



Store design

By Ann Baker-Keulemans

Store design is vital to the success of any retail space. From customer comfort and shopping flow, to ease of delivery and shelf packing, a store's layout and design has to work.

It's always in a state of slow but constant flux, though – as consumer behaviour and buying patterns change, so too should the arrangement and composition of your store.

However, keeping your layout fresh, relevant and contemporary, without disturbing or upsetting the consumer experience, is a necessary balancing act. Your shoppers might say they are excited by your store's



The key to the consumer's **HEART**

new layout – and really mean it – until they can't find something where it used to be. This means that signage is key to helping your customers adjust to any changes in your store, while lighting, flooring and finishes, till placements, the height of your shelves all affect the consumer experience as much as where you situate your products within a store.

A store's design guides and informs the shopper, making the experience easier and more efficient, while also encouraging impulse buys and 'shopping with their eyes'.

Signage matters

Big, bold, easy-to-read signage is a must. No shopper wants to spend precious time searching for the correct aisle, counter, or department. Keeping things in their line of sight can be overlooked as shelves get stacked higher and promotional banners cover the store. You can have the sleekest signage imaginable, and it won't do any good unless it can be seen and understood



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by consumers of all shapes, sizes, and abilities – it is critical to keep factors such as the first language of the majority of your shoppers, wheelchair accessibility or sight-impaired consumers in mind when planning your in-store signage.

Wider aisles work best

Aisles are better when wider. Shoppers loathe being inconvenienced, so ensure even the unruliest of trolleys can make it around any corners and that two distracted shoppers can pass each other safely in the aisle. A wider aisle also allows your shoppers to browse in peace and gives your merchandisers space to work.

Keeping queues under control

Smart planning and the careful positioning of salespoints and tills are necessary to create a better queueing experience, as well as cater for as many till points as is necessary for your customer base. Queues that back into the store space can severely disrupt shoppers who are still busy. And don't overlook the frustration of insufficient unpacking space at the cashier (often caused by too many displays on the counter). Ensure you provide enough room for shoppers to park their trolley in front of the cashier while also providing enough space to unpack their goods and make payment.

Smaller store formats

When the focus is on providing convenience, some retail groups are seeing the benefits of downsizing. According to Checkers, customer demand for



At the opening of Checkers Foods Franschhoek: Gesie van Deventer, Mayor of Stellenbosch Local Municipality; Reuben Riffel, Chef; Aviwe Malanga, Checkers Cashier; and Pieter Engelbrecht, Shoprite Holdings CEO.

Take a virtual tour around Checkers Foods Franschhoek here: <https://www.shopriteholdings.co.za/articles/Newsroom/2022/checkers-top-quality-food-franschhoek.html> ▶

Checkers supermarkets in their neighbourhoods has inspired a new, smaller format Checkers Foods. In their press release announcing the opening of Checkers Foods at the Weltevreden Park Shopping Centre in Roodepoort in November 2021, they say, "The new 1 200m² Checkers Foods store boasts an expanded fresh food offering with solution-based convenience ranges curated to meet specific customer needs, including lunch, braai, dinner or emergency purchases." Checkers has now also opened their first Checkers Foods in the Western Cape, with a 1 000m² store launching in Franschhoek in April 2022. The store has a unique look and feel "designed to honour the style and charm of Franschhoek and the architecture of the building in which it is located."

The store includes freshly prepared sushi, exclusive brands Forage & Feast and Simple Truth, a meat market with free-range chicken and restaurant-quality steak, a bakery with artisanal breads, fruit and vegetables, a wine and cheese cellar, fresh flowers, Starbucks and a Money Market counter.

In a similar vein, local company TDC&Co. (www.designcompany.co.za) unpacks their work on Checkers Hyper, saying their main objective was to "challenge the status quo and develop a fresh approach to the large format store experience."

Understanding that each department is an independent entity, resulted in each area having a signature look and feel, and created an interesting artisanal market-style design. Although the finishes



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and signage for each department are different, to reflect this independence, the use of similar materials treated or aged in different ways, and a harmonious colour palette, ties everything together.

Meanwhile Checkers FreshX concept stores offer an emphasis on fresh food and convenience. Checkers says, "Customers can also look forward to an improved layout – including wider aisles and seamless floors that allow trolleys to move with limited noise. Unlike traditional Checkers stores, the FreshX concept stores feature more upmarket furniture and signage – including benches and tables for customers to test samples."

