

Main Street, Small Town, U.S.A., is pretty well filled with small local shops

SUBURBAN BRANCH DEPARTMENT

Main Street, Big Town, was once the only possible big-store location



ARCHITECTURAL RECORD'S BUILDING TYPES STUDY NUMBER 210

The suburbs are acquiring new retailing facilities, urban in character, semi-rural in location, with few of the disadvantages of either. An appraisal prepared in collaboration with Daniel Schwartzman, A.I.A.

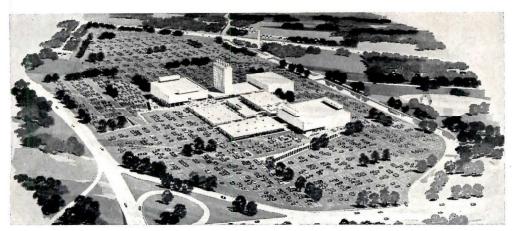
STORES

Since world war if the suburban branch department store has become established as an important retail facility. There are several reasons for its growth. The 1950 census showed that suburban population was then increasing five times as fast as urban, a rate that has since accelerated. Greater use of motor vehicles has made suburban stores easier to reach and shop in — and more profitable; at the same time it has helped to compound urban congestion and make downtown shopping less simple.

The U.S. Department of Commerce reports that store construction of all types is most active where population is growing fastest, in the suburbs. Considering also that in the period 1946–1952 this country's total store construction (in dollar volume) was 10 percent of private house construction whereas in the 1920's it was 14 percent, store building should remain active. In this activity the suburban department store is new. The store with a wide variety of merchandise for all members of the family and for the home, within a short driving distance of a suburban neighborhood, was until recently a luxury. Now, however, responsible planners and developers consider it an essential community facility; and - given reasonable sales goals, intelligently designed buildings and sites of reasonable size established a pattern of success. Even when it has been part of a regional shopping center which may as a whole be something less than successful, the branch department store itself has done well. It would appear to be financially more sound than either the small individual shop or the very large shopping center. It has attracted the attention of most of the conservative operators of large department stores, and there are still many hundred downtown department stores in cities with growing residential

Typical suburban branch department store: Bullock's Westwood, Westwood Village, Calif.





Out-of-town site near super-highways: Bamberger's in Paramus, N. J.; Abbott, Merkt & Co., Engineers

SUBURBAN

suburbs which could profitably build branches in the suburbs, where operating costs are low and net returns high.

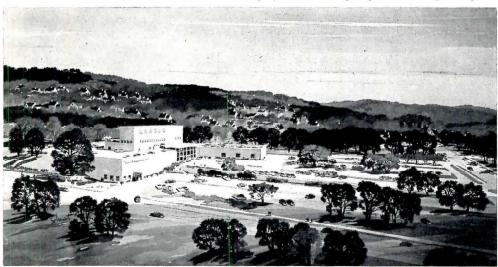
BRANCH

DEPARTMENT

STORES

This study is not a detailed critique, but an appraisal of trends in design and of certain points on which operators and designers agree. Many of the examples, existing and proposed, in the following pages have a striking similarity. This reflects their common purpose and conservative ownership. On the other hand there are some vigorous design innovations, based, as they must be in this field, on hard economic facts.

Saks White Plains, N. Y., on edge of town near highway, has 3-level parking; Kahn & Jacobs, Architects



Hecht Co., Northwood Shopping Center, Baltimore, Md.; Abbott, Merkt & Co., Engineers; Daniel Schwartzman, Architect







Robinson's, Beverly Hills; Pereira & Luckman, C. O. Matcham, Archts.; Bullock's Pasadena; Welton Becket & Associates, Archts.





Lord & Taylor, Westchester, N. Y.; Starrett & Van Vleck, Archts.; Wieboldt's, Evanston, Ill.; Holabird & Root & Burgee, Archts.





Bamberger's, Plainfield, N. J.; Abbott, Merkt & Co., Engrs.; Gimbel's, Cross County Shopping Center, Yonkers, N. Y.; L. Douglass, Archt.





