

Sleek Shopping

Built in the home city of two world-class automakers, Gerber Mall reflects Stuttgart's image as a center of elegant industrial design and innovative technology

BY VILMA BARR

Located in downtown Stuttgart, Germany, Gerber Mall is an example of a major trend by shopping center developers to construct mixed-use projects that fit the lifestyle of the population in urban areas. Rather than the traditional stand-alone, retail-only mall site, the mixed-use strategy has been used to revive multi-store shopping destinations that were hard-hit by the global economic downturn in 2008.

Opened in September 2014, Gerber Mall includes 270,000 sq ft of retail space with more than 86 shops on three levels; 75,000 sq ft of offices; 68 apartments from two to five bedrooms on four levels; and a 13,000-sq ft elevated courtyard. Situated in an historic section of Stuttgart, its building design is integrated with the surrounding cityscape.

The calling card of that city is high-end design. Stuttgart is the world headquarters for both Mercedes-Benz and Porsche AG, two brands that have built their images on sleek styling and top-quality performance. When interior architects Ippolito Fleitz Group GmbH and Pfarré Lighting Design approached the planning for the Gerber Mall, their assessment of the center's target customer was a consumer who would respond to a strong contemporary design statement. Their solution was to create an environment distinct from other enclosed shopping malls that included accent elements comparable to the stripes on a high-performance black-and-white race car, suspended illuminated circles of light that were both decorative and functional, and glowing escalators that

A clean white ceiling was achieved by placing equipment and lighting inside a matte-black channel.



offset the shops' gray façades, all topped off by a sprawling LED enhanced skylight.

CLEAN AND CRISP

"Gerber Mall itself is more of an urban boulevard than a mall," says lighting designer Gerd Pfarré. "The developer wanted it to be known in the greater Stuttgart region as a shopping destination that offers a high-quality environment, easy orientation for the visitor, and spatial elements that generate a strong recognition value.

"One of our key objectives was to present a clean white ceiling, free of openings for air ducts, speakers and other technical attachments," Pfarré adds. As a result, almost all of the visible technical equipment is integrated into a recessed,

matte-black channel system. "Inside the channel are architectural and event track lighting, along with A/C outlets, sprinklers, loudspeakers, cameras and security lighting," Pfarré says.

The dark channels are a visual link to the escalator's black handrails and the illuminated stripe that extends down the length of the underside of the escalators. "The glow from the escalators contrasts with the dark gray profile outlines of the shop façades," Pfarré points out. This technique gives the mall interior a distinctive crisp museum- and gallery-like background. Prominence is given to the show windows and open display fronts of the shops, not unlike a series of three-dimensional artworks. To achieve this effect, glare-reduced 70-W honeycombed metal-



The hula hoop lives: 10 color-changing rings encircle Gerber's central column.

halide spots, especially developed for wide-area lighting, were installed in the public areas and walkways to blend with the spill light from the show windows of the various shops.

RING LEADER

To meet the developer's requirement of spatial elements that would make Gerber easily recognizable, the designers introduced three-dimensional works at entrances and within the mall's central spine that combine lighting art and free-form interpretation. These 31 LED illuminated circular rings "are integrated in the lower-level ceiling, and at the other entrances, they are suspended from the high ceilings above," Pfarré says. Mounted around a full-height central column and reflected in the fountain

below is the "hula hoop" of 10 rings. "It is the only installation with an RGB system at Gerber and is used for special events," says Pfarré.

The effect of these color-capable glowing hoops attached to the structural supporting column is that of a sculpture floating in space. Manufacturer of the rings, which range in diameter from 6.9 ft to 14.8 ft, was Hatec. Cree supplied the 3000K LEDs rated at 4.5 watts per ft.

Above the top floor, a skylight measuring 203 ft by 13 ft allows daylighting onto the center's walkways and public spaces below. To camouