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## MIX MASTER

LittleMissMatched puts tweens in charge

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By Steve Kaufman, Editor at Large



LASZLO REGOS PHOTOGRAPHY, BERKLEY, MICH.



# KNOCKING THEIR SOCKS OFF

The first store for the LittleMissMatched brand tunes into the psyche of tween shoppers with "anything goes" encouragement.

**LittleMissMatched**, a new retail brand with a novel approach, believes there's a time in most girls' lives when they feel the freedom to follow their muse. According to Jonah Staw, co-founder and ceo of Miss Matched Inc. (New York), that time of creativity and self-expression occurs in their tween years, when they're beginning to free themselves from the opinions and dictates of their parents but have not yet fallen into the herd mentality that plagues many teenagers.

So they dabble. "Have you seen kids mixing their drinks at a fast-food restaurant?" asks Ken Nisch, chairman of JGA Inc. (Southfield, Mich.). "They hold their cup under one fountain, then under another. They like to experiment." Adds Staw, "Tween girls are half-kid, half-grownup. So we needed something that was both 'mom-approved' and 'kid-loved.'"

The brand's name itself contains all the ingredients you need to know about the concept: Its target

#### **Opposite page**

LittleMissMatched was founded on the idea that tween shoppers like to experiment and have fun with their choices.

**Above** The disc-shaped cashwrap counter is meant to invite conversation and consultation between shopper and sales associate.



**Above** Graphics throughout the store are big and colorful, imploring young girls to have fun.

**Right** Flip-flops and other pre-packaged merchandise fill the walls, but there's not a single pair of matched items.





customer is a little miss and the merchandise is mismatched, but only in the most charming way.

So matched pairs of socks – or gloves or mittens or pillowcases – are not permissible. Some of the merchandise is prepackaged. But much of the rest is in bins, bowls and troughs, so shoppers can pursue their own individual whims.

The brand launched six years ago in department and specialty stores like Nordstrom and FAO Schwarz. But when the company, bolstered by private equity from Catterton Partners (Greenwich, Conn.), began expanding from brand to retailer and developing a store design, it needed to be appropriately whimsical. (Or, as Staw is fond of saying, an “anything-goes philosophy that knocks people’s socks off.”)

Staw enlisted brand consultant Adrienne Weiss Corp. (Chicago) and store design firm JGA to create a shopping environment that balanced the playful-

ness of the brand with a hard-headed strategic effort to appeal to LittleMissMatched’s target shopper. There’s also merchandise for boys, men and women but, as the sign above the door says, it’s the little miss who’s getting the attention.

In the brand’s first store, a 1017-square-foot space in Downtown Disneyland (Anaheim, Calif.), colors are bright, graphics are inviting and merchandised areas are placed around the store to cater to what Weiss calls the demographic’s “pinball activity”: They’ll bounce around the store from one area to another, touching everything and doubling back.

The fixtures themselves were designed to encourage this touching. A “sock rocket” full of prepackaged merchandise is a dominant vertical element. Another fixture, called the “mixing bowl,” has nearly floor-to-ceiling eye appeal, but the key ingredient is a bowl full of loose goods allowing shoppers to bring

**Above** Dominating the sales floor is the “mixing bowl,” featuring a trough full of goods where the shopper can dig in and handle everything.



**Above** The revolving "sock rocket" vertical fixture places merchandise within reach of both the young shopper and her mother.

the fun of the dressing room into the center of the store to make their own mismatches. Other fixtures are topped with foot forms that invite shoppers to test their own combinations of socks. They can also mismatch gloves and accessorize with scarves, leg warmers, flip flops, skirts, backpacks, notebooks, change purses, etc.

The cashwrap – a series of disks rather than a counter – was designed to invite sharing with the employee standing alongside the customer, commenting on her choices and making recommendations.

"Too often, adults see shopping as a chore," says Nisch. "But the tween shopper is expecting a fun experience and that's what this store delivers." ▲

Visit [VMSD.com](http://VMSD.com) for an exclusive interview with Miss Matched ceo Jonah Staw.

#### PROJECT SUPPLIERS

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Miss Matched Inc., New York

**DESIGN**  
Adrienne Weiss Corp., Chicago

**DESIGN**  
JGA, Southfield, Mich.

**LIGHTING**  
Lighting Management Inc.,  
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