

Bringing the 'wow' factor into the mall

Water features are not just confined to leisure parks - retailing destinations around the world are realising the benefits of incorporating them as part of their exciting offerings for shoppers.

Michael Denman, Director of Overseas Operations at Crystal Fountains, an insight into how a water feature can become more than just a focal point within a mall.

Water features are seen as **a vital** enhancement to the shopping experience. Visitors are treated to displays during peak visits **to generate** repeat visits and maximise sales. **As a** result, people often come back again and again to see these performances. There is no doubt that **water fountain** displays encourage the public to stay longer than the industry average of 55 minutes - **and bring more revenue as a** result, to the retail tenants.

Almost without exception, **any new** major retail experience - **whether it be** in Beijing, Abu Dhabi or Chicago - provides dramatic water fountains to draw in the crowds and act as a 'people magnet'.

After all, water is a fundamental part of the culture of every race on earth and being one of the four elements vital to human life, almost every culture reveres water **and sees it as an** essential purifier.

And today's malls are capitalising on that philosophy while at the same time, encouraging the creation of fantastic water features - and equally, seeing the benefits in terms of customer footfall. But let's go back in time.

Islamic gardens

Throughout history, water has had its place in landscape architecture - no more so than in Mesopotamia (the latter day Iraq) which was the cradle of civilisation. Islamic gardens were built by Arabs, Persians, Moguls and Turks - each civilisation offering elaborate gardens with fountains as their centre piece.

Move slightly from the area we see as today's Middle East and look into Europe and especially Spain - Alhambra in Granada - where Moorish architecture incorporated water. Look elsewhere adjacent to the Middle East region (again as we know it today) and towards India and the famed Taj Mahal where water displays are the centre piece of a wondrous tomb built by the Moghul Emperor Shah Jehan for his beloved wife.

As man travels today so he will see water features as important focal points of the countries he visits - and it is in those very ancient monuments that our water features of today have their roots. Man has always been inspired by water - there is an excitement in watching its movements which incites rushes of expectation and instilled enthusiasm. These are two factors which make the advent of spectacular water features within public spaces, especially in shopping centres, which attract spectators.

Getting more extravagant

In the Middle East developers have turned to the elements to enhance their offerings to customers. Water features are not so much the unusual in shopping centres but quickly becoming the 'norm' and, as malls become more sophisticated and attractive so the water features

Sahaheel Waterfront Development, Al Kout Mall, Kuwait





become more extravagant. Indeed, they are seen as a vital addition to the shopping experience. Clearly, where shopping centre owners are prepared to pay upwards from US\$300,000 – and the sky can quite literally be the limit – there has to be a hard business reason for installing such features, particularly as shoppers are becoming more discerning and there are more shopping destinations for them to visit.

Shoppers today cannot simply be identified purely on the basis of demographics and disposable income, there are a whole host of other factors which now have to be taken into account and entertainment is not the least of them. Shoppers want to have lasting memories- they are into experiential shopping and exciting water features contribute to that experience.

Choreographed features

Water feature technology has moved on so much that they can now cater for a whole host of different environments, seasons, times of day and moods. They can be choreographed to light and music and latest in LED technology will create a whole host of new experiences. Their versatility can create still, reflective water pools during quiet periods of the day or night or they can provide a strong aesthetic or dramatic feature with dancing streams and jets and coloured lights for each shopping and family activity.

They can also be an anchor feature for the end of a mall and designed as a 'signpost' where shoppers can identify their bearings. For example, it is common to see water features placed at the bottom of a lift, staircase or escalator to provide a reference point or a resting place.

West Edmonton Mall, Canada



With the massive property boom across the Middle East and especially in the GCC countries, water features are more in demand than ever. In Dubai for example, Crystal Fountains is creating water features for Emaar Properties at several major projects including the Burj Dubai development comprising the tallest tower in the world, the Tower Park Island Park and Lake Promenade –

all scheduled for completion in 2008.

Elsewhere in the Gulf, Crystal Fountains has created striking water features for the Tamdeen Development Company at the Al Kout Mall on Kuwait's waterside Fahaheel Development and has been retained by the same developer on Kuwait 360, a massive shopping centre in South Surra with a gross lettable area of around 60,000 m².

Musical extravaganza

Spectacular internal and external water features have been created at Al Kout Mall. The exterior fountain, located in the lagoon leading to the marina transforms from a elegant feature by day to a musical extravaganza at night, complete with water effects spanning 250 metres at varying heights from 10 metres to a central jet that shoots 45 metres into the air.

The daytime animated shows provide three different programmes while the evening musical extravaganzas work around nine different shows which are choreographed to custom songs developed by a local composer hired by the developer.

By contrast, the Gateway Theatre of Shopping in Durban, South Africa, strikes a very different mood. Installed by the centre's owner Old Mutual Properties, it reflects the natural beauty of the roaring waves pounding the nearby coastline with a giant



interactive water feature 30 metres long and five metres high which, at night, doubles as a musical choreographed show, complete with vertical effects rising 40 metres with colour sequenced lighting.

