

PRODUCT NEWS & DESIGN SOLUTIONS FOR STORE PLANNING & VISUAL MERCHANDISING

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Ideas

Mazda revs up its dealership design

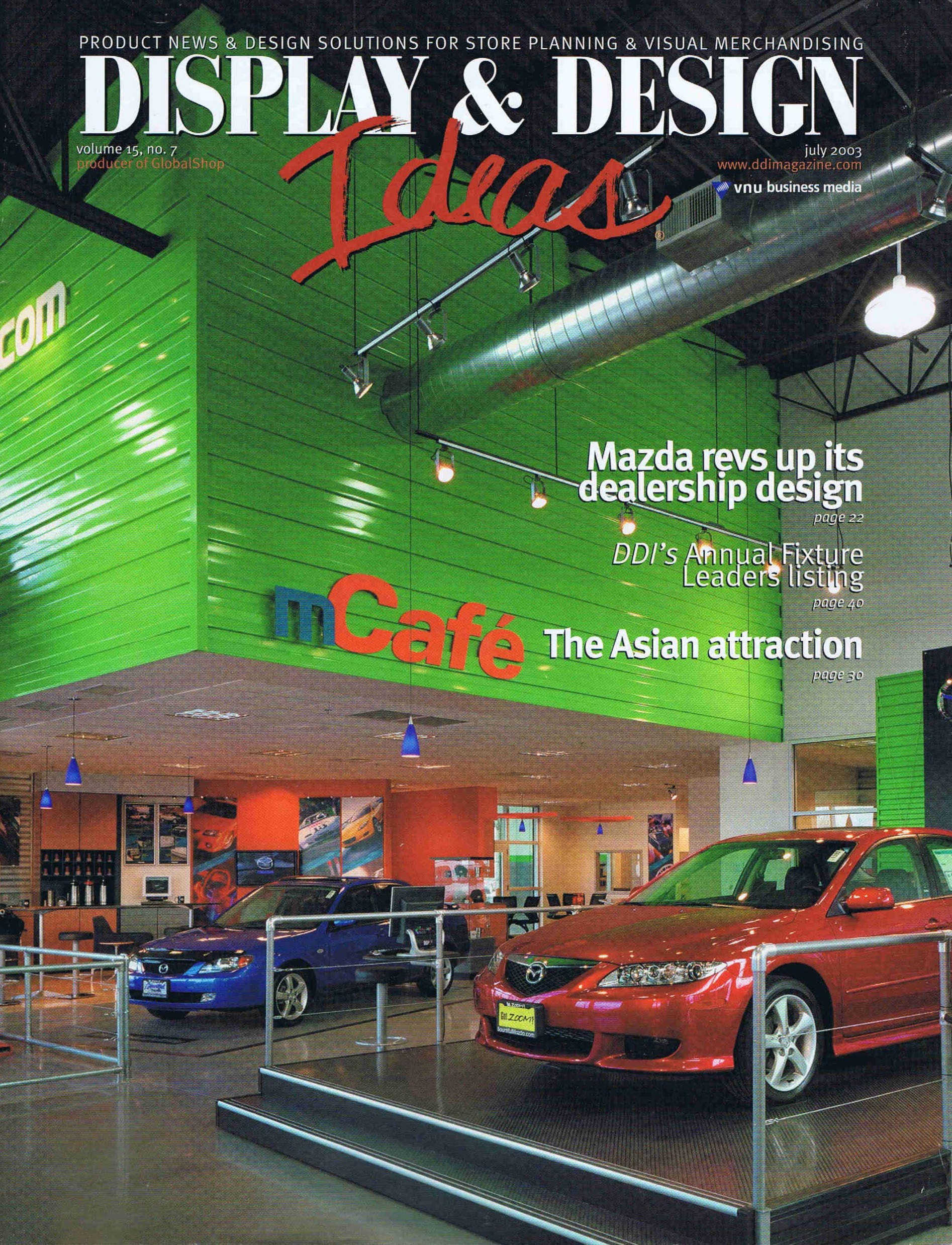
page 22

DDI's Annual Fixture Leaders listing

page 40

mCafé The Asian attraction

page 30





The Asian

Design trends turn to Asia for inspiration

By Gareth Fenley, Contributor

Designers of everything from fashion to interiors have been looking to the East for inspiration lately. The influence of Asian cultures, especially China, suffuses many of the most trend-setting designs of recent years. Nearly every top fashion designer has featured Asian touches in fashion collections this year. "I like the idea of bringing a modern geisha to life, creating a new dimension of femininity," says fashion designer Roberto Cavalli. His "Chinoiseries" collection blends Oriental styling with sexy sophistication using provocative bustier-dresses using Chinese prints such as flowers, dragons and ideograms. For Gucci's kimonos and Oscar de la Renta's embroidered dresses and coats, silk is the material of choice. The merchandise mix in stores includes tops with mandarin collars, jackets with frog closures, side-slit tunics and pull-on, pajama-type pants.

In architecture, designers are creating environments for contemporary Asian products and cuisine that pair traditional Asian motifs with Western design.

