

## Not Your Father's Car Dealer: Jaguar of Tampa by JGA, Inc. and Illuminating Concepts

Tampa, Florida: Classy cars take center stage in a traffic-stopping showroom.

by **Kristen Richards**  
December 10, 2002

Image: the sleek profile of a leaping jungle cat – a jaguar. Now, cast in chrome and put it on the hood of a car – talk about brand recognition! [Jaguar](#) continues to be one of the world's most distinguished automotive brands with a rich history, highly identifiable styling (for the most part), and English pedigree – now with American (Ford Motor) parentage.

For the Jaguar of Tampa dealership, JGA, Inc., in close collaboration with Illuminating Concepts (IC), has created a sophisticated, theatrical setting not at all typical in car showrooms of any ilk. Visiting the 33,120-square-foot dealership is more like an “event” in viewing, purchasing, or servicing an automobile. “Unlike most retail, the challenge was not how to make the product a star, but rather how to highlight its star quality and create an appropriate setting – a habitat that implicitly brings to life the brand message,” says Ken Nisch, JGA Chairman.

By the same token, the JGA/IC design team made sure that the environment was not one that projected “conspicuous consumption” – you’ll find no Austrian crystal chandeliers or blindingly polished marble floors here. It is a refreshing change from the gaudy and ostentatious “Auto McPalaces” or the generic glass-box, fluorescent-lit car showrooms that line so many American roadways (especially in Florida!).

(click on pictures to enlarge)



(Scott Stephens/Illuminating Concepts)

Aston Martin Jaguar of Tampa: passers-by turn into the parking lot to watch the "show."



(Laszlo Regos Photography)

The setting creates a more welcoming, hospitality-based approach to the sales process.

As Nisch explains it, “These days, while it may be acceptable to be consumptive, it is clearly not acceptable to be conspicuous. In dealing with a product that carries the image and associated economics of a Jaguar automobile, a degree of ‘casualization’ helps develop a sense of comfort and relaxation on the part of the potential consumer: ‘It’s about the style, not the status’.”

Seeing the dealership more as a campus, the natural landscape of the property – from a running stream to numerous live oaks – was preserved and enhanced to act as an informal and gracious backdrop for the display of automobiles. Generous curves within the landscape allow the customer to flow from one area of the campus to another, with the focus always on the main building. The setting allows a more welcoming, hospitality-based approach to the sales process. This tactic influenced everything from the nature of the exterior auto displays to the main showroom and service modules.

One enters the double-height showroom through a pair of over-scaled, crafted wood paneled doors accented by curved extruded stainless handles, contrasting the adjacent steel-framed windows. The interior is what one might call “eclectic contemporary” that combines earthy with high-tech. Industrial metal mesh scrims and stainless steel display panels – and the sleek, clean lines of the cars themselves – play against leather-like caramel stained concrete floors, dark stained timbers, a mix of crafted and eco-influenced furniture, and a large tropical aquarium that fills one wall.

“Clearly the arrogance of space, both floor space as well as volumetric space, is only possible because of the price point of the vehicle itself,” Nisch says. “This suggested an approach that lets the customer view the product virtually in the round, isolated from other vehicles. The chain mail scrim device became the ideal solution, allowing a degree of transparency where the space wouldn’t feel too confining, overwhelming, or distracting.”

Inside, the theatrical lighting and audio system is fully automatic and day-of-week/time specific. During business hours, a variety of scrolling and colored patterns, overlaid with brand logos, are projected across the mesh screens and interior architecture. “Our goal was to engender the same emotion of excitement generated at the larger auto



(Laszlo Regos Photography)

Sales interactions can also take place on a series of porches and terraces surrounding the main building.



(Laszlo Regos Photography)

Visitors enter the showroom through a pair of over-scaled, crafted wood paneled doors accented by curved stainless handles.



(Laszlo Regos Photography)

The waiting and reception areas offer a mix of crafted and eco-influenced furniture and carpeting in soft shades of tan and khaki; the caramel stained

shows during the unveiling of a new car,” says Ron Harwood, IC Principal and Creative Director. “Typically, these events are shielded from the public and reserved for the international press. This has never made any sense to us as the consumer is the ultimate target for any new release.”

These series of three-dimensional effects creates a dynamic, textural backdrop (and ethereal brand enforcement) for the vehicle displays within the double-height volume of 24-foot ceilings. After hours, the system switches to "show mode," providing a much more animated and vibrant series of looks to attract passers-by. At 11 pm, the lighting switches to "off" mode, leaving only enough fixtures turned on to illuminate the showroom vehicles. The modes can be changed by IC designers through an Internet connection to the dealership for special event lighting for parties and model launches. (Take two minutes and visit IC's [video](#) (PC and Mac versions) of Jaguar of Tampa and see it in action!)

