

Things Remembered: A Chain Retailer Goes Boutique

THINGS REMEMBERED, based in Highland Heights, Ohio, opened a new prototype store in July 2007 in Akron, Ohio's Summit Mall. The 1,573-sq.-ft. store was designed by JGA, based in Southfield, Mich. The personalized gifts retailer's goal was to create a new store environment exuding warmth and charm—and increase customer browsing time by creating the look and feel of a series of boutique shops.

By focusing on a series of vignettes and presentations, organized by type of recipient (bridesmaids, business associates, or male/female, for example) and by occasion (wedding, anniversary, new baby, life milestones, and others), the intent is to help customers find new gift ideas—and unique ways for personalizing them.

BRIDGING TWO MANAGEMENT TEAMS

In late 2006, the chain was acquired from Cole National Group, a subsidiary of Luxottica Group, by Gordon Brothers Group. JGA's design work on the prototype project bridged the acquisition. "During the process, many things changed. The new management team revised adjacencies concepts, space allocations, and organization of the store, with a focus on product presentation as well as personalization," explains Ken Nisch, chairman of JGA. Although the first prototype provided a good operational foundation for the project, the new management team's focus on products and presentation provided more freedom for the design team.

The new emphasis was on a lifestyle environment with inviting graphics and wall features that "framed" individual gift collections. Finishes such as wood floors and indirect lighting contribute to a welcoming feel. Materials and finishes in a palette of silver, sage, driftwood gray, and slate provide a textural and natural background for the colorful graphics and the retailer's products.

The modular perimeter fixturing system, built by Leiden Cabinet Co., Twinsburg, Ohio, utilized new finishes and new components, including tall bookcase fixtures that jut out into the store to divide the space



Photos: Hanson Photography, Cleveland

into "rooms." In addition, the fixture package placed more emphasis on vignettes and categories. Also added were round nesting tables to hold seasonal products, vitrine-style pedestal tables, and metal etageres. Dress forms with cut-away niches, provided by New York-based Lifestyle Inc., hold a variety of gifts and small objects and contribute to the homey, boutique character of the space. Lewisville, Texas-based Chippenhook, provided the risers used in and on the fixtures.

MOVING QUICKLY

Due to the changes implementing during the retailer's management transition, not only was the pace of this project fast, but

A Charming Prototype

JGA's design of the new Things Remembered prototype included:

- Moving the focus from an architectural focus to modular pieces that create flexible "rooms"
- Creating new fixture components, built by Leiden Cabinet Co., including tables, etageres, and jewelry cases, that present gift ideas organized by occasion and by recipient
- Integrating a completely redesigned graphics program, from the retailer's new ad agency, which included store graphics, catalog, and web site, as well as more colorful packaging
- Creating boutique-like touches including forms, with cut-away niches to display small products, from Lifestyle Inc.

some changes were implemented in stores that were already being built, even as the design continued to evolve.

The project moved so quickly that, as Nisch says, "Technology was too slow—we didn't have time to create CAD drawings for everything, so we reverted to the proverbial back-of-the-napkin drawings."

"There were times when prototyping and decisions were made on a daily basis," says Nisch. "It really helped that Leiden could mock things up quickly and drive prototypes over to where the retailer had set up a series of vignettes in their warehouse for testing, condensing the decision-making process to just a few weeks."

Things Remembered currently has more than 600 locations in 48 states. The new design is currently in 27 stores, with 39 planned by the end of the year. 🌈

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