The recent Roberto Cavalli "Chinoiseries" collection is among many top designers' Asian-influenced fashion lines. Cavalli says his goal is "bringing a modern geisha to life." Photo courtesy of Roberto Cavalli

Attraction



Pearl River in SoHo, designed by Traboscia Roiatti Inc., interprets the floor planning of Chinese homes with portaled courtyards.

This year in Manhattan, a 20,000-sq.-ft. Asian emporium opened at 477 Broadway between Broome and Grand streets. Pearl River, previously located in Chinatown, moved their shopping experience to SoHo. The two-level store is packed with over 10,000 SKUs ranging from traditional clothing to home furnishings and kitchenware from China, Japan, Korea, India, Thailand, Indonesia and other countries.

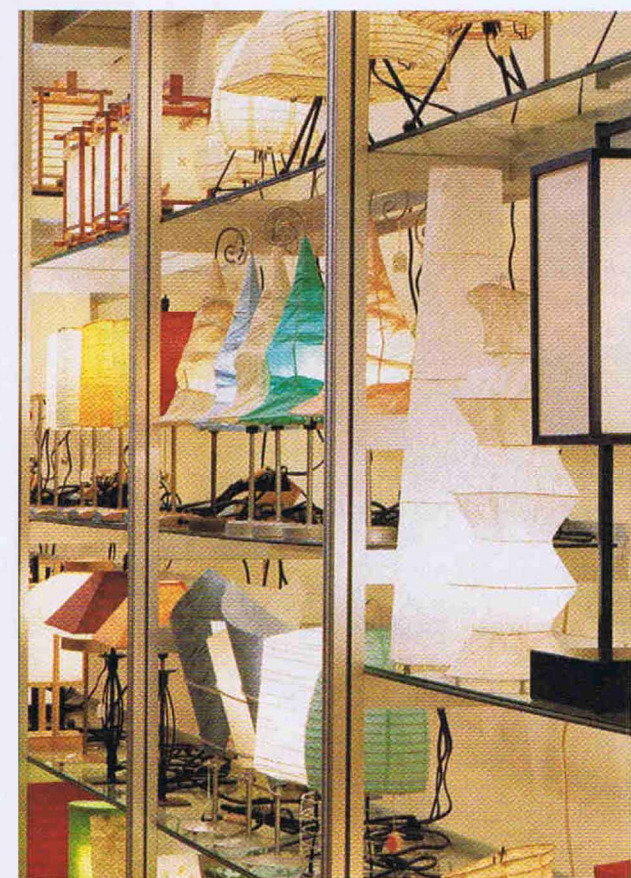
"The product defines the Oriental character of the whole store," says architect Caterina Roiatti, principal, Traboscia Roiatti Inc., New York. "The contemporary envelope was the best way to showcase this project. The Oriental reference was in the floor planning of the store, with a reference to Chinese houses that have courtyards in the middle, which are used as multifunctional spaces." Pearl River has four courtyards with large portals opening into them, loosely based on Chinese entry portals. Roiatti says that the scale of the 15-ft.-high portals was important because they serve as visual elements to guide customers through the busy space. Another key element

is a 15-ft. waterfall fountain located in the center of the main floor, which incorporates zigzag patterns that resemble Japanese symbols for water.

Pearl River is located in a landmark building, so restoration was a major objective in the project. Brick and cast iron were cleaned and restored, as were the tin ceiling and original maple floor. A new staircase of steel, patinated to look similar to cast iron, was designed to encourage shoppers to descend to the cellar level.

Although the owner, Ming Yi Chen, brought in used fixtures for the cellar, he built out the main floor with all new fixtures. Roiatti specified the Rakks shelving system made by the Rangine Corp. of Millis, Mass. "We wanted to have very neutral fixtures that would not create conflict with the merchandise," Roiatti said. "We had no idea what it was going to be and where it was going to go."

Rangine Vice President David Greenberg explains that his company cooperated closely with the architects. "They had used our products in other projects, and they decided our system would be part



Asian merchandise is offered at Pearl River on a neutral shelving system with horizontal surfaces of glass.



Photo: Ken Hayden, London



Photo: Scott Frances, New York



Left: London's Hakkasan presents Chinese cuisine in an interior designed by Paris-based Christian Liaigre, who incorporated traditional Asian motifs into a modern lounge and dining area. Top right: Architect Richard Meier floated striking red banners with Chinese ideograms over this 44-ft.-long dining table at New York's restaurant 66. Bottom right: Prada's SoHo store reopened this spring with a new Asian-inspired interior and includes a new wallpaper design that depicts a Chinese stadium filled with spectators holding individual cards to form the image of women with uplifted arms.

of the general aesthetic for Pearl River," Greenberg says. "They had computer renderings, and we used them to mock up full-scale prototypes."

Most of the shelving used is glass, but each set of shelves has one shelf made of Trespa solid surfacing material. "The material is very durable, and it comes in a variety of colors," says Roiatti. "Mr. Chen kept asking for colors. The edge is naturally black, which in some way looks Oriental, like a lacquered edge. The fixtures were very easy to use and assemble, and they look unique. We wanted something new and fresh that doesn't look like nearby stores."

Elsewhere in New York, Asian design influences the interior of the restaurant 66, located at 241 Church St. on the ground floor of The Textile Building. The restaurant offers traditional Chinese cuisine as interpreted by Chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten. New York architect Richard Meier created the interior, designed as an open space with large frosted-glass panels that separate intimate dining areas. Guests enter the lounge and dining area

through a 12-ft.-tall curved, frameless glass wall. A frosted, glass wall and fish tanks separate the dining area from the kitchen. Meier worked with lighting designer Herve Descottes to create ceiling coves that conceal all the lighting in the restaurant.

A spectacular 44-ft.-long communal table is surmounted by silk banners depicting Chinese ideograms in red that hang from large square coffers recessed in the 12-ft.-high ceiling. The long table and all other tables in the restaurant are made of resin that glows like jade with stainless steel bases.

Another contemporary Chinese restaurant that has been making design news is Hakkasan, one of London's most fashionable new dining spots. Owner Alan Yau selected Parisian interior designer Christian Liaigre to interpret his design goal of "bringing back the dragon," creating a distinctly ethnic but modern interior. Liaigre responded by translating traditional Chinese motifs such as lanterns and screens into contemporary design language.

The main entrance is decked with lotus flower

motifs, and the handrail of the stairway leading into Hakkasan incorporates Chinese characters. The lounge has marble-topped tables inspired by "dream stones," traditional decorative panels made of semi-precious stone. Dragon images from the Qing dynasty were worked into a circle and embroidered on taupe leather covers for the banquettes. The central dining area is enclosed in sculpted wooden screens, most of which were purchased at antiques dealers in Beijing.

In a final nod to Asia, an Oriental touch is now featured at the Prada Epicenter store on Broadway and Prince Street in SoHo. The store reopened this spring featuring new changes to the famed Rem Koolhaas interior. Chinese mannequins, both old and new, are a central attraction of the project, which is dubbed "Parallel Universe." Also included in the new look are wallpapers, digital stills and art installations. And Prada has been no exception to the fashion trends of the year—many items in the recent fashion collection had Oriental motifs, bringing the yin and yang of East and West together in perfect balance. 