

**MICHAEL K. STORE DESIGNED BY TOBIN+PARNES, OPENS IN SoHo, NEW YORK**

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*By Marianne Wilson*

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.

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."

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 through the large space and past the various shops. The main flooring consists of a heavy-duty glazed ceramic tile in a beige and black pattern.

"The floor is done like a wavy, yellow brick road," Zadneprianski explains. "It starts at the front door and takes customers all through the store."

Small video screens and pulsating, colored lights are inset in the floor at various points. An LED border on either side of the pathway pulsates with light.

The flooring in the vendor shops runs the gamut from stained concrete (Nike) to vinyl (Puma). The majority of the shops use a diamond-plate metal floor that has been distressed with black paint.

Theatrical lighting adds a club-like feel to the space. A variety of techniques are used, including color-changing LED lights, strobes and laser lights. A programmed light show washes the floors, walls and ceiling store in color throughout the day. The club feel is enhanced by a DJ booth and a fog machine.

There are five checkouts. Each one has a touchscreen where customers can access product and store information, watch videos and take a virtual tour of the store via a computer-generated 3-D model.

A moving overhead conveyor runs through the space. It carries display cubes that hold unique or hard-to-find items and also offers display possibilities to vendors.

Landmark: Michael K is located in a landmark building, which presented some major challenges. An existing skylight inside the retail space, for instance, was designated a landmark element and could not be touched. Rather than ignore it, the designers placed color-changing LED lights behind it.

In another challenge, the floors above Michael K are residential.

"To prevent the sound from escaping above, we created a state-of-the-art soundproofing system," Zadneprianski says, "with extra layers of insulation in the walls and ceiling."

Opened in August, Michael K has been performing well, says Kedmi, who owns the store with Miron Schwartz. The partners also operate 12 specialty stores in the New York metro area under three banners: Active Warehouse, Transit and Sports Lane.

"With Michael K, we're adjusting things as we go along," says Kedmi.

One of the items that could well change over time is the mix of in-store shops.

"These are not leased spaces," Kedmi says. "So we are free to ask a vendor to leave at any time."