

FINISH FIRST

Consider materials and finishes early in the store redesign process, say Keith Kovar and Ruth Møllergaard (with Sarah Yates).

WITH SO MANY materials and finishes to choose from, you can't leave these decisions until after you've signed with a contractor. They warrant a more detailed discussion.

Today's flooring has to be durable, attractive and environmentally friendly. Natural wood floors create simple elegance and, unlike plastic laminate wood floors and ceramic tiles, will absorb sound — like the clickety-click of heels. Carpet is another favorite. Like good wine, wool carpets age gracefully and develop a rich patina with time. Continued advances in fine-gauge tufting technology have made nylon fiber carpets an increasingly sophisticated alternative, with wonderful patterns and color options, costing an average of \$15 to \$50 a square yard. As carpet tiles or broadloom, it offers good appearance retention, durability and ease of maintenance. Low- and medium-pile carpets comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and emit no volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

"Perhaps best of all about carpet is that it provides a luxurious appearance while acting as a cushion of support for staff on their feet all day," says Mark Nagler of Atlas Carpet Mills, a manufacturer in Los Angeles.



FINISHED. To pull a the look together on-time, it is critical to consider finish materials at the outset.

Technology has also enriched paints with texture. Christian Bernard stores use encausto, or hand-troweled plaster, for their sophisticated European look. Metallic paints are used as neutrals: bronze, gold, steely metal and the coppery green known as verdigris are top choices.

The major paint companies are continuing to develop "green" paint with zero or low VOCs, which dry without releasing solvents into the atmosphere and the acrid after-paint smell into your store's environment.

"Today's 'green' paint is durable; you won't have to paint as often. You can apply it while people are inside the space; customers can return to a newly painted store without being

upset by the paint odor," says Steve Revnew of the Sherwin-Williams Company.

If you want to walk on the wild side of virtual reality, choose computer-generated wall covering customized to produce whatever faux environment your designer and you choose. Fabric-wrapped walls provide a rich backdrop of texture and sound absorbency. Like carpet, these wall coverings need proper installation. Look for an installer with a track record.

More than any other design element, the allocation, style and finish of your showcases establish your look as a contemporary, fashion-forward or family-focused retailer. Showcases will also be one of your biggest expenses, costing an average of \$200 to \$800 per running foot for standard cases, dependent on your choice of material and the additional customization in laminate, finish, veneer and molding. Custom cases cost at least twice the price.

Familiarize yourself with your options online. Would pear wood, black and white or brushed gold look better in your store? Good planning and experience produce a combination to suit your budget and maximize your space, without crowding. Your designer will

also advise you about the type of glass you need and the security options.

"As a jeweler, my first decision would be based on my customer and the jewelry's price point," says Gregory Lowe, president of TECNO Display in Hayward, CA. "A high-end case selling fashion jewelry is a little like a Rolls Royce at your son's baseball game. A VW might be more appropriate. Lower priced doesn't mean cheap looking, but cases must be properly made because they see a lot of action."

Inside the cases, fluorescent light is the most common light source; it doesn't heat up and it casts no shadow. LED lighting rails in showcases offer sparkle with no heat. Their cost is about 2-1/2 times that of fluorescent.

A minimum of two months is needed for cases to be built,

delivered and installed, even for standard cases. You pay an up-charge and a bonus-shipping bill for less lead time, and you run the risk of opening without your cases.

Before you select a manufacturer, ask your designer for recommendations, and check references personally. Choose a company based on the quality of case that it builds in addition to its ability to deliver.

Your in-case props and displays need to be ordered as soon as you've ordered your showcases. Leatherette is still the primary material but softer suede materials (like Ultrasuede or Charisma) and exotic wood trims or paint, utilized as an exotic veneer or faux finish, provide exciting alternatives. Some designers customize props for in-case display with paint. Back-painting on acrylic, for instance, reflects a color or logo through

its various facets, bringing platform systems to life.

"You want to maintain the integrity of your store design while ensuring that your coordinates work to get the best results," says Steve Kidwell, vice president of display at Chippenhook.

Designing and building a jewelry store is a complex and exciting process. Like a colorful three-dimensional puzzle, it requires that all the pieces fit in the right place at the right time. Be cool. You, your designer and/or architect plus your contractors can make it all happen.

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LINETIME

WHAT TO SAY AND WHEN TO SAY IT

I know a saleswoman whose customer's order got messed up. She called the customer right away and announced,

"I just heard what happened. I'm on my way over so you can shoot me."

She then brought her customer a box of her favorite donuts. Her quick thinking, humility, and the sweets softened the blow and got the relationship rolling again.

SOURCE: Michelle Nichols, "Savvy Selling" column in *BusinessWeek.com*; see savvyselling.com for more.