Gimbel's Southgate, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Welton Becket and Associates, Archts.; Gimbel's Cheltenham, Philadelphia, Pa.; Welton Becket & Assoc., Howell Lewis Shay, Archts.



Bullock's Palm Springs, Calif.; Wurdeman & Becket, Archts.



Lytton's, near Chicago, Ill.; Shaw, Metz & Dolio, Archts.



Emporium, Stonestown, Calif.; Welton Becket & Associates, Archts.

FEW GENERAL RULES of thumb help to define the A typical suburban branch department store. These cannot be considered more than approximations, since each store and each trading area varies. Of course parking space is required; what may be called the optimum parking area ratio is $2\frac{1}{2}$ times the gross floor area of the store building, although the exact amount desirable in any given case may differ, depending on such items as accessibility of the site to residential areas within walking distance, or nearness to public transportation. The value of each car stall to the store can be estimated at \$7200 of annual sales, a figure arrived at from the following formula: average unit sale X customers per car X minimum car turnover X selling days per year. In the average case this becomes $\$4.00 \times 1\frac{1}{2} \times 4 \times 300 = \7200 . However, these figures vary radically and must be used with caution.

A suburban branch should carry a representative selection of all merchandise handled by the main store. It should have enough stock — which means storage space — to be self-sufficient for a period of time whose length depends on distance from the main store and warehouse, or on whether the branch will have facilities for receiving shipments directly from the manufacturer. If some major categories of merchandise are not carried the prestige of the main store may be lost to the branch, or the branch may lose its identity as a department store and become vulnerable to vigorous competition from neighboring specialty shops. The major classifications normally handled in a department store are:

Women's wear: dresses, coats, suits, etc.

Accessories: handbags, shoes, hosiery, lingerie, etc.

Men's wear: complete Children's wear: complete Dry Goods: linens, fabrics

Small wares: notions, stationery, etc.

Housewares

Home furnishings: rugs, draperies, lamps, etc.

Furniture

Miscellaneous: toys, luggage, etc.

Beauty salon Restaurant

Size, Capacity, Costs

Suburban branches which qualify as department stores with minimum adequate assortments of most kinds of merchandise usually have not less than 50,000 sq ft of total floor area. A more complete store has about 150,000 sq ft in a moderate-sized community or 200,000 sq ft in a larger community. In the most active trading areas branches of very high-volume stores are now providing over 300,000 sq ft. In all of these, the sales area (including behind-the-scene stock area immediately adjacent to selling) is usually 60 to 70 percent of total floor area, depending on amount of self-selection fixturing and volume of shipments directly from manufacturers. Average finished heights for ceilings are 13 ft for the street floor and 11 ft 6 in. for other floors.

The average branch store has annual gross sales amounting to \$70 to \$100 per sq ft of selling area, includ-

ing forward stock areas. Cost of the building, at current levels, varies generally from \$15 to \$20 per sq ft; cost of fixtures, \$8 to \$10 per sq ft. The typical suburban branch department store, then, has \$7,500,000 of annual sales, 150,000 sq ft of area, a site providing 375,000 sq ft of parking space for 1250 cars. Variations from this average are as many as the various philosophies of merchandising and the sizes and types of communities.

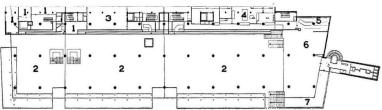
Location, Site

Ideally the suburban branch is located in an area covered by the established prestige and reached by the advertising of the downtown store. This strengthens the obligation to carry a good selection of merchandise of most kinds carried by the downtown store. Ready interchange of items between branch and downtown helps but does not solve the problem; the suburban

Abraham & Strauss, Hempstead, N. Y.; Daniel Schwartzman, Peter Copeland, Marcel Breuer, Archts.







