



Shades of Yorkville's Made-In-The-Shade Design

Text by Nina Amir
Photography by Ray Van Dusen

When the smallness of a retailer's merchandise deems the product itself ineffectual in enticing people into the store, the burden of attracting customers falls on the store design. Yet, when the allure of the store does, indeed, draw a customer inside, a crucial change in focus must occur. Store design fades from view and the customer's eye is drawn to the merchandise, which now seemingly appears larger than anything else in the shop. In other words, the design elements become the very thing that makes the product itself stand out, thus creating a perfect symmetry between merchandise and store design.

Achieving such symmetry may be one of the most complex imaging assignments a retail store designer tackles. Yet, when accomplished successfully, the results can be extremely exciting for both retailer and designer. Take Andrew Aliberti and Trish Duval, for example — the retailer and designer, respectively, who, in combining his merchandise and her store design, created Shades of Yorkville, a sunglass shop located in Hazelton Lanes of Toronto, Canada.

Aliberti sells sunglasses of all shapes,

sizes, styles and prices. His business, Summer Shades Inc., began in 1985 in Edgartown, a township located on Martha's Vineyard, Mass., and now includes a store on Nantucket, as well as one in West Hampton Beach, N.Y. In addition to these resort shops, he also owns a store in Lake Tahoe called Sierra Shades. Of his five shops, Shades of Yorkville — opened in September 1989 as a separate corporation — is the only one not located in a vacation hot spot and, therefore, it took on a more sophisticated, modern and "funky" image.

All of Aliberti's stores carry basically the same merchandise. Glasses range in price from \$6 for children's models to \$350 for top-of-the-line fashion eyewear, and each store features both European and American lines, such as Oliver Peoples, L.A. Eyeworks and Persol. "We like to concentrate on the newer lines that are yet to be shown in all the other sunglass and optical shops," explains Aliberti.

Despite the general consensus that his merchandise makes it easier for people to see, Aliberti asserts that most mall shoppers would not find their eyes drawn to a window display featuring sunglasses. Indeed, the glasses themselves most likely would get lost in the display. That's where Trish Duval, of Lexington, Mass.-located Duval Interiors, enters the picture.

While Duval designed Aliberti's other stores with a "laid-back" look, Shades of Yorkville required a different image. Instead of a hot spot setting, it was placed

When designer Trish Duval joined creative forces with retailer Andrew Aliberti, their mutual goal was to create a sunglass shoppe that would "stop people in their tracks, prompting them to exclaim, 'Oh, my God!'"

