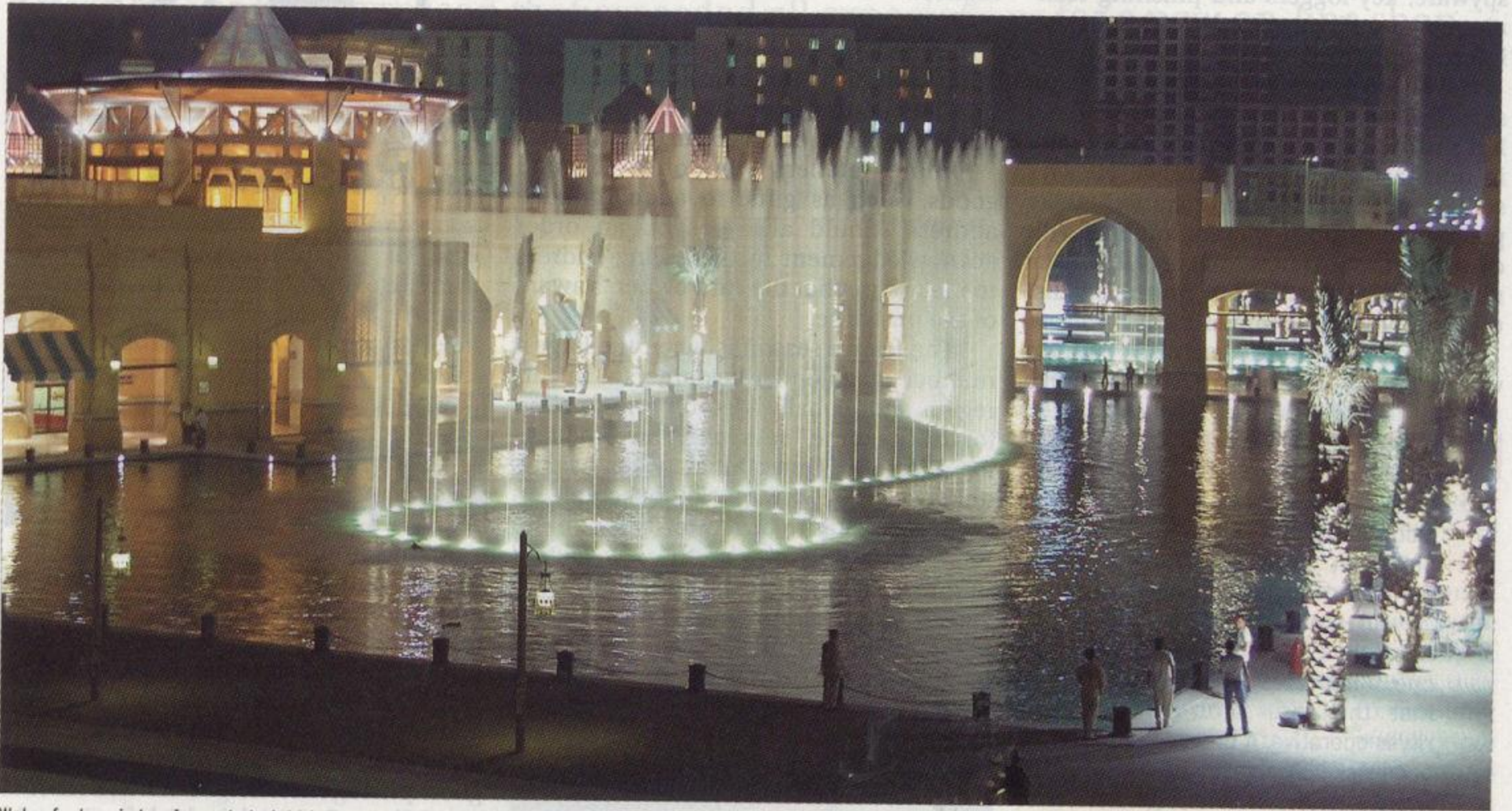


Malls splash out

Fascinating visual displays of water features draws shoppers into malls



Water feature is transformed at night into a visual extravaganza

Dramatic water features are becoming an expected part of new shopping malls and it is near the top of the list for mall owners when they consider the what art and entertainment they can add to draw customers for their tenants.

Visitors to the Al Kout Shopping Mall in Kuwait, for example, are treated to a water feature, which, elegant during the day, is transformed at night into a visual extravaganza. The experience comes complete with water effects spanning 250 metres at varying heights from 10 metres to a central jet that shoots 45 metres into the air and is set to a musical backdrop.

This feature was created by Toronto-based Crystal Fountains who are involved in numerous Middle Eastern

“Water attractions can play an important part of 'wayfinding' both internally and externally”

projects including fountains for Burj Dubai, Messila Beach, 360° Kuwait, King Abdullah Economic City in Saudi Arabia, and Smart Village and Uptown Cairo, in Cairo, Egypt.

What these features provide are visual attractions and meeting points that offer an array of choreographed water experiences – dramatic, playful, refreshing or relaxing. With rapid increases in technol-

ogy the animated displays are computer-controlled and are invariably combined with customised lighting effects in certain cases choreographed to music.