MEZZANINE: 1, office; 2, open; 3, service dept.; 4, kitchen; 5, cafeteric; 6, restaurant; 7, balcony



GROUND FLOOR: 1, storage; 2, shipping; 3, entry to restaurant; 4, show window; 5, show case; 6, moving stair; 7, vertical sliding door

In Rotterdam, Holland, with little auto traffic, the ter Meulen, Wassen en van Vorst department store has greater window area than American counterparts; van den Broeck & Bakema, Archts.

customer is a "take-with" shopper. When the size of the plot — and hence of the store — is restricted, this has led many operators to limit the categories of branch store merchandise to those which can be stocked in sufficient width and depth. A branch in a suburb which is primarily a dormitory for city workers does tend to draw some business from the main store, particularly if the residents are established customers or have the same buying habits as main store patrons. But the larger department stores with more than one branch are finding that their main city plants, with merchandise handling facilities and highly skilled executive talent, can serve the branches with only minor adjustments and become more productive pieces of real estate when the sales volume of the branches is added. Sometimes main store sales have actually increased as prestige of the branches has grown.

Branch locations are of three principal kinds: 1,



Abraham & Strauss, Great Neck, N. Y.; Lathrop Douglas, Archt.





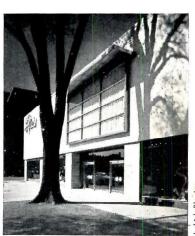
Saxone Shoe Shop, left, London, England (Michael Egan, Archt.) proclaims itself a small shop by nature of marquee, show windows, etc. Center,

BRANCH DEPARTMENT STORES: Entrances, Show Windows, Façades

Photos below: top left, Hutzler Bros., Towson, Md. (Office of J. R. Edmunds, Jr.; Ketchum, Giná & Sharp, Archts.) has two entry levels created by elevating a cross street and building out under it. Bottom left, see-through façade and sidewalk show cases, Bullock's Westwood (Welton Becket & Assoc.) Top right, large window accenting the entrance is heavily curtained; Lytton's (Shaw Metz & Dolio). Bottom right, Aux Dames de France, department store in Toulon, France, has the generous fenestration which Europeans prefer (de Montaut, Gorska, Lajarrige, Poutu, Architects)



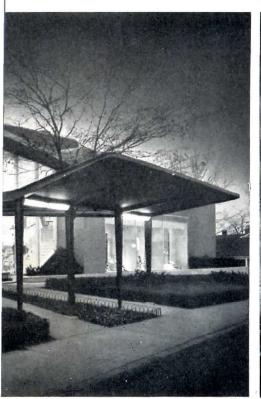


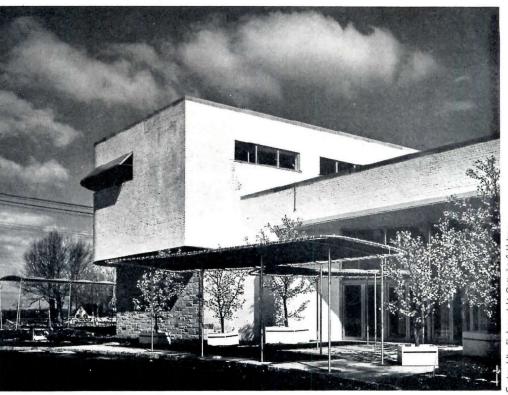


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floating marquee, Scruggs in Clayton, Mo. (Harris Armstrong, Archt.) Right, fabric marquees, Lord & Taylor Westchester (Starrett & Van Vleck)

center-of-town in a smaller community; 2, independent location in a suburban area; 3, key location in a shopping center. Parking space is essential to all three. Of the first two types, the most successful examples have profited from a prominent site on the main street or thoroughfare with parking contiguous to the building on one or more sides. When the site has permitted, roof parking or adjacent multi-story parking has been used successfully. The third type, the key unit in a shopping center, requires extremely careful evaluation of potential customer traffic, both directly from the parking area and secondarily from adjacent stores.

