



Fantasy World in Kuwait City's Souk Sharq Mall is a family destination.  
**Above right** A life-size, space-age, toy soldier, Freddy welcomes you to his world.



Fantasy World in Kuwait City's Souk Sharq Mall is a family destination ruled by 'Freddy'.

**F**reddy, a life-size, space-age toy soldier, stands guard at the entry to Fantasy World to welcome shoppers to Kuwait's premier toy store on the upper level of Souk Sharq Mall. A colourful combination of the classic Nutcracker and a fanciful Renaissance-like hero astronaut, Freddy is the store's identifying icon and graphic logo.

Fantasy World occupies a 362m<sup>2</sup> corner location at the top of the escalator in the shopping centre's centre court. The dual frontage attracts shoppers with its backlit panels – integrated with special animated holographic optic effects. "Shoppers can watch the colours changing as they ride up from the ground level," explains architect Ken Nisch, chairman of JGA, Southfield, Michigan, retail speciality planners and designers who created the store.

Located on Gulf Road, on the Persian Gulf waterfront, Souk Sharq Mall is regarded as the largest and most popular mall in Kuwait. Tenants include major chains as well as independent retailers – and Debenhams and the Sultan Center serve as anchors. International and regional brands include Kenneth Cole, Sony, Boots, The

Athlete's Foot, Nokia, Charles Jourdan, GNC, Mango, Oasis, Next, River Island, Racing Green, Arbash Diamonds, El Taher, Milano, Steps, Zara, and The Body Shop. Souk Sharq boasts the largest food court of any Kuwaiti mall, and is a popular choice by tourists and locals for snacks and informal dining.

Behind the mall is a huge artificial lake. Visitors can take a break from shopping by renting a motor boat for a spin or demonstrating their jet ski prowess.

Fantasy World is owned and operated by Safari House General Trading Co., W.L.L., a Kuwaiti company. The firm now operates three retail stores and three independent toy distribution subsidiaries. Retail promotional techniques employed include television, print media, and billboards.

Souk Sharq Mall's Fantasy World store, a prototype for the chain's future expansion, opened on 1 May 2009. Its motto and advertising tag line, 'Kids Deserve the Best', is a theme that extends to accompanying parents and grandparents. "Fantasy World positions itself as an upscale environment to present state-of-the-art technology in today's toys by offering entertainment and learning options, with an



**Above** Freddy stands ready to greet customers at the entrance to Fantasy World.

**Right** The dual frontage at the top of the escalator has backlit panels with special animated holographic optic effects that are constantly changing.



emphasis on the child's visual vocabulary," says Nisch.

Kuwait's demographics played an important part in the store's design and merchandising strategy. "Fifty per cent of the population under the age of 25 is married, and they tend to have large families," Nisch points out. "Kids are the center of Kuwaiti society. Extended families live in large compounds, with enormous indoor 'backyards' and pools. There's no typical 'neighbourhood' play for youngsters to participate in, as is a common practice in other countries around the world," Nisch says.

Kuwaiti families tend to socialise and shop together – and shopping, as entertainment, is part of their leisure-time activities.

"That's one of the main reasons for the year-round density of customers at the Mall. There's no fourth-quarter, seasonal holiday promotional push to generate traffic. Rather, traffic is constant with the emphasis on generating repeat business by introducing the hottest, newest products," Nisch emphasises. Top-quality branded lines with a strong educational focus are prominently displayed. Major sale periods are limited to twice yearly.

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The floor plan is based on a perimeter racetrack layout that leads customers to the various departments. Carpeting provides a soft play surface for children to sit on the floor to examine and handle items from the displays. Merchandise, imported from Asia, the U.S., and Europe, is organised by Boys, Girls, Early Years, Outdoor/Sports, and Amazing Minds. "The owners were very clear about their objectives to make the products easy to find, easy to try, and easy to buy," says Nisch. Fantasy World stores do not carry any items that are judged by the store's merchandise managers to be inappropriate for young children. Electronic games stress learning formats.

### FIXTURES

JGA's design concept was to give the space what Nisch describes as a "galactic, celestial, out-of-this-world feel." Circular, multi-coloured ceiling discs that match the signature colours of the individual departments are both decorative and functional. Cloud-like in their placement, they serve as overhead way-finders,

## FANTASY WORLD PROJECT FILE

**Owner:** Safari House General Trading Co., W.L.L., a Kuwaiti company.

**Retail manager for Fantasy World:** Harvey Dulku.

**Store design, graphic design:** JGA, Southfield, Michigan. Ken Nisch, chairman; Mike Benincasa, creative director.

**Architect:** N-S-Interiors, Safat, Kuwait. Narinder Sethi, project architect.

**Storefront film:** Filmshield UK, Ltd., Newcastle, U.K.

**Fixtures:** Madix, Inc., Terrell, Tex.; Opto International, Inc., Wheeling, Ill.

**Ceiling discs:** Moss Inc., Belfast, Maine.

**General contractor:** United Carpentry Turnkey Interiors, Safat, Kuwait.

**Lighting design:** Lighting Management, Harriman, N.Y., John Brocken, project manager.

**Photos:** Courtesy of Fantasy World.



**Above** A LCD screen plays action DVD movies with the appropriate product placed tantalizingly in front. What little boy could resist?

helping customers navigate through the store to locate and visit the individual displays.

The fixtures are fabricated from two layers of fabric – a white liner under a colour layer, stretched over a round frame. Internal illumination is by T5 fluorescent lamps. The circular design is extended to product display fixtures and to graphics for departmental identification.

Feature walls are covered in bold stripes. Display fixtures are fabricated of high-gloss laminate, in white or in the store's signature colours.

Large, suspended monitors in each department show a varied programme of movies, cartoons, and promotional messages. A flexible control system permits broadcasting to specific portions of the selling floor, or simultaneously throughout the store.

To encourage personal communication between Fantasy World and its customers, personnel at demonstration tables present selected new products periodically during business hours. ■

By **Vilma Barr**, a freelance writer based in Philadelphia and a regular contributor to *NZRetail*.



**Above** Although the store contains a vast amount of stock, it is still very easy on the eye and easily accessed – with much of the product at kids eye-height.

## KUWAIT CITY'S YOUNG POPULATION

Metropolitan Kuwait City has a population of 2.6 million living in a 200 km<sup>2</sup> area. Median age, according to estimated published 2008 figures, is 26 years (male, 28 years; female, 22.6 years). A total of 26 per cent of the population is under 14 years of age, while only 2.9 per cent is 65 years old or over.

Kuwait City was first settled in the early years of the eighteenth century on the site of an earlier abandoned fort. It grew as a thriving seaport over the next hundred years. The country sought British naval protection when internal dissension between ruling families erupted at the turn of the twentieth century. With the discovery of oil in 1936, the city's standard of living improved dramatically, and

residents were provided with health and educational services.

On 2 August 1990, military forces from neighbouring Iraq seized the city and annexed it. During the occupation, the city was extensively damaged. Six months later, the Iraqi military retreated.

With the combined efforts of the Kuwaiti government and foreign investors, the city was rebuilt and modernized; emerged to become an important international business hub. Its revitalisation spawned the construction of hotels, offices and shopping malls. Souk Sharq Mall, which had been damaged by a missile, was reconstructed employing Arabic and Mid-East architectural motifs.