The fifth in a series of super-regional value and entertainment-oriented super malls, Grapevine Mills, just north of Dallas, opened to excitement and fanfare. The first mega-mall of its kind in Texas and the Southwest, it already has impressed thousands of shoppers with its variety of discount retailers and its “entertainment zone,” 60,000 square feet within the 1.5 million-square-foot mall of indoor space replete with restaurants, movie theaters and visual displays that could rival the best nightclub.

In fact, to achieve such a high-energy space within the mall, Grapevine Mills' owners, The Mills Corporation, hired a design firm that specializes in entertainment venues such as clubs and restaurants to create the most elaborate entertainment zone within a Mills mall to date.

“They wanted out-of-the-box thinking, so we looked for fresh concepts and the materials to carry them out,” said Turner Duncan of Duncan & Miller Design, the Dallas-based firm that created the look for this part of the mall, which includes a 30-screen AMC movie theater and themed restaurants such as the Rainforest Café.

Unlike the retail area, where the surroundings should not compete with the stores for customers' attention, mall owners wanted to bring the customer into a different mood and thought pro-
The ceiling system seems to float effortlessly above shoppers, creating a distinct visual.

The owners wanted to bring the customer into a different mood and thought process within the entertainment zone. The challenge was to create a design for the ceiling, corridor and floor that would excite and thrill customers.

This effect was achieved with what could be described as a huge light and sound show. High definition television monitors display constantly changing customized programming. Audio sound tracks run in sequence with the visual images that trip from one monitor to another down the corridor. Theatrical lighting, including “gobo” fixtures—lights that project images through patterned templates—and moving lights keep color and light reflecting and shifting off the floor, walls and ceiling.

“Because the mall’s flat ceiling is 24 feet high, we knew...
we had to bring it down to a more human scale, break it up and find a way to reflect the light show off of various surfaces,” Duncan said. “The forms we used became very important because they would be an integral part of the space and its composition. We wanted a surface that was easy to create and install and was relatively lightweight.”

Duncan & Miller looked at various ways to create that system, including the use of fiberglass, fabric and plaster forms. They liked the ways they had seen USG Interior’s specialty ceiling product, the CURVATURA™ 3-D Suspension System; used in other applications, and determined it would meet their multiple needs.

“We found we could hang CURVATURA anywhere,” Duncan continued. “It’s flexible and easily moved when the mall’s needs change. It was easily hung among the ceiling joists and light fixtures, and provided a great reflective surface for the lighting system. The system also provides a distinctive visual indication overhead when the mall is crowded that this is the entertainment zone.”

Duncan & Miller took advantage of the system’s variety of panel materials, grid colors and three-dimensional designs, including the perforated aluminum, stainless steel mesh and translucent fiber-reinforced plastic panels and grid in orange, pink and stainless steel. The
firm configured them in several ways, from flat, 12-by-16 rectangles to 12-by-18 weaves and gently arcing curves.

According to Duncan, all the materials were standard; nothing had to be custom ordered.

The firm had acoustical contractor Integrated Interiors (Fort Worth, Texas) hang the panels at various heights, mingled with other large forms such as colorfully painted boxes, spheres and hooded light fixtures.

In the end, mall visitors are being wowed from head to toe—by the ceiling, light show, themed restaurants or intricate design of the stained concrete floor beneath their feet.