Smaller format versus larger format stores

Smaller-format stores located within suburbs and catering towards a very specific customer base harken back to the convenience and corner stores of the past – albeit on a new and improved level. As consumers find a new work-life balance post-pandemic, the desire for more intimate shopping experiences that can be completed quickly – on the way home from school or work, or during a mid-morning work-from-home break – becomes the norm. Consumers love shopping local – but they expect more.

A survey from YouGov conducted in 2021 shows some interesting data on store size preference. The survey, which spanned 17 markets, shows that people prefer smaller grocery store formats to larger ones in most markets. This sentiment is strongest in markets such as India, Mexico, France,



Good lighting, wider aisles and clear signage are not only functional, they also add to the overall look and feel of a store – in this instance, clean, uncluttered, aesthetically pleasing, and easy to navigate all come to mind.

Image courtesy of Lotus Fresh, Head Architecture and Design Ltd.

Poland, and Denmark, where more than two in five people agree they prefer smaller grocery stores. Larger format stores tend to be more popular in places such as the UK, Sweden, Australia, China, and Singapore – where people are more likely to disagree that they prefer smaller grocery stores to larger ones.

In Germany and Italy, people seem split on the topic and perceptions of smaller versus larger stores are closely divided. However, this is also age-dependent, as many younger consumers polled in the survey said they preferred larger stores.

In an article for Rosseto Serving Solutions, Mark Dunson at Chain Store Age says, "To remain competitive, many retailers are exploring new, smaller store formats with a wider variety of fresh and prepared food offerings." He believes this is in

response to the growing consumer demands for convenience, as well as fresh produce.

Design decisions – what to think about and what not to forget

Chriselda Kistnasamy, Marketing Manager for store design and shop fitting services experts TCK Retail Solutions, says, "As consumers, we buy with our eyes first. Design can encourage shopping or hinder it. How many times have you walked into a shop and walked out simply because the experience of shopping was frustrating? Layout and design are of utmost importance when it comes to attracting and retaining customers. At TCK we use a system to enhance the flow and design of the space. Store design is one part art and one part science."

When it comes to store design, some things





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tend to get overlooked. Kistnasamy explains, “People often forget to consider positioning the right display products in the right places. We call it Retail Design Strategy and Visual Merchandising – a combination of interior designing, formulated store layout, brand management and signage essentials – and it can be an effective way to drive sales. Retailers also need to consider using display units and counters that are both efficient and good looking to start with, instead of relying on ‘window dressing’ after the fact. Lastly, lighting and signage are crucial to good design and are both often afterthoughts.”

For stores that need a design makeover, the real challenges are budget and downtime. For Kistnasamy, retailers looking to design a new store or revamp an existing one need to incorporate three basic principles: every design must work to elevate sales, improve functionality, and add value to a store. She says, “As a store owner, your store design should give you these three things in addition to looking good.”

Colour coding and the impact of colour on consumers

As strange as it may sound, colour therapy (or chromotherapy) is a recognised holistic therapy. This is because colours, and even shades within a particular colour, can evoke certain feelings and responses. Your colour palette can also say quite a bit on a social level. Bright and bold colours are assertive, modern, and edgy – think lime green, fire engine red, canary yellow, teal, tangerine



Green roofing in Vancouver, Canada.
Image courtesy of Building and Decor



Natural colours are more calming and convey a sense of maturity.

orange, bubblegum purple. Natural palettes are more calming and convey a sense of maturity. Earthy tones convey a sense of “local and organic”,

whereas brighter hues tend to signify the exotic and convey energy. The temperature of a colour, whether it is warm or cold, can also affect people and the way they think and act. Warm colours convey a cosy atmosphere, while cool colours portray a clean and modern look.

A store designer who understands chromotherapy and the meaning of colours can provide expert advice for choosing the best colours for your store. For example, red can encourage action, orange can stimulate enthusiasm, and yellow can engender feelings of happiness. Green means balance, and blue, serenity. How you pair and complement the colours you choose can also have an effect. It’s a science, and one that shouldn’t be ignored. From a practical point of view, once you have chosen your palette, be sure to examine it closely under different kinds of natural and artificial light to avoid any unwelcome surprises.