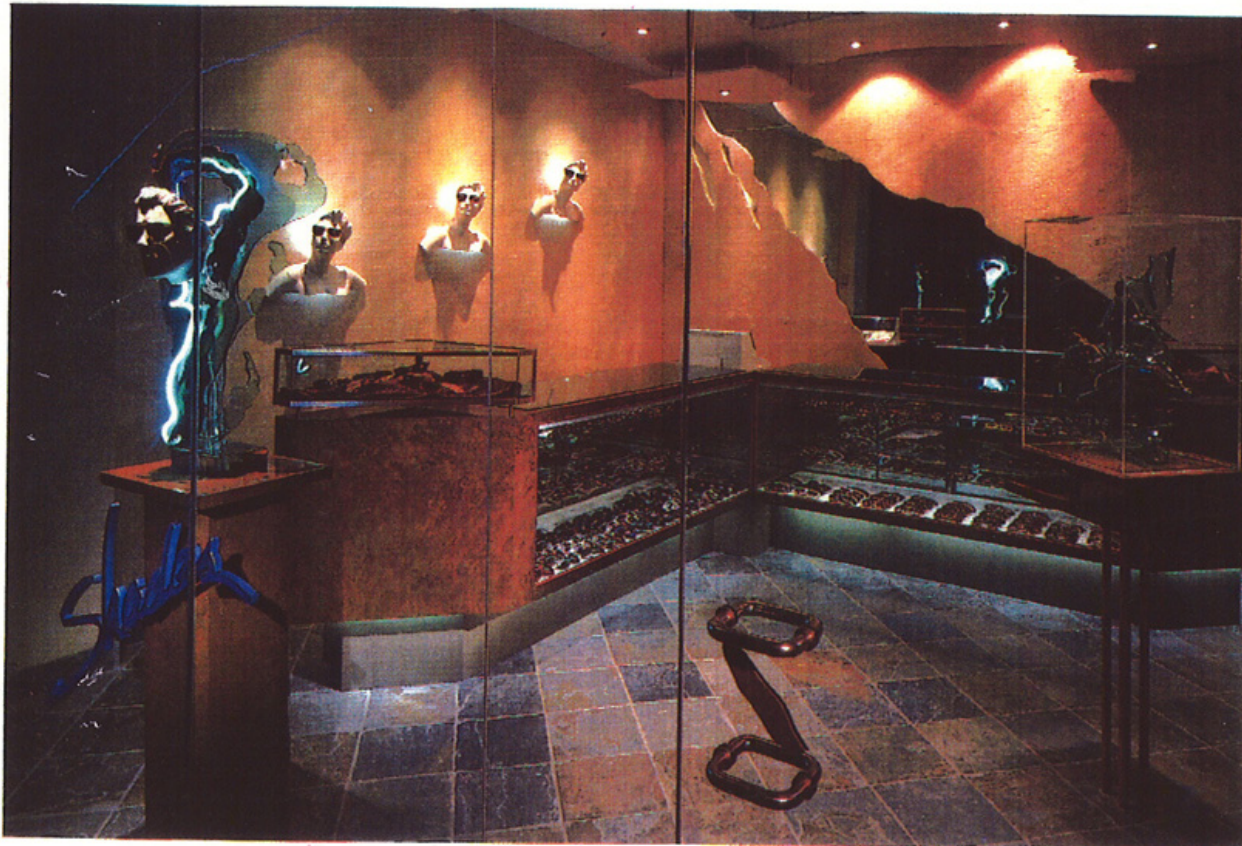
in a sophisticated mall in a cosmopolitan city. Aliberti explains, "The Toronto store was designed much, much more upscale, because that's what the area demanded. We wanted it to be striking in an environment where every retailer invests a lot of money in store design. Among all the beautiful shops, we wanted Shades of Yorkville to be

customer. I wanted to play off his energy, so it seemed the perfect launch for a really funky, fun, alive and electric shop," says Duval.

Aliberti confirms that the shop accomplishes all these objectives. "The modern tone and the funkiness reflect both my attitude as shop owner and the fact that the lines we're carrying are

store. These are highlighted by lighting directed at the glasses themselves, creating the illusion of bright sun rays shining on each face.

The layered irregularity and jagged edges of the sculptures provided a key for developing the rest of the store. "A lot of the store's jagged elements were a take-off from the sculptures, because it



something that would stop people in their tracks, prompting them to exclaim, 'Oh, my God! Let's look inside and see what's going on.'"

Shades enjoys a corner location at the mall's main entry, where foot traffic ascends an escalator into an atrium. The storefront is visible from two different directions. The aim was to attract shoppers from the entryway and escalator into the store. "My intent was to create a glass cube that one could see through," says Duval. Inside this cube, she planned to place something large, electric and dimensional, so passersby would not just "read the name of a store, but actually see something of interest that would draw them from the escalator to the store."

And Duval wanted to reflect both the product and its owner in the store design. "His glasses are sporty and fashionable and of definite quality ... Aliberti himself is very alive, young, energetic, he enjoys his interaction with the

cutting-edge types of products." Too, the design complements his approach to sunglasses in general. "People more and more are looking at sunglasses as accessories, as fashion statements. I wanted the shop to have a real design to it, because I think sunglasses no longer are just to protect your eyes."