As a result of the care that is needed to ensure that the right sort of water feature is incorporated into a shopping complex, it is vital that these are planned at the outset and that water feature designers form part of the main project team. After all, it's too late when, halfway through a project, it becomes apparent that the water feature a mall owner may want, is not feasible, that there just isn't sufficient space or it just can't be handled economically or logistically.

The life cycle of a water feature is typically 10 years but there are examples of water features lasting over 25 years – for example, Eaton Centre in Toronto Canada. This particular feature

still excites the crowds with the same equipment that was installed over a quarter of a century ago.

It is clear that water features now provide a key focus in the architecture of modern shopping malls and that they will become ever more creative and exciting as owners seek to create more ways of keeping shoppers happy.

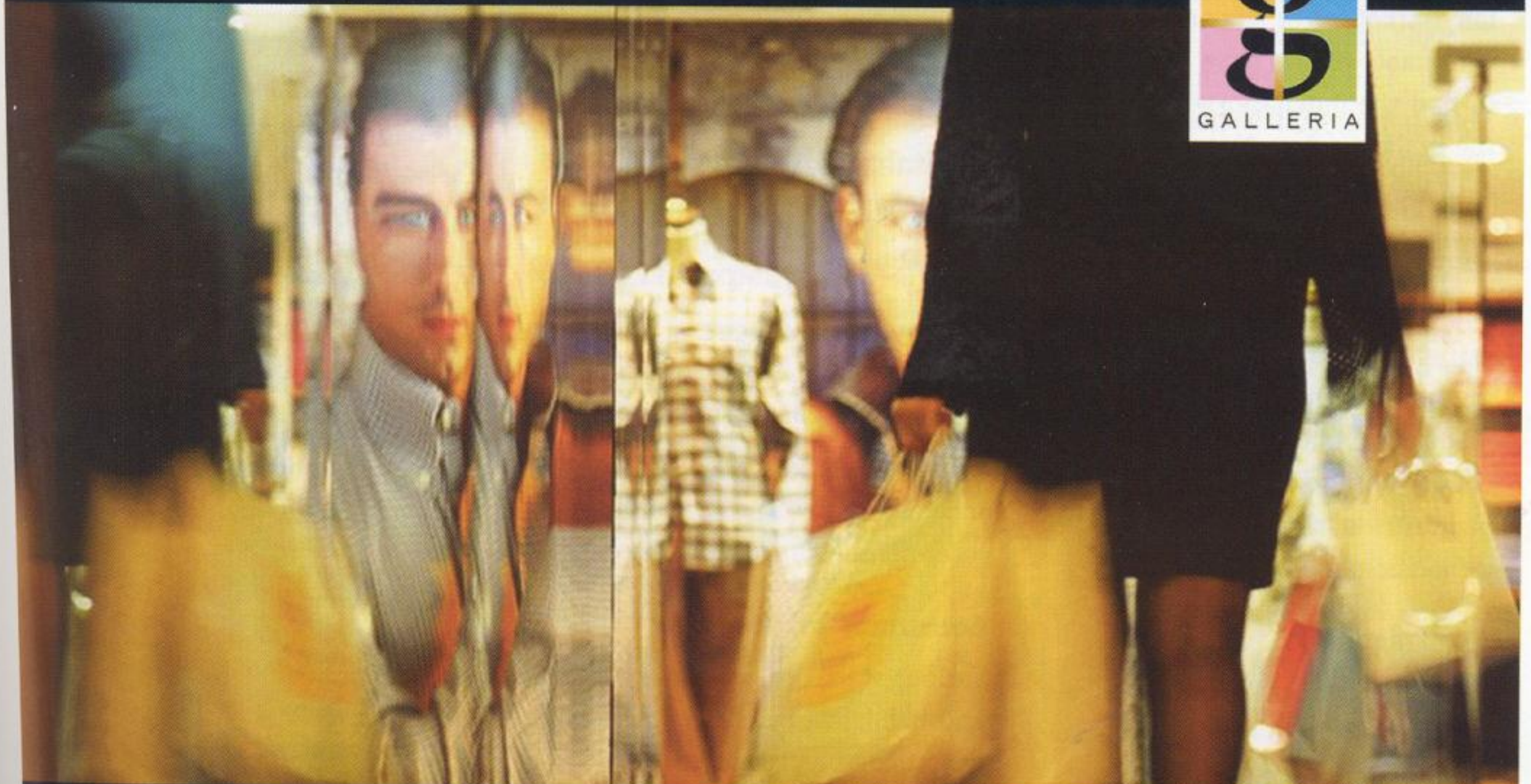
About the company

Toronto, Canada-headquartered Crystal Fountains was founded in 1967 and has since expanded to encompass over 30 countries in six continents.

Although the company's base of operations for North America, Europe, Asia and the Middle East is Toronto, the company has just – at the end of 2006 – opened a regional coordination office in Kuwait City, in response to strong demand for water features in the Middle East.

The new office was launched at CityScape, the International property and development Show which ran in Dubai from December 4-6, 2006. In September last year, a Singapore office was opened to serve clients in South East Asia.

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