Entrances, Show Windows, Facades

When the building fronts on a main street or thoroughfare, or when the parking plan places the building in back of an area of parked cars, monumental entrances are often employed. Sometimes this has been done by combining a two-story glass area with the entrance and obtaining an impressive night effect; but considering that, indoors, the store is simply a selling mechanism, the strong daylighting is disadvantageous; it tends to backlight and silhouette the merchandise so that color and texture are difficult to discern without excessive

Bullock's Westwood, Westwood Village, Calif. (Welton Becket & Associates, Archts.) has the windowless façade demanded by most American merchandisers, multiple entrances immediately accessible from the parking area



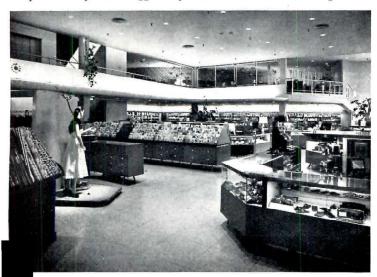
Jouglas M. Sirmon

artificial lighting. Yet generous, gracious entrances consistently characterize successful stores. The combination of show windows, both look-through and closed back, horizontally with the glass area of the entrances, has been used to this end. So also have inviting, protective entrance canopies which emphasize and identify the isolated store, and continuous covered walks which direct traffic and terminate logically at the main entrance. "Floating" marquees, supported at transom level, let daylight enter the store above them or provide a view out from within. The colorful laced awning has been used as a marquee to create an informal, gay atmosphere.

In suburban stores, display staffs are necessarily limited, non-selling area must be severely restricted, and the customer, who arrives by car, has little interest in window-shopping. The look-through window which makes the store interior the display is appropriate. When enclosed show windows seem advisable, the trend is to construct them as demountable units so they can be removed inexpensively when the space may be wanted for selling or for a look-through window. The freestanding show window, detached from the building, permits a free integration of the rich landscaping that is usually desirable with the store itself. The look-through window with a floor at selling floor level requires a sill or bulkhead at the minimum height needed for good maintenance; the partial look-through or enclosed window has a floor at bulkhead height, usually 12 to 20 in. Shadow boxes or freestanding show windows follow no set dimensional pattern, varying according to site or type of merchandise to be displayed. For all types the serious problem is lighting. In look-through windows, since lighting fixtures must be seen from all sides without glare, they are usually recessed in ceilings, which limits possible effects even if wide-angle equipment is used, and makes floor-lighting of low backgrounds essential. For enclosed windows, a sturdy, open, metal grid ceiling, preferably 2-way louvered, affords the needed flexibility for overhead lighting and for suspending props. Wing shields at both sides of the

(Text continued on page 191)

Simple aisle layout, Scruggs, Clayton, Mo.; Harris Armstrong, Archt.



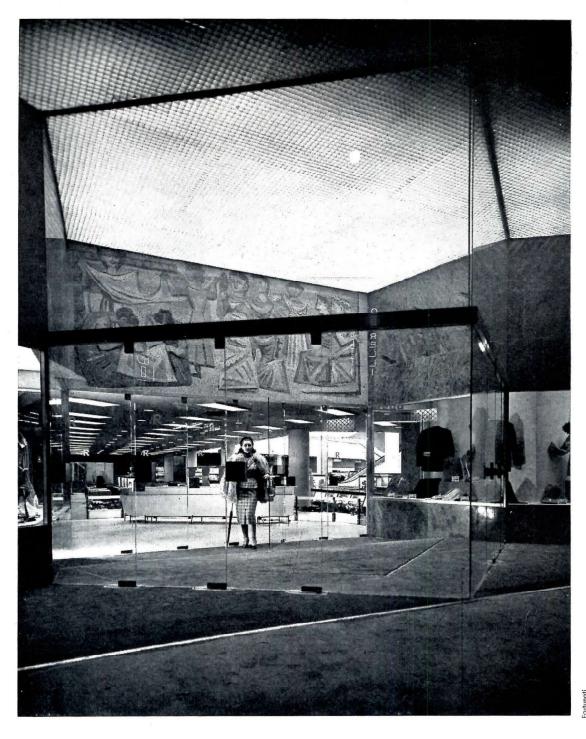


La Rinascente in Milan has many of the characteristics of American stores in its different traditional setting, many of them differently handled than they would be by American architects. The principal entrances permit the buying public to look through into the store's interior; show