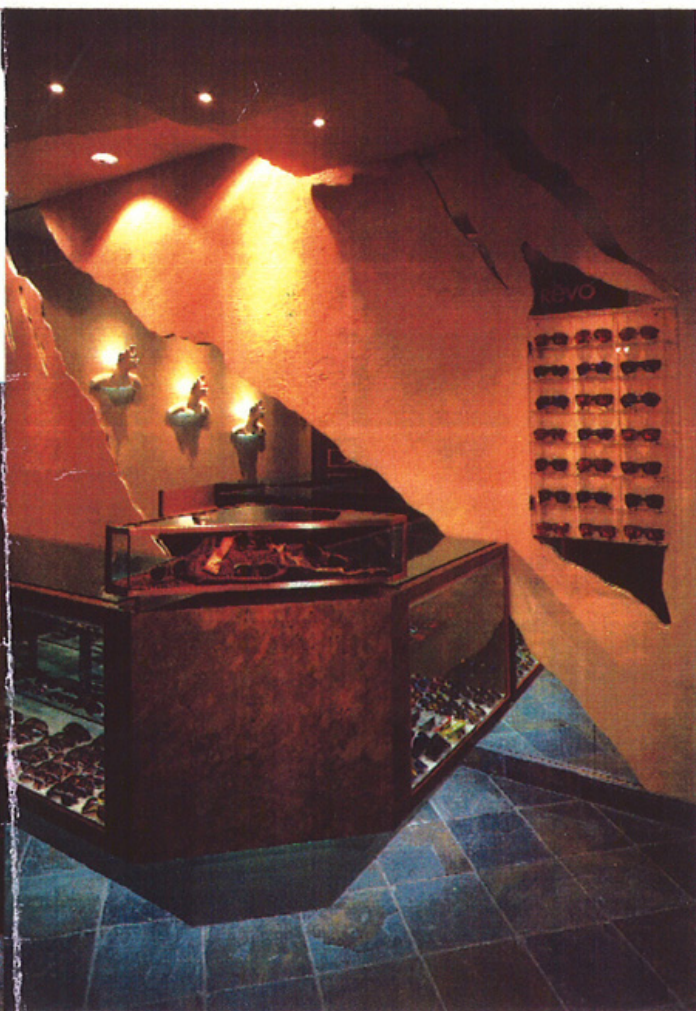
And design Aliberti got. Starting with the exterior, the 325-square-foot, L-shaped store is glassed in from floor to ceiling, with copper-faced bases and hardware. "Any detail on the exterior would detract from the minuscule detail of the product," explains Duval. "That's why the clear, clean architectural glass front seemed the best suited."

Inside both display windows reside unique, electrifying sculptures of watery green layered acrylic and bronzed plaster faces framed by bolts of blue neon light. The sculpted faces, crafted out of casts of the same model, sport electric blue reflective sunglasses — the only external indicator of what is inside the

felt so right," Duval says. "This element deserved to be repeated in the store."

If the sculptures aren't sufficient to draw attention to the shop, the brick walkway outside the store could be considered the clincher — accented by triangular-shaped "arrows" made of China slate that point directly to the two store entrances. This slate flooring is repeated inside and laid diagonally so that the lines of the floor lead directly to the display cases inside.

Through the window one can see several more attention getters. Three busts are mounted in descending order on the left wall, all made from plaster casts of a second model. Like the face sculptures in the windows, bronzing powder was worked into their surfaces to create a connection between them and the coloring in the floor, and they're wearing sunglasses. "What we're trying to sell is the glasses," says Duval. "And displaying them on three-dimensional faces is the most effective way to do that."



Shades of Yorkville features architectural elements that are "organic" in nature: The plaster of the walls feels earthy, like the floor, which has a mountainous, rocky feeling to it. The acrylic used in the sculptures is watery looking, and the electricity of the neon is reminiscent of a bolt of lightning. "It all seems to have movement, like the wind."

On the opposite wall, a mirror slants almost ceiling to floor. Its jagged edge was created by applying medium-density fiber board over the mirror and cutting that in such a way that the mirror creates the illusion of cascading water. Duval claims that the mirror provides one of the strongest design elements in the shop. "The objective of being able to view the glasses *became* a design element. There was an incorporation of both the utility and the design in a very creative way."

The walls themselves are made of drywall with plaster. A specialist painter from the Toronto area added several layers of customized color, creating a softly mottled, worn-rock appearance.

Angled between the two walls sets a custom-designed counter with fluorescent-lighted, recessed base and patined copper metal laminate surface. The glass display is edged in copper, as are the raised glass display units. These piers are supported by copper tube. Used throughout the store, these copper tubes also support the center display table — covered with aging copper metallamine — which displays yet another acrylic sculpture holding sunglasses.

The copper tubing also is used to suspend a one-piece, jagged-edged, floating

soffit extending the length and reflecting the line of the counter. This has three smaller soffits suspended and cantilevered below, two projecting forward directly above the piers and one receding to a corner location above the point of purchase.

Special low-voltage lighting fixtures are shallow enough not to protrude above the soffit and become visible to the customer. Lighting also is employed effectively to showcase the busts on the wall.

According to designer Duval, all of Shades' architectural elements are "organic" in nature, which, by her definition, means anything that has a natural or flowing element to it. "If you look at the entry sculpture, you'll see a few layers of acrylic. It's dimensional, and it waves, it moves," she explains. "It seems to have a life all its own. It starts to breathe a bit, just like the soffit above the counters. There's nothing rigid or confined about it. It's layered, and even the layers are cantilevered out so that you have dimension.

"Elements come toward you," she continues, "elements that are dropping down. The display cases have raised piers — again, dimensional. The mirror flows almost as water would. Then, the

plaster of the walls feels very earthy, like the floor, which has a mountainous, rocky feeling to it. The acrylic used in the sculptures is watery looking and the mirror has a watery-type reflection. And, the electricity of the neon is reminiscent of a bolt of lightning, and it all seems to have movement, like the wind." Even the storefront features an organic element: sand-blasted onto the glass, a crack runs down from the upper right corner pointing directly at the sculpture.

When all the elements are intermingled, the store becomes a study in contrast. Yet, in all the design disparities, a shopper somehow finds comfort. "There's an incredible amount of warmth when you walk into the space. It emerges from the natural feeling of the stone floor and the plastered walls," says Duval. "Then, you've got these elements that sort of zigzag through the space like lightning, very sharp and very fast, with a lot of movement. And you have the mirror, which also is reflective and cool. But, this is offset by the warmth." The end result is inviting. Shoppers want to stay awhile and experience the excitement and the comfort, taking their time before making a purchase.

Aliberti admits there are an abundance of design elements at work in Shades of Yorkville. Yet, the image achieves its objective. "Everything works so well together that the design doesn't take the customer's attention away from the product." He concludes, "The sculptures and the mirror may lure them in, but, ultimately, these fade away and the shopper is drawn to the product.

"That's exactly what we had in mind." □

Nina Amir is an Atlanta-based freelance writer specializing in retail marketing communications.

THE PLAYERS

CLIENT

Andrew Aliberti, President, Summer Shades

Duval Interiors Design Team

Trish Duval, Principal

Karen Clarke, Senior Designer

Consultants

Contractor: Kontour Interior Contractor

Artist: (Sculptures and Wall-mounted Busts) Craig Kraft Studios

Specialty Painters: Moss & Lam

Suppliers

Slate Flooring: Eurocal Slate Centers

Display Cases: (Metal Laminate) Chemical; (Plastic Laminate) Wilsonart

Low-voltage Light Fixture: CSL Lighting Mfg. Inc.