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**a** Painted blue walls and blue laminate fixture panels define the ground-floor casual collections area at Liz Claiborne's London flagship on Regent Street.

**b** Colored glass mosaic tiles behind the cashwrap are one of the surfacing "gems" MOVK created for the store. Designers wanted to define the retailer's look through interesting materials rather than simply graphics.



# London Britches

*Innovative materials mark Liz Claiborne's European flagship*

**HOW DO YOU TAKE A SUCCESSFUL RETAILING CONCEPT** across the pond? For some European retailers debuting in the U.S., a big, splashy store on New York's Fifth Avenue is the only way to make an impression (read: H&M). But for retailers going the other way – taking a classic American brand to Europe – the same rules don't always apply.

When Liz Claiborne decided to open a full-line store in Europe (it already had successfully introduced vendor shops in British department stores), it chose a modest-sized space in an up-and-coming location – London's Regent Street – and looked to designers at MOVK (New York) to create the look. "American brands are more popular and getting more space in [European] department stores," says MOVK principal Mark Oller (the MO in MOVK). "So Liz really needed to bring its presence to a higher level."

That higher level is a two-floor, 3000-square-foot space that feels more like someone's tastefully designed home

than a mega-brand's European flagship. But the intimate space has its advantages. Oller says, "We wanted to get people to spend time in the store and feel at ease. We didn't want to create a temple, but something that would appeal to the consumer."

## BRAND EVOLUTION

According to designers, the store's look is an elevation of the new vendor concept MOVK designed for the New York-based retailer, but with a more refined materials selection (like real terrazzo flooring) and an emphasis on feminizing the brand. According to MOVK principal Victoria Kirk (the VK), "Bringing in both light and color, giving the store a more playful edge, was the driving force behind the design."

**To draw customers to the stairway at the back of Liz Claiborne's London store, designers created an atrium-like mezzanine level. A false wall and backlit bronzed, aluminum-framed windows add visual interest.**





Customers enter on the ground floor, where the casual collection for women 25 to 35 is housed. Blue chips in the white terrazzo flooring enhance the store's millennial look. Opaque-white glass chandeliers direct customers to the back of the store.

For one, Liz wanted to put its younger "casual" collection on the ground floor, even though the upper level – what Londoners call the "first" floor – actually had more square footage. Further, the store's long, narrow footprint necessitated a strong visual element that would draw customers to the back stair and up to the first floor. So MOVK created a bright, open mezzanine level at the back of the store, where a stair leads up to the first-floor "career" collection.

Oller says that before Liz moved in, bad windows at the back of the building overlooked a not-so-nice courtyard. Now, a false wall with backlit windows gives the illusion of natural light without the view.

But the building's age also offered some advantages.

Designers faced a number of challenges transforming the former travel agency into a modern, inviting space that would attract the 25-to-50-year-old women who shop there. (Zara is a close neighbor.)

For example, designers retained some of the building's original detailing on the first floor (such as coffered ceilings with crown mouldings) to create a more traditional look in the career collections area. On the ground floor (where the detailing had been stripped), MOVK recreated the detailing with a modern abstraction that is more appropriate for the casual collection.

#### **SURFACE AND LIGHT**

A key element of Liz's new look is the use of interesting surface treatments. Proprietary materials, such as quartered gray elm, titanium glass and glass mosaic tiles, bring texture throughout the space while subtly reinforcing the Liz brand. "We wanted to create something more proprietary through materials and less through imagery," says Kirk, "to start defining Liz's spaces by something other than its ad campaign." Though graphics are integral in attracting customers to Liz's vendor concepts, Oller says in a flagship store, "you know where you are, so you don't need a lot of photography thrown in your face."



**Furniture, carpeting, a seating area and soft curtains mark the first-floor career collections area. The traditional look of a coffered ceiling with crown moulding complements the product line.**

Designers say white terrazzo flooring and blue-tinted walls on the ground floor create a youthful, contemporary look. "Floating" box shelves lined in blue laminate also identify the casual collection. And quartered gray elm fixtures create a common link from ground to first floor.

The career collection is marked by refined materials and residential cues, like seating and soft curtains. Here, golds and oranges give the space a softer feel. Glass mosaic tiles on both levels (light blues and greens on the ground floor, golds on the first floor) are a "punctuation mark, a nice little surprise in the store," says Oller. "We wanted to make Liz

more playful by introducing elements of color that are not only feminine but add a dynamic to the space."

But the store's mix of ambient and spot lighting keeps the space open and inviting. Rather than creating a "generic white box," MOVK used perimeter lighting throughout to make the store softly glow. White opaque acrylic chandeliers running the length of the ground floor create drama, while acting as directional beacons to the mezzanine. And spotlights add punctuation in the ceiling.

Designers say that since its June 2000 opening, the store is doing better than Liz had ever predicted. Brad Lenz, vp of store planning and construction for Liz Claiborne, says the company is pleased with the outcome of the design and shop, but mum's the word on the retailer's next step. ❖

**Design Team:** MOVK, New York – Mark Oller and Victoria Kirk, principals; Robert Nassar and Ricardo Marquez, design team

**Outside Consultants:** Tienda Ltd., Gratham, England (architect of record/plumbing engineer); Rodgers, Clark Lander Ltd.,

Leicester, England (structural engineer); Cold Control Services Ltd., Alton, Hants, England (mechanical engineer); Dudley Bower Services Ltd., Grantham, England (electrical engineer)

**Carpet:** Harbinger, Atlanta

**Custom Glass:** Bendheim Architectural Glass, New York

**Display Lighting:** Modular & Reggiani, London

**Fabrics:** Angela Brown, New York

**Flooring:** Architectural Systems, New York

**Metalwork:** Peerless, London

**Textured Wood:** Artecture Plus, Toronto

**Upholstery:** Bruno Triplet, London