

Michael K's Urban Path

A wavy pathway illuminated with LED lights moves customers through the store. An overhead conveyor works to the same effect.

For The North Face, for example, the design team (Tobin+Parnes designed many of the individual shops) included an "element" room that features a wind machine and rain system. The shopper can test run different jackets by stepping into the "storm."

The shops and other departments are presented in a high-tech, futuristic environment. The dominant material is metal and it can be seen in nearly every format: smooth, hammered, burnished, raw, painted and stressed.

"The metal shell is the major element that brings the disparate vendor shop elements together," Tobin says. "It gives the store an identity without taking anything away from the vendors."

A department store for hip urbanites. That's Michael K, a new retail concept in downtown Manhattan. Pulsating with music, video and light, the two-level, 22,000-sq.-ft. emporium has an over-the-top look and feel.

"It's a total sensory experience," says Carol Tobin, principal, Tobin+Parnes Design Enterprises, New York City.

Conceived as a one-stop shopping destination, Michael K is devoted to

sportswear brands that resonate most loudly with its 17- to 35-year-old clientele: Nike, The North Face, Sean John Blue, Puma, Polo Jeans Co. and Ben Sherman, to name a few. A total of 22 brands are featured, each in its own in-store shop. While the spaces are in keeping with each vendor's prototypical shop design, many also have features unique to the location.

"We asked the vendors to take everything up a notch," Tobin says.

Light, image and sound are in constant play throughout the store. A total of 200 video screens are featured, from large projection screens to plasma monitors and LCDs.

"There is music everywhere, motion everywhere, as well as light, color and excitement," says Tobin+Parnes' Vlad Zadneprianski, who designed the store with owner Haim Kedmi.

One of the crucial design elements is the flooring, which pulls customers