Creativity versus practicality – design trends with a purpose

There are a number of exciting design trends on the horizon. Some make excellent sense from a practical and a functional point of view, while others are aimed at attracting customers using more emotive methods, such as how a store feels, its atmosphere, and the overall customer experience. There are also shorter-term trends that can provide some in-store excitement.

Ghost kitchens spring to mind – a trend that has made its way into Walmart Canada. Restaurant brands partner with the retailer to provide



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a one stop mealtime offering, with online and walk-in ordering making its way into some retail outlets to promote specific brands).

In-store dining

An in-house food prep area dedicated to fresh food made for customers has the potential to encourage longer shopping trips and more browsing, provide a space for consumers and their families to snack, or sit and take stock. More comfortable, inviting retail spaces are growing in popularity.

The creation of relaxing and sociable spaces

Many retailers embracing free-flowing perimeters with clusters of market-style displays such as cheeses, baked goods, wines, and deli areas. According to Rosseto Serving Solutions, ...

“ Design and architecture magazine Dezeen spotlighted a grocery store in China called Lotus Fresh. Designed like an open market, the supermarket is further enhanced by open ceilings and a set of store graphics that incorporate clear hand-scripted fonts in Chinese and English. ”

Lotus Fresh, which has 70 locations in China, rebranded to attract customers in big cities like Shanghai and the Pudong area. That store’s designer, Head Architecture, later was awarded the title of Most Influential Design Agency in Greater China.”

That’s quite the sell, and it’s easy to see why. A market-style design makes it much easier to



Images courtesy of Lotus Fresh, Head Architecture and Design Ltd.

wander and browse the produce, be enticed by new or unexpected offerings, and make impulse buys. It can be somewhat frustrating for shoppers looking for a speedy exit, but the number of options on offer in this style of set-up can outweigh that.

“ Psychologically speaking, retail spaces that encourage lingering, and eating or drinking, can drive further sales as a fed shopper is a happy shopper, and happy shoppers tend to buy more. This is also true of hungry shoppers caught by the scent of fresh food ... two birds, one stone. ”



Patterns at play – how floor design works

How store designs are utilised, and even mixed-and-matched, can be a source of innovation and creativity.

- The grid layout is the most common, the most familiar to shoppers, and provides maximum



display space with minimal empty space. Wide aisles encourage browsing, and gondola ends at the front of the store provide a changing landscape of speciality items and promotions that are hard to ignore, and which can be used to attract new customers, depending on how much of the store can be seen from the entrance.

- A herringbone layout is an adapted grid for much smaller floor spaces. While it maximises the available space, it does reduce product visibility from the front of the store and can cause a small space to look even smaller and more cramped.
- The loop is not particularly popular locally, although a good example is hardware and home store Leroy Merlin, although it is not a strict loop, per se. Shoppers are guided along a single main channel through the entire store, which means they have to walk past every department, but this can be frustrating during peak periods as too many shoppers going the same way can cause something of a logjam effect.
- Free-flow designs are relatively new for the local market and are less predictable. The grouping of products produces an open market effect, but this style of design does take up a lot of space and consumer movements are much less predictable.



Most important, is the customer experience. Is your store laid out intuitively, with product groupings that make sense while also subconsciously guiding consumers to consider additional unplanned purchases? Are your displays appealing, eye-catching, and placed for the greatest effect? Is your store easy to navigate? And ultimately, are you geared to making the best use of your space for maximum sales and customer satisfaction?

Trends to watch

The designer word of the moment is disruption. By disrupting the norm and disrupting traditional ways of thinking, store designers are hoping to intrigue and attract consumers with store concepts that

meet their needs while also playing into the desire for a truly superior shopping experience. When everything can be bought at the click of a mouse, shoppers need a reason to go in store.

It should be noted that while change can drive sales (confused shoppers buy more while searching for the products they actually came for), this can be an annoying tactic. Introduce change gently, and if you are making a big change, give loyal customers plenty of warning. And while not every international trend translates well on South African shores, what we're seeing is innovative, challenging, and even titillating. Building and Décor (www.buildinganddecor.co.za) introduces us to several trends they expect to see in the near future.



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Ways to save

With energy costs rising and food retailers looking to improve the shopping environment for customers, Insulated Structures has developed an effective solution to reduce the cost of in-store refrigeration while enhancing the customer experience.