An expansive collage of mesh panels that forms a transition between the sales and back office windows overlooking the showroom floor accentuates the dramatic scale of the space. Sales interactions can also take place on a series of porches and terraces surrounding the main building where there are seating areas and service drop-off points. The customer waiting areas include an exterior patio, a flat-screen television, Internet-ready workstations, and an extensive display of retail products.

“Using the environment as an embodiment of the brand, the scale, sculptural quality, and classic design provided a great leverage point for the Jaguar showroom design by letting the automobile speak for itself,” says Nisch. “Other luxury industries are migrating away from pretension in terms of the obvious brass, marble, and crystal to a much more substantive approach – a sense of volumetric luxury versus a mere veneer of luxury. I characterize the experience as savory versus gourmet.”

Client: Aston Martin Jaguar of Tampa  
Client Team: Elder Automotive Group: Irma Elder, CEO, Tony Elder, Robert Elder, Co-presidents  
Design Firm: JGA, Inc.  
Structural & Building Design/Engineering: Tondelli Engineering, P.A., Tampa, FL  
Lighting Design: Illuminating Concepts, Farmington Hills, MI

concrete floors lend a feeling of richness.



(Laszlo Regos Photography)

Customer areas include a large tropical aquarium, a flat-screen television, and Internet-ready workstations.



(Scott Stephens/Illuminating Concepts)

The lighting and multi-media system creates a variety of scrolling and colored patterns, overlaid with brand logos, that are projected across the steel mesh screens and interior architecture.



(Laszlo Regos Photography)

The chain mail scrim acts as a filter for independently displaying the distinctive luxury vehicles.

General Contractor: Canco General Contractors, Inc., Tampa, FL  
Photography: [Laszlo Regos Photography](#); Scott Stephens/Illuminating Concepts

Since 1971, **JGA** has evolved to become one of the nation's leading retail design, brand strategy, and architectural firms. The firm's expertise is in balancing space planning, brand identity, imaging, graphics, and merchandising. JGA clients include Audi, Jockey, Hot Topic/Torrid, J. Jill, La-Z-Boy, The North Face, American Museum of Natural History, Ripley's Aquariums, Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, Hershey's, Avon, and GNC.

**Illuminating Concepts** is recognized as a pioneer of turnkey "immersion experiences," environments that saturate visitors with an array of enticing elements. For 22 years, the firm has provided clients with solutions for architectural, theatrical, and retail lighting, audio systems, water features, and special effects. IC's branded software system, MediamorFX™, provides the artificial intelligence required to fuse each of these elements together automatically, essentially allowing Architects and Owners to tailor an environment to meet ever-changing needs.

**Additional Project Resources:**

Tile: Crossville (porcelain); American Olean (ceramic); Azrock (vinyl)

Carpet: Durkan Commercial Carpet/Karastan

Laminates: Formica; Wilson Art; Nevamar

Solid Surface: Corian

Wallcoverings: Seibold & Associates; Essex 54 Dynamic Finishes

Furniture: Herman Miller (systems furniture); Room & Board; Design

With In Reach; Smith & Hawken; Restoration Hardware; Shelby Williams

Wire Mesh Fabric: Cascade Coil Drapery

Lighting: Targetti; Peach Tree; Zumtobel; Boyd; North Star; Day Brite;

Gardco; High End Systems; Lutron; Tannoy

Audio/Speaker System: Tannoy

Aquarium: Sea- Era Aquariums

Paint: Benjamin Moore

Millwork: Price Cabinets

**See also:**

[Adventure in Style: The North Face Beverly Hills by JGA, Inc.](#)

and

[Custom Cuddles: Pawsenclaws & Co. by JGA, Inc.](#)



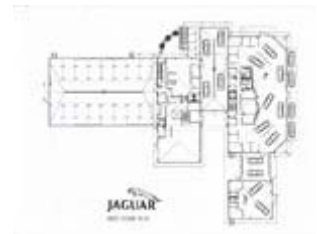
(Scott Stephens/Illuminating Concepts)

The three-dimensional effects projected on the metal mesh screens provide a kinetic, theatrical backdrop for the vehicles.



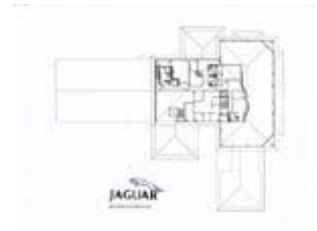
(Scott Stephens/Illuminating Concepts)

The lighting and audio system is programmed to switch to different modes depending on the time of day.



(JGA)

First floor plan



(JGA)

Second floor plan