

# Design directions

Stephen Roberts lists the things to remember when developing retail centres



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**W**hile the basic design principles remain constant, it is the local issues that remain a challenge. That is why it is essential for any architectural firm to have local presence in the area they plan to work in.

## CONSUMER PSYCHE

Retail design is far from static, it changes not only with the times, but also with the location, the local community it serves, the size of the centre and the tenant mix. Since India is a nation of such social diversity, the first challenge is to understand the psyche of the clients and future customers of the particular town or city in which the centre is to be established. One cannot safely assume that the correct formula for Mumbai will necessarily be the same for Chennai or Bengaluru.

## CLEAR DELIVERABLES

Whether the requirement is for a mega mall or a convenience centre, it is imperative to ensure that the deliverables are clear. This may seem obvious, but since retail design is still relatively new to India, one finds that prospective clients are not always familiar with the finer issues that can make a difference between a successful

centre and a white elephant. A retail centre is not simply the traditional street centre with a roof over it. You cannot simply put a few thousand feet of retail area together and expect a thriving centre. It is first necessary to understand that success means success for all the interested parties — from the client, who wants good returns on investment, the retailer, who wants a profitable turnover, the customer, who wants a pleasant shopping experience, to the local authority, who are in-

terested in a centre that is both attractive and traffic friendly. In the development stage of retail projects, the inclusion of property managers and leasing agents, who both understand the finer points of retail development and the local market, is a great benefit.

## HIGH REAL ESTATE COST

A particular challenge in designing for the developer is the high cost of land, which forces the developments to be multi-level, with the parking on basement or upper decks, which adds to the capital cost, negatively affecting the viability and forcing higher rentals. International retail designs usually have two levels, with the parking all on grade. However, here, there is a need to adapt to the multi-level designs, which are made easier by the popularity of the cinemas and large food courts that provide the bulk for the upper levels.



Developers often fail to see the benefits of well-designed parking areas

## PARKING SYSTEMS AND CONSTRUCTION TIME

It is somewhat of a challenge to convince some developers of the need for well-designed parking areas, with good ingress, egress and circulation. Automated parking areas are a definite no-go for retail centres. Customers need the convenience of easy parking to contribute to

the whole feeling of a satisfying shopping trip. Another challenge facing retail development is the speed of construction, due to two factors — the necessity for parking basements and the high labour content as opposed to more modern forms of construction. Parking basements always take time depending on ground conditions. Using buckets to haul concrete up two storeys and manual moving materials through the site is time consuming. When developments get to site, there needs to be a construction programme that is detailed to the n<sup>th</sup> degree to avoid unnecessary delays in delivery.

Budgets and cost control are other challenges that are unique to India. The use of professional cost consultants, otherwise known as 'Quantity Surveyors' would, in my opinion, be of great value to any project. To begin the project with calculated costs, including land costs, professional fees, municipal fees, rentals, interest charges and returns, eases the request for finance and enables the investors to sleep easier. ■

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