DEPARTMENT STORE IN MILAN,

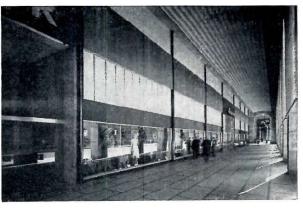
windows and the entrance on the opposite page are angled to relieve monotony and catch the eye of approaching shoppers. Above the entrance, opposite page, is a mosaic mural by Massimo Campigli, and above that, an over-all grid shielding fluorescent lights. The 9-meter-high arcade (far right) shelters windows composed in horizontal bands to preserve human scale; windows are protected by aluminum blinds which slide down from above to cover them

Fortuna



TALY; CARLO PAGANI, Architect





Mario Zacchetti

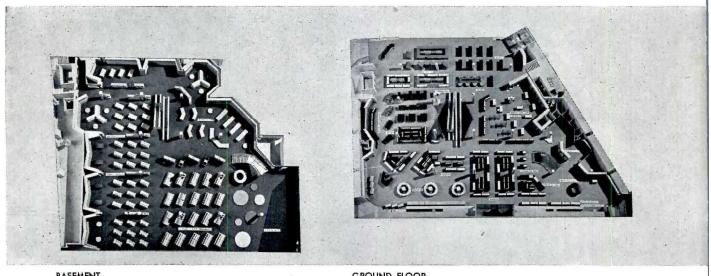


DEPARTMENT STORE, MILAN, ITALY





Plan models below show housewares in the basement, in a free arrangement of the gridiron plan; ground floor with 5 entrances, one at each corner and one in center of main front, wide aisles for free circulation, escalators in middle; first floor with piece goods, luggage, toys, charge accounts, etc.; second, tea room, beauty parlor, fashion theater, etc.



BASEMENT



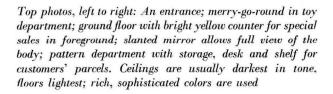
GROUND FLOOR

Bottom, left to right: Simple housewares imaginatively displayed; china department, continuous lights on inner and outer edges of shelves; second floor, continuous storage mezzanine; millinery on second floor

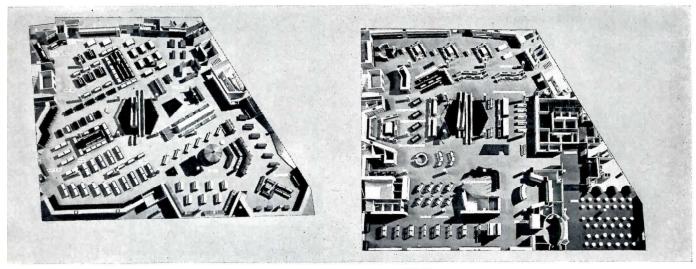












FIRST FLOOR

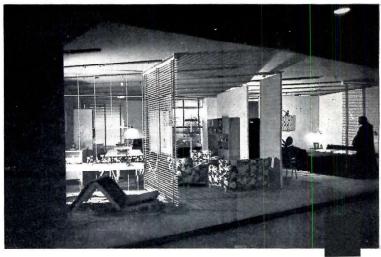
SECOND FLOOR

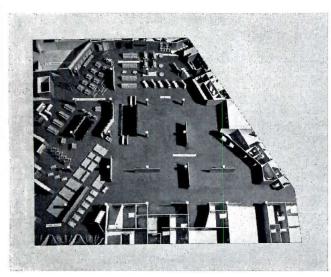




DEPARTMENT STORE, MILAN, ITALY







THIRD FLOOR



Ortinati

Open area in center of third floor (plan model at left) is for furniture pieces. Around this are flats for permanent displays which are changed periodically. Remaining area is for other household equipment. Photos, top: left, upholstery fabrics in open shelved fixtures whose tops are kept free for cutting; storage is behind curtain display in background. Right, model apartment, one of the permanent displays. Below, left, space around escalator kept free, not used for sales; right, fixture and counter for selling upholstery findings





Diagonal and rectangular aisle layout, Abraham & Straus, Hempstead, N. Y. Daniel Schwartzman, Peter Copeland, Marcel Breuer, Architects

Generous space in gift section of home furnishings floor, Bullock's Palm Springs, Calif. Wurdeman & Becket, Architects



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SUBURBAN BRANCH DEPARTMENT STORES

(Text continued from page 186)

window are also desirable for vertically adjustable lighting.

