGER Drylac Power Coatings powdercoating products
- ECOsurfaces Commercial Flooring low-VOC flooring products made from post-consumer and post-industrial rubber
- Dai Nippon Printing's non-PVC film and electronic beam products
- Doelken-Woodtape's chlorine-free ABS Edgebanding and 3D acrylic edgebanding
- Uniboard Canada's no-urea-formaldehyde board
- Northern Contours components using board produced from 98 percent recycled raw materials
- Rex Lumber's FSC-certified lumber, mouldings, and flooring
- Bierson Corp.'s custom components of formaldehyde-free 3D laminates membrane-pressed onto no-added-formaldehyde MDF of 100 percent recovered and recycled wood fiber substrates
- DVUV LLC's custom components of UV-cured powder-coated MDF through a process requiring no solvents and emitting no VOCs or HAPs
- Sherwin-Williams' Green-sure-designated Sher-Wood® Ultra-Cure® UV Waterborne woodworking coating free of formaldehyde, heavy metals, and HAPs, and with low VOCs

CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME

The vast majority of fixture and display providers surveyed cite the cost of green materials as a challenge to meeting clients' green objectives. As John D. Brandano, managing partner of Brandano Displays, puts it, "Our challenge is to meet the stated objective without diluting the promotional value of the display. The client typically wants green at little or no extra expense while maintaining the look of the display."

Other challenges cited include:

- Insufficient availability of green materials and components
- Lack of knowledge about available materials
- Inferior performance of green materials
- Increased lead time needs
- Inability to keep up with demand
- Inability to make an entire fixture out of green materials
- Lack of consensus on what is green and/or sustainable.

Explains John Empfield, director of marketing of Alpena, Mich., panel provider Panel Processing Inc., "The definition of green is amorphous. Most engineered wood

panel products are made from raw materials from sustainable tree management, but it is nearly impossible for us, as finishers and fabricators, to know the source of the material we buy. So claiming a green status could backfire."

Despite the challenges, providers of products for store environments that educate themselves about sustainable product needs stand to remain competitive in the slowly greening retail landscape. ■

Jo Rossman is senior editor of *NASFM Magazine*.

Resources

Turn to Product Showcase in this and ongoing issues of *NASFM Magazine* for a look at materials and components introduced by members, including environmentally friendly offerings. Watch the New Products & Services section of www.retailfix.com for new green stock fixtures and displays. And use NASFM's online search to find more information regarding member companies mentioned in this article.

Getting Staff Up to Speed on Green

The growing demand for green stores has created a need for retail environments providers to develop staff expertise. Half of NASFM-member design firms surveyed have LEED-accredited individuals on staff. For fixture and display providers, nearly half of those surveyed have assigned staff to study green issues. The departments that manufacturers charge with this responsibility vary from company to company—from marketing to purchasing, project management to sales, human resources to finishing.

Harbor Industries, a Grand Haven, Mich., P-O-P display, fixture, and interactive kiosk manufacturer, took the matter seriously. The company formed a cross-functional Green Team whose role is to help the firm "design, manufacture, and deliver sustainable business practices" by partnering employees, communities, suppliers, and customers.

Serving on the team are the director of quality assurance and safety, a buyer/planner, an inventory control manager, a shipping/receiving supervisor, the director of continuous improvement, a senior buyer, a samples manager, a design manager, an engineer, and a sales rep.

The group, which began meeting in March 2006, meets in full every other week. On the off week, sub-teams meet to focus on assigned topics: education, energy conservation, facilities, environmentally friendly materials, recycling, and sustainable design. Thanks to the group's efforts, Harbor Industries has implemented several energy- and waste-saving plant strategies and has begun using alternative materials in its products whenever possible, reports Cindy Parker Euscher, vice president of sales services.

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ABOUT NASFM MAGAZINE

NASFM Magazine is the official publication of NASFM, the retail environments association. Published six times a year, it is the only magazine aimed at decision makers in the retail environments industry, which includes store fixture suppliers, retail design firms, suppliers of visual merchandising products, and suppliers of materials and equipment. *NASFM Magazine* features insightful coverage of industry-specific issues and events on topics including manufacturing and materials, management, marketing and sales, technology, finance, and human resources.

NASFM Magazine is free to NASFM members. Subscriptions are available to suppliers of store fixtures and other products and services for retail environments, contract design firms, and suppliers of materials, services, and equipment. For subscription rates, see <http://www.nasfm.org>.

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NASFM CAN HELP YOU FIND THE SUPPLIERS YOU NEED

Member companies offer a full range of products and services for retail environments, and include store fixture suppliers, retail design firms, suppliers of visual merchandising products, and suppliers of materials and equipment for the retail environments industry.

Member capabilities extend beyond fixture manufacturing to include importing, exporting, consolidating, installing, project management, engineering, design, and more.

For retail buyers, designers, and specifiers, NASFM offers comprehensive sourcing for retail environments solutions through the *Buyers' Guide*, a searchable online database, and customized referrals upon request. NASFM's online "Just for Retailers" area (<http://www.nasfm.org>) features new designs and ideas, member product introductions, winners of NASFM's Retail Design Awards, and a wide range of articles.