A POINT OF PRIDE

Anning Johnson Creates Art Store’s Colorful, Curvy, Complex Walls and Ceilings

Upon entering Artcraft Collection’s new Reston, Va., store, the eyes of many visitors focus first on a green, hour-glass-shaped ceiling. Sculptured monkeys dangle from this cloud, along with halogen spotlights that illuminate furniture below and artwork and crafts displayed on the store’s orange, green, purple and baby blue walls. Drawn by color and light, customers’ eyes glare at the thousands of art wonders available for sale.

But eventually, store geometry turns gazes gently back from the art and
toward some yellow circular ceilings, an orange jagged wall, an undulating purple backdrop. And on the eyes go—moving from ceilings to products, from products to walls and from walls back to ceilings—in an endless sensory cycle of art, light, color and shape.

Artcraft Collection President Jay Winer gives no thought to his customers being too mesmerized by the store to buy its merchandise. Customers will keep coming back because Artcraft Collection, he says, has engineered a powerful space.

Designing the store was one thing, but building it was another. What was it like working on such a complicated store?

“This wasn’t a ‘read the drawings and build it’ type of job,” says Jason Roach, project manager, Arming Johnson Company. “We knew we’d be working closely with the architect on this one.”

“Wow” Factor

Artcraft Collection sells one-of-a-kind and limited-edition contemporary art, home furnishings and furniture produced by 450 American artisans. The product mix at the 5,200-square-foot store in Reston runs the gamut from tabletop accessories to hand-painted buffets, ranging from $25 to $8,000 per item.

“The store has ‘wow’ factor,” says Winer about his Reston location. “There isn’t anybody who walks inside that doesn’t have this incredible reaction to the merchandise.”

To design the store, Winer, who co-owns Artcraft Collection with his wife Sharyn and son Adam, turned to architect Ron Brasher of DRBrasher Inc., Columbia, Md. Brasher, in turn, lined up Buch Construction, Laurel, Md., a general contracting firm specializing in retail store construction, renovations and tenant fit-out projects. Buch Construction invited only selected subcontractors to bid on the work, and Arming Johnson won the walls and ceilings contract.

Arming Johnson, a division of Anson Industries Inc., is a “big-little firm,” according to Roach. The company’s Lorton, Va., office—one of eight district offices in the country—handles everything from department stores and condominiums to small shops and specialty projects.

The blue ceiling swirl overhead is the perfect backdrop for art and furniture. But this store doubles as a showcase for contractor Anning Johnson’s talent in constructing walls and ceilings.

Roach explains that the architect knew exactly what he wanted in terms of the layout, the shape of the walls and ceilings, and the store’s overall atmosphere and feel. He specified multiple ceiling islands made out of Sheetrock® Brand Gypsum Panels from United States Gypsum Company running on several different planes. The architect, however, welcomed some input on how to pull off the ceilings.

Would Anning Johnson frame out the structures, use a specialty millwork system or order pre-engineered ceilings? What did the architect say?

“He was very open to our suggestions,” Roach says. “From the beginning, the architect and the general contractor made us feel like we were part of a team.”

Creative Approach

How would the curvy ceilings be built? For example, the architect originally thought that one part of the ceiling system—eight, 3-foot-diameter ceilings that cantilever inward from storefront windows—should be framed with wood studs. But Roach says his foreman knew it would be impractical to build such tight ceiling radiiuses using wood. It would have been tedious and expensive and would have made the overhangs unnecessarily heavy.
The creative approach involved using the USG Drywall Suspension System and Compässo™ Suspension Trim from USG Interiors, Inc. Using a pre-engineered drywall suspension system enabled Arming Johnson to avoid building labor-intensive structures. The suspension system simplified the design and made it easy to transition between various ceiling elevations.

Mechanics built 3-foot-diameter ceiling suspensions off the front windows, splaying the hanger wires toward the front of the store to hide them. Using ceilings here and throughout the store allowed Arming Johnson to create uniformity—one system of tees and clips, one manufacturer, one way to gear up for production. Consequently, Roach obtained permission to switch from a ceiling trim brand specified by the architect to another product.

“The best part of this job is we had everything figured just right,” Roach says. “Given our experience with these kinds of jobs, we knew our options and how to price them. We didn’t have a single change-order on the project.”

**Positioning Main Tees**

A critical aspect of the ceiling installation involved positioning the main tees and cross tees of the suspension system so that recessed lighting fixtures, sprinkler
heads and air returns could be placed in the metal grid.

One 15-foot ceiling cloud, for example, has six recessed light fixtures running in a line down its center. This is where the suspension systems flexibility came into play. It has connection holes punched every 8 inches, which allowed mechanics to plan the grid precisely so few of the lighting fixtures, sprinkler heads and air ducts fell where the structural main tees ran.

“We got most of the lighting to work out,” says Roach. “But we did have to cut a few of the cross tees because of the numerous lighting fixtures.”

Building the walls also took time. Many of the store’s back walls curve and undulate, and the framing required extra blocking to support shelving for the merchandise. Some walls had jagged edges, which required the finishers to become artists themselves to achieve a clean, finished, high-end look.

“There’s also a big soffit in the back that’s radiused,” Roach says. It goes from 10 feet above the finished floor to the deck 20 feet up. We built it using a combination of track and studs with drywall grid at the bottom. The soffit was not detailed in the plans. We knew they wanted a radius, but we had to figure out how to build it.”

In the end, the work was completed in about two months. Since the Reston store’s opening, “sales ‘have just been phenomenal,” Winer says.

Roach says his company’s work at Arctcraft Collection finished on budget and helped Arming Johnson fill in time between bigger jobs. In addition, the Reston Artcraft Collection store has become a company showcase of its walls and ceilings abilities and skills. “The huge buildings we do can easily turn into vanilla and drag on,” Roach says. “But smaller, more specialized jobs allow us to pay attention to details and have fun. The Artcraft store is a point of pride for the company,”