Opinion varies as to the value of window areas not used as show windows or combined with entrances. Color-corrected artificial lighting makes it unnecessary for the customer to see merchandise under actual daylight, but in some localities this habit persists. Where it does not, problems of fixturing and lighting are not complicated by the brightness differential between natural and artificial light; architects have welcomed the resulting windowless solutions, using uninterrupted masonry facades, introducing patterned relief in brick and concrete, and color in tile and richly veined marble.

Circulation, Vertical Transportation

A gridiron of aisles between fixtures is doubtless orderly but it does not always provide direct, graceful access from entrances and it is difficult to coordinate with the curving or angled walls often used to add interest or flexibility to the interior. In multi-floor stores the shortest possible aisles, generously wide, from entrances to escalators will increase customer traffic to other floors and add substantially to their sales. The completely "free-flow" plan complicates the fixtures, requiring costly wedge-shaped fillers for standard units or specially formed fixtures; it has been abandoned in most recent examples. Occasionally we find a curved

aisle, introduced to meet a special condition in an otherwise straightforward pattern. Diagonal main aisles superimposed on a gridiron of minor aisles are now customary on street floors when entrances are at building corners; these are also used on other floors to feed customers directly into corner areas. Individual shops enclosed in high walls are used in stores designed for leisurely shopping and for such intimate departments as Maternity or exclusive salons for high-priced merchandise in high sales-volume stores.

The trend toward greater amounts of forward stock in reserve areas next to sales spaces, to enable the store to meet peak seasonal demands easily, affects circulation planning and increases the opportunity to create interesting interiors. Since these reserve areas are usually at the rear of the selling space, away from the aisle, and since their size varies according to the type of merchandise, the back wall of fixtures must change position from department to department. The resulting variety in depth of departments can be helpfully utilized in design.

In most large branch stores escalators are depended on for customer use. A passenger elevator is included only for the aged, the disabled, or the young mother with a baby buggy; many store operators believe the freight elevator can also serve these customers. Open stairways between floors now appear in smaller stores intended for leisurely shopping.

(Text continued on page 193)





BRANCH DEPARTMENT STORES: Vertical Circulation



Photos above, left to right: stair to mezzanine, Ciro's of Bond Street, San Francisco, Raphael Soriano, Archt.; stair to mezzanine, Scruggs, Clayton, Mo., Harris Armstrong, Archt.; reinforced concrete stair, ter Meulen, Wassen en van Vorst Store, Rotterdam, Holland, van den Broek & Bakema, Architects. Below, escalators in (left) La Rinascenti, Milan, Carlo Pagani,

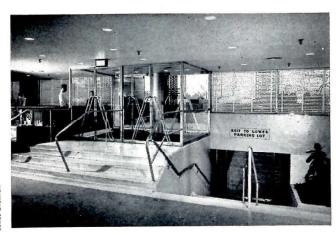


Archt.; and in Martin's, Garden City, N. Y., Frank Majer, Archt., Morris Lapidus, Assoc. Archt.; note selling fixtures. Two photos right, changes in level integrated by stairs and escalators. Harris Armstrong, Archt.

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Lighting

Store lighting schemes today are varied and ingenious; few designers agree on methods. However, there is a recognizable trend toward reducing the insistent patterns of directional lighting. Fully recessed circular and square fixtures accomplish this successfully. When rectilinear fixtures are employed, many designers recess them above the finished ceiling to reduce their dominance and reduce the contrasting brightness between the darker ceiling and the light source. This requires careful coordination with mechanical lines above the suspended ceiling or additional space, which can add expensive cubage to the building.

Color-corrective lighting is wanted by most store operators; they have accepted the cost of combining fluorescent and incandescent sources in the same or adjoining fixtures. Also to be considered are the increased yearly cost of electricity and the cost of the additional load on the air conditioning system due to extensive use of incandescent lamps which emit more heat than fluorescent. Yet, though fluorescent lamps are economical, they are not now available in fully color-corrected types. Many architects, feeling that incandescent general lighting is the only means of providing flattering illumination of merchandise, are using it entirely for general lighting, with a minimum of fluorescent in show cases and baths of light on back walls.

Medium-level general lighting, combined with a few small departmental areas of high intensity where it is appropriate to the merchandise, is increasing. This helps to make the store interior more interesting in design and produces a desirable over-all economy. Strong spotlighting from hidden sources, so essential to good store illumination, requires careful planning of fixture layouts at the earliest stage of design of the building. The suspended, dry, acoustic ceiling has come into use as its flexibility and compatibility with changing lighting needs, its low first cost and other virtues, have become apparent.

Fixture Design

Recently completed stores are being evaluated on the quantity of self-selection fixturing they have used. These methods make it easy, through fixture design, for the customer to appraise, compare and select the exact size and pattern wanted, and to help complete the sale with a minimum of sales clerk assistance. There are as many opinions on the desirability of these various methods as there are store operators. There is nothing new about the technique. It dates back to the earliest market place or bazaar and was widely re-introduced by our most famous variety store operator at the turn of the century. The only new aspect is to make it graceful and acceptable to the department store customer who is used to full sales clerk assistance. It does require, however a re-study of the capacity, requirements and distribution of fixtures as well as proper use of signs, without which self-selection is ineffective. These in turn have affected the general appearance of the individual fixtures and can immeasurably affect the total appearance of the store. After some relatively timid introductions of self-selection into new stores, we are beginning to see some violent swings in both directions, from wide general use in "high-volume" stores, to complete absence in the "prestige" store.

It is fortunate that the advantages of utmost flexibility and orderliness of merchandise display in fixtures have long been recognized by store architects. It takes a skillful designer to overcome the tendency to an over-mechanized appearance and yet to retain the efficiency and flexibility that are essential.

The influence of good architectural design, which employs structural materials to their full strength and expresses them frankly wherever possible, is being logically applied to fixture design and has an enormous effect on the general appearance of the store interior. Natural wood has been recognized as a precious material to be used in moderation and in sharp contrast with large areas of solid colors. Plastic laminates, which are more durable than natural wood for wearing surfaces and permit the use of light colors and subtle textures, have also strongly affected the design of fixtures.

Air conditioning and dust filtering devices now in almost universal use in retail stores have reduced the need for glass protection of even that merchandise which is normally accessible to the customer, and has simplified the details of fixturing, premitting more continuity of design and lightness of sections.

Character and Design Quality

This has become a matter of concern for the store executives as well as for architects. There is a strong wish to express the prestige and merchandising philosophy of the management and the nature of the community in the architecture of both exterior and interior.

Informality is the keynote of suburban store design, with a conscious attempt to express the difference between building for the casual living habits of the cardriving suburbanite and building for the city store where the only customers arriving by car are the chauffeur-driven "carriage trade." Landscaped areas are being used to give relief from the inevitable sea of asphalt resulting from the necessary parking requirement, and stores on restricted plots which have sacrificed all green areas to parking suffer badly in comparison. When the site permits, a small garden area for quiet relaxation will be deeply appreciated by the footsore shopper.

Interior merchandising departments should each be identified as separate entities, but at the same time should be in harmony with adjacent departments. Variety and change of pace can be obtained by judicious use of color, texture and materials.

In all these matters the architect has an important function. While his skill is no substitute for sound merchandising policy, the alert store operator today recognizes the value of the architect's contribution, of his resolution of the problems implicit in mercantile philosophy, operating policy, and the owner's desire for a totally successful establishment.



SUBURBAN BRANCH DEPARTMENT STORES: Lighting









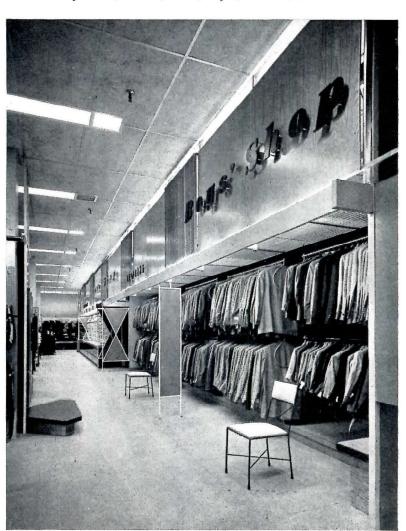
Far left, *decorative downlights and slatted wood ceiling, Qantas Imperial Airways office, London, England; James Cubitt and Partners, Archts. Left, top, Lightrend Shop, Los Angeles, Calif., Pereira & Luckman, Archts., center, Barton's candy shop, New York, N. Y., Victor Gruen, Archt. Immediately below, downlights, Wilson's Gift Shop, Statler Hotel, Los Angeles, Holabird



Julius Shulman

& Root & Burgee, Archts. Bottom row, left, fluorescent fixtures, appliance department, May Co. Wilshire, Calif., A. C. Martin Associates, Archts.; center, circular coves and incandescent downlights, French, Shriner & Urner Shoe Store, New York, N. Y., Olindo Grossi, Archt. Right, lighted clothing display, Fedway Stores, Wichita, Kans., Meyer, Katzman, Archt.







The branch department store of the immediate future exhibits few fundamental differences from its predecessors. The pattern is strongly established, so strongly that its effects are apparent in the very few downtown stores of recent construction, such as the new Macy's in



Roger Dud

Kansas City, Mo. (Daniel Schwartzman, Kivett & Meyers, Gruen & Krummeck, Archts.) Perhaps, as in Joske's store in Gulfgate Shopping City, Houston, Texas (John Graham & Co., Architects & Engineers), several levels may be used for parking and for access directly to selling floors; however, this, too, has been done before. Graham also designed the Stix, Baer & Fuller store at Richmond Heights, St. Louis County, Mo., which employs brilliant color and a delicately framed entrance motif to relieve the otherwise severely economical exterior; yet its shape is no less austere than the Altman White Plains, N. Y. store, top right (Kahn & Jacobs, Archts.) Bottom row, left to right: John Wanamaker Westchester, N. Y., is being built on 15 acres of the large Cross County Shopping Center, Yonkers, N. Y., will have multi-level parking (Lathrop





Douglass, Archt.); Bon Marché Store, Eugene, Ore. (another by John Graham) is being built for \$7.13 per sq ft including general contract, mechanical, electrical and sprinkler systems, elevators and escalators. At right are two views of J. W. Robinson's, Beverly Hills, Calif.; a bronze and brass fountain by Bernard Rosenthal in sunken garden, and Wilshire Blvd. entrance (Pereira & Luckman, Charles O. Matcham, Archts.)

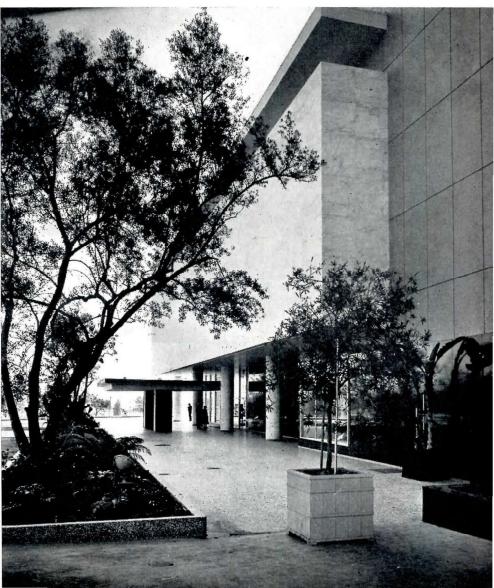
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