Insulated Structures doors are easy to retrofit on in-store cabinets to reduce the energy required to keep chilled foods at the correct temperature.

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● Brand storytelling

The power of storytelling has long been used by brands to sell their products. Moving this in-store and utilising the same tactics to highlight brand values and core tenets that answer consumer demands can help attract and retain customers.

● Interactive shopping experiences

In order to compete with the ease and convenience of online shopping, retailers are having to be quite creative when it comes to their in-store experiences. This also needs to happen in a space that feels safe, comfortable, and welcoming – no easy feat when customers expect to be able to taste, touch, and smell what they are buying, safely.

● Technology

This is dependent on a store's target market and demographic, as for many South African consumers, overt and advanced technology can be off-putting, overwhelming, or utterly foreign. For others, the latest and greatest tech is a big draw, from QR code competitions to contactless shopping and digital coupons, to name a few.

● The power of social media

Social media is pervasive and effective, and its effects cannot be escaped or ignored. The power of social media is significant, particularly for tech-savvy and younger shoppers. Investing in an innovative, interactive, responsive, and effective social media team is vital for a retailer's success. Use your social platforms to showcase your store's design elements, innovative layout, and beautiful displays.



● Natural lighting

Natural lighting, or the effect of natural lighting, is a mood enhancer and can enhance the aesthetic appeal of certain products. It also allows consumers to get a more realistic look at what they're buying. Alcon Lighting recommends 4 000 to 4 500K bulbs for a natural lighting effect, which is "optimal for retail dressing rooms and grocery stores".

● Wayfinding for floor designs

Not just a pretty floor layout– specific designs can be used to subtly direct the flow of movement and guide shoppers around the store.



Images courtesy of alconlighting.com



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Basic store design mistakes to avoid

Last but not least, here is a list from spc-retail.com of basic store design mistakes to avoid.

Choosing the wrong floor plan. This will confuse your customers and even stop them from coming back to your store. **The solution:** Choose a layout for your type of business, size of store and customer expectations.

A complex or disorganised layout. Your customers will feel as if they are in a maze, have to work hard to find what they want and distract them from their shopping goals. **The solution:** Think logically about your floor plan and navigation signage. Bring in some outside feedback from customers and ask them about their experience. You'll be surprised at what they say!

Too much merchandising space. Too much space means you have to keep all those shelves stocked. **The solution:** Rather give your shoppers a little more room to get around the store and browse the shelves.

Lack of design cohesion. Too many diverse elements will detract from your ambiance, brand image and overall shopping environment. **The solution:** Design elements that run through the store will pull it all together.

Lack of flexibility in design and displays. This will result in store boredom and a feeling of stagnation. **The solution:** Even long-term design needs a little shake up now and then. Making minor changes will keep your store engaging. Use tables, platforms, shelving, and other displays that can be changed as required.



Image courtesy of spc-retail.com

Blocked sightlines. Already mentioned, but worth another. Blocking a customer's view with tall displays will not help them to figure out where to go next in your store. **The solution:** Look at the eye level of your customers – tall and short. What do you want them to see as they enter and exit? Use shorter displays towards the front of a sightline path and taller displays towards the back.

Overcrowding with point of purchase material. Having too much point of purchase material in aisles blocks access and makes customers want to leave the area so they don't contribute to the blockage. **The solution:** Use appropriately sized displays that don't block the flow of traffic and limit point of purchase displays to keep aisles free of clutter. **SR**

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Foundation of KK Engineering

1968

Registration as a company

1981

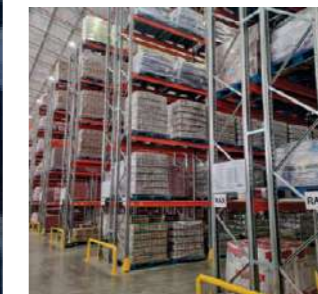
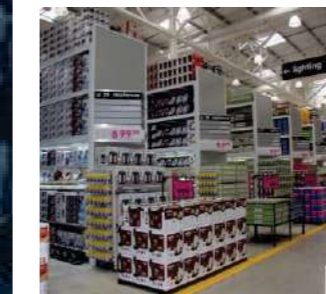
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2018





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