

Creating Authenticity

Consumers seek authenticity with the experiences they crave in retail environments.

Greg Lyon



CenterCal's Silverdale Trails in Silverdale, Washington, is designed with the nuances of the local market in mind.

For years now, the commercial real estate industry has been inundated with news that brick-and-mortar retail is in danger. It's no secret owners and developers alike are in need of new and improved ways of capturing the attention of shoppers who rely on e-commerce for their everyday needs. A variety of strategies have been implemented in centers throughout the country, all of which ultimately point back to how the center is designed to meet the needs of local consumers.

It is widely understood that shopping center design plays a significant role in driving foot traffic to retail destinations. Beyond the tenants themselves, a well designed center has the ability to entice shoppers to leave their homes and computers to browse in-store. The impact of retail design is further amplified when it caters to the personality of its local com-

munity. Rather than the retail destinations of decades past, which are often contextually detached from their surrounding areas, shoppers and guests are looking for environments that clearly speak to the distinct lifestyles and aspirations of their communities.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to designing a shopping center that resonates with the surrounding population, as a number of factors must be considered. It is critical to recognize these considerations must go beyond mere demographics. Rather, owners and developers should be closely examining whether a center is "authentic" to its region. In other words, the personality, values, attitudes, interests and lifestyles of local consumers must be integral to the design of any successful center.

THE TRAILS: MAKING A CASE FOR PSYCHOGRAPHICS

The effectiveness of catering to a specific area through authentic retail design is likely best displayed through a study of The Trails, a new retail center in Silverdale, Washington. Under the direction of the client, CenterCal Properties, the design of The Trails moves beyond the prototypical open-air retail center and pushes the market sector into new territory, resulting in a project that warrants the retail industry's attention. This establishment provides guests with an unparalleled culinary, boutique and entertainment experience. Through careful consideration of the region's uniqueness, Nadel was able to create a center that serves as much more than a retail destination. The 200,000-square-foot project is a gathering place for the community, where locals can spend time in an immersive environment that meets their specific needs. This was achieved by



The architect worked collaboratively with the developer, environmental graphics and landscape design teams to create a cohesive look for Silverdale Trails.

working in a deeply collaborative manner with not only the environmental graphics and landscape design teams, but the client as well. All teams were present at the onset of conceptual design to create a retail destination that would not only emanate the special qualities distinctive to the Pacific Northwest, but also convey a feeling of being within the nation's most hip and vibrant main streets.

The team knew that to create a truly distinct, authentic and successful design it had to speak clearly to the individual lifestyle of the region, creating an environment both contemporary and highly Pacific Northwest in spirit. With the soon-to-be shopping center a few miles across the water from the Seattle headquarters of e-commerce leader Amazon, the team also knew there was significant work to be done.

In order to better understand the profile of a Pacific Northwest shopper, particularly one residing in the greater Seattle suburbs, Nadel considered psychographics. As a result of this analysis, Nadel found that, on the whole, Pacific Northwest shoppers enjoy the outdoors, are dedicated to sustainable living and are drawn to authentic architectural environments that are youthful and edgy without compromising sophistication. The team also noticed local shoppers preferred an active lifestyle, swapping cars for biking and walking when possible.

This information on local consumers became the filter through which all design decisions were explored and made. In practical terms, this meant the design

of The Trails needed to be honest, avoiding any contrived, artificial or unrealistic design aspects, such as faux second floors and spandrel glass. If a wall was to be constructed of concrete block, then it should look like concrete block in the finished design. Integral to the project was creating interest and complexity by exploiting the functional components of the design. Additionally, there was great care taken in bringing the outdoors to the center, offering spaces where shoppers can relax and enjoy nature amidst a shopping and dining experience. Finally, recognizably sustainable design elements and materials were incorporated to mirror the values of the intended target shopper.

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Seamlessly transitioning from indoor to outdoor space was a major goal of the design for Silverdale Trails.

BRINGING MAIN STREET TO THE SUBURBS

There was also research done regarding trends in Main Street boutique retail, and new trends in the space were implemented throughout the project to meet the client's goal of bringing a hip, urban retail experience to the suburban retail center. For example, many Main Street retailers are revamping the traditional storefront entry experience, trading it in for glass roll-up doors and thereby removing the barrier between indoor and outdoor space, store and streetscape. Ultimately, this allows for a more fluid experience for guests.

To mimic this at The Trails, the project team incorporated roll-up glazed industrial doors that open the entirety of the retailers and restaurants to the pedestrian zone and common areas. This theme was continued through the creation of outdoor rooms between inline shops. Flanked by the roll-up doors, these outdoor living rooms have hearths and casual seating in addition to other amenities such as free Wi-Fi. They further blur the line between indoor and outdoor covered space, resulting in a rich guest experience.

While these concepts are seen along many of the great shopping streets throughout the United States, they are still

rarely executed in shopping center design, contributing to developments becoming detached from what is occurring within primary retail markets.

COLLABORATIVE DESIGN AT THE FOREFRONT

The traditional process of creating an architectural design, in which each consultant acts independently of the others, can often result in arbitrarily placed signs and disconnected landscaping. Unlike that strategy, the process used for The Trails created a more connected, immersive and sophisticated relationship between architecture, signage and environmental elements.

The approach was a success. Throughout the project, minimalist architectural forms give way to articulated canopies and custom storefront entries of rich materials. As the architecture, environmental graphics and signage were designed in unison, the buildings truly function as a canvas for integral signage. In some cases, custom signage is literally painted on the building itself, a result that could only occur through these teams working together from the beginning of the concept phase. With the landscape design team a part of the process from the outset, it allowed the rest of the project partners to think strategically about the relationship between

landscaping and other project elements. This brought about seamless transitions from indoor to outdoor space, with fully integrated outdoor rooms and amenities. Altogether, the process produced an authentic, immersive guest experience, resulting in a more engaging shopping center for businesses and shoppers alike.

AN INTEGRATED AND EFFECTIVE RESULT

The Trails exhibits the best in emerging trends for the open-air retail design market sector. The design process led to a successful and distinctive result, from the serious consideration of the local psychographics to heeding the most current trends in Main Street retail design through to taking a collective, collaborative conceptual design approach between the architecture, environmental graphics and landscape design teams. Projects such as The Trails will begin to inform retail destinations across the country, giving rise to environments that speak to and reflect the communities in which they reside. **SCB**

As an owner, design director and principal of Nadel Architects, Lyon currently represents the firm in the retail/mixed-use sector, strategically driving business growth, as well as creating a strong market presence and brand equity for Nadel.