In this way it is very easy to create diversity with these water features. Sometimes they can be still reflective pools during quiet periods of the day or night or they can be dramatic features with dancing streams and jets, and coloured lights for peak shopping and family entertainment.

And one has only to think of the ornate gardens of the Alhambra in Granada, Spain with its cooling pools and relaxing fountains to know of the importance of water in the psyche of the Arab mind throughout history.

Water attractions can play an important part of 'wayfinding' both internally and



Meeting points that offer an array of choreographed water experiences

externally. They can be an anchor feature for the end of a mall and guide shoppers throughout the mall often being found at the bottom of lifts, staircases and escalators, and acting as a reference point, meeting or resting place. Externally, they provide unique character to a retail mall, especially in cities such as Dubai where there is such a massive growth in retail provision that each centre needs to find a unique way of drawing shoppers to their location in preference to a competitor's.

At Old Mutual Property Group's Gateway Theatre of Shopping in Durban, South

Africa, for example, Crystal Fountains has installed a giant interactive water feature, 30 metres long and 5 metres in height that reflects the natural beauty of the neighbouring coastline with its wave-pounded beaches. At night, this doubles as a beautifully choreographed show with water jets rising 45 metres into the air set to a musical and colour-sequenced lighting backdrop. There can hardly be a better attraction for shoppers who come from many miles around for their "shopertainment" experience.

The ultimate aim, of course, is to encourage shoppers to stay for longer than the shopping centre industry average of around one hour, to make it a day-out for the whole family and to bring more revenue to tenants.

Versatility is another aspect of these water features. Where they are located at central locations inside a mall they

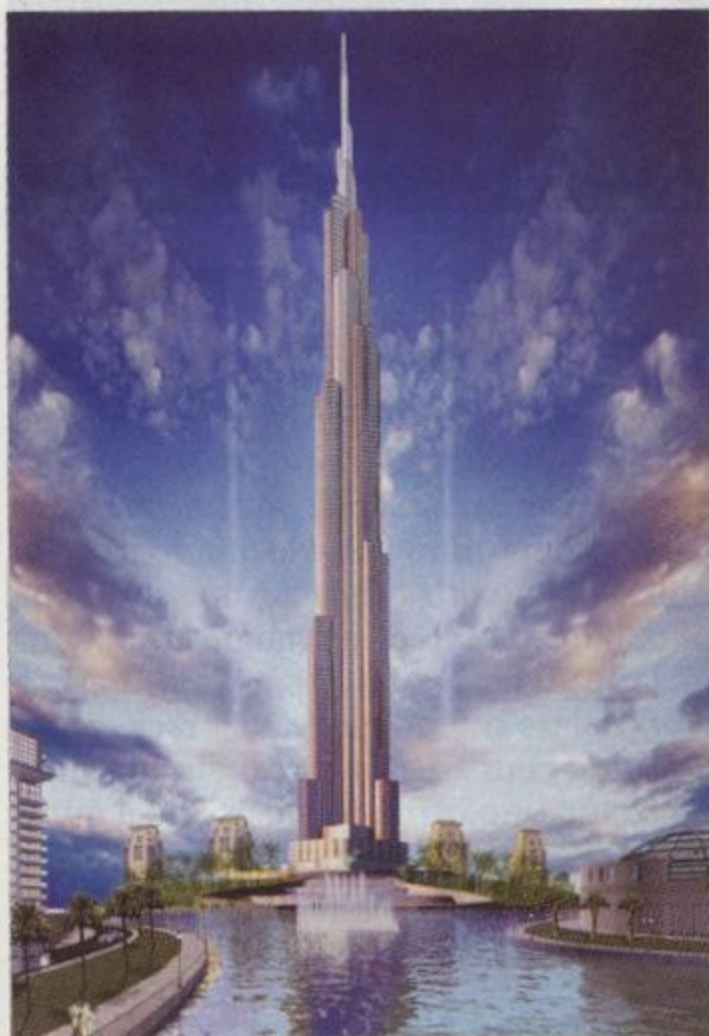
can be rapidly transformed for promotional events being used as platforms for fashion shows and concerts. So at one moment they may make a peaceful resting place for those wanting to sit and relax after a hectic session of shopping but at a moment's notice they can be covered over to become the stage for a musical folk group to perform.

However, it is vital that the water feature designers are brought in right at the concept stage of a shopping mall. If they are left out until much later, the grand designs conjured up by a developer and his architects may not be feasible, or that not enough space has been allowed for or it just can't be handled economically or logistically.

These water features vary dramatically in terms of cost and depend upon pool-size and their level of sophistication, quality of finishes and musical and lighting animation. The good news, however, is that the gap between the simple and sophisticated displays is closing all the time as control technologies become more and more affordable.

The shopping mall developer needs to plan carefully and consider the value of consulting knowledgeable water feature specialists to assist in the evaluation of critical aspects such as concept, feasibility, safety and how most effectively to address key design, implementation and operational issues.

In conclusion, with shopping malls facing greater competition from their neighbouring centres down the road, they need to provide attractions with pulling power and the "wow factor". There are a variety of ways that this can be done and attractive water features are one of them. ■



Burj Dubai



Water features provide visual attractions