

The changing face of mall lighting

Driving through just about any city in South Africa one could be forgiven for thinking that without shopping malls the construction industry would be at a loss – new malls are constantly being built and older ones continuously renovated. With so many to choose from, what is it that draws customers to one shopping mall rather than another?

Since Regent Lighting Solutions has been involved in lighting numerous shopping malls across Southern Africa, and as far afield as Dubai, *Lighting in Design* asked Randal Wahl what he thought drew people to a mall. He doesn't claim to know all the answers but is pretty certain that lighting plays a big role.

Despite a frequent lament of lack of time, many people are prepared to drive considerable distances to get to a mall of their choice and some will stay there for up to five hours. According to Michael Glimcher, CEO and chairman of Glimcher, a commercial real estate company based in Pittsburgh, the mall is a destination offering more than just retail. He says that, "while shopping will always be a primary reason to go to a mall, going to the mall is about the experience," and being able to join friends for a salad and a glass of wine or take in a movie supplies "the right mix of retail, restaurants and entertainment" [1].

Wahl agrees with this and adds that other advantages of malls include choice, variety, convenience and safe parking. In addition, in South Africa particularly, people value natural light and fresh air.

But many malls offer the above advantages – and include wireless connectivity for access to tablets and smartphones – as a matter of course, so what else can property developers do to attract people to their malls?

Wahl believes that lighting plays a part. He says that because many people stroll through malls, not necessarily with much purpose other than

to socialise or window shop, interesting lighting can add much to the appeal. "More investment is being allocated to interior lighting to enhance the mall experience. Lighting designers and architects play an important role in selecting the correct luminaires to enhance the architectural features; to create a lighting effect that is appropriate for a specific area; and for specific applications. Lighting has moved from being merely a functional element to becoming more of a design element that gives functionality and, incidentally, it is here that LEDs come into their own."

In general corridor lighting in malls there is a move away from downlighters only. Architects are making more use of natural light and incorporating suspended fittings into the interior design of the structures. Visitors to the mall want an experience when they arrive and here light plays an important part in enhancing the overall effect for shoppers. Back lit translucent stretch ceilings with exciting and eye-catching designs offer functional light but create interesting effects and these are being used more frequently in malls.

It is the trend these days, says Wahl, for a fair proportion of the lighting in a mall to be non-obtrusive i.e., hidden or recessed in cavities so the light can be directed and controlled; thus reducing glare levels and resulting in good uniformity. "Obviously, standard lighting still plays a role, but we prefer to incorporate lighting, such as track lights, in recessed light systems. We have a developed linear and track system that gives designers and engineers the flex-



Malls are making more use of natural light which, when combined with high end fittings and an effective lighting design, creates an environment that attracts people to the venue.



Various lighting applications in Sandton: From recessed linear wall mounted with customised recessed trim to the adjustable Tiltlux fittings to highlight the domed ceiling features, to Iris lighting elements in planters, to bespoke suspended walkway fittings offering down and uplight.

ibility of an adjustable luminaire to shine light where it is required yet also offers a linear light source for the required functional downward light when lower light levels are needed. Incorporating two types of lighting in a single system is important as, in addition to its flexibility, the system allows for bespoke lighting applications.”

Since track lighting is directional, traditional track systems perform best as accent lights; they do not work for lighting up walkways. With Regent’s system it is possible to incorporate the track system to give general lighting. Specific areas can be highlighted and general areas can be illuminated using a single system that can be interlinked, joined or made into rectangular or L-shapes.

Within the system, designers can specify downlighters, linear sources and tilt lights to create different lighting applications using the same system, which itself can be recessed, suspended or surface mounted.

As new shopping malls are built, existing malls upgrade continuously to attract people and keep tenants. For example, the Zone in Rosebank is be-

ing upgraded less than ten years after it was initially designed to attract a new generation of shoppers and tenants for the World Cup and Gautrain Station. Sandton City precinct in Gauteng is another case in point. The upgrade evolution there started years ago and has been transformational. Regent’s involvement has been consistent – it began with the upgrade of Sandton City, progressed to the rooftop car park and continues with Nelson Mandela Square and its surrounding buildings.

For the Nelson Mandela Square underground parking, Regent supplied an LED light fitting that offers downlight but also reflects off the ceiling to reduce the cave effect so common in parking garages. The final effect is a ‘wash’ as well as light onto the concrete ceiling, which is painted white to reflect down, giving an improved lighting effect and greater sense of security. This is further strengthened by different coloured end caps on each level so people can identify where they are in the parking garage.

With the new approach to mall lighting, upfront planning for the lighting design is essential. Architects and consultants that have clear briefs can



Right: Pandora Square Pendant LED luminaires have been used to create stylish, interesting passageway lighting in the BayWest Mall in Port Elizabeth.

achieve world class lighting effects. In instances where application is important, established lighting manufacturers play a critical role as their design departments can develop luminaires to meet the ever-changing requirements. It is time, however, that is the scarce resource in many such opportunities and early intervention plays an important role in the overall effect.

“Finally, in most instances the architect or lighting designer working on a mall would like an installation that enhances the shopping experience, is user friendly and ensures repeat visits. However, it is not only the look that is important but also the long term effect of the lighting, so flexibility and easy maintenance are essential,” concludes Wahl.

Reference

[1] Smith N., Malls attract shoppers looking for an 'experience', BusinessNewsDaily, May 22, 2013 <http://news.yahoo.com/malls-attract-shoppers-looking-experience-103800996.html> accessed 30 October 2015 LID



Right: At the Menlyn Mall Food Court, linear Maxi LEDs, recessed in a continuous frame were supplied in various lengths and staggered at various angles to create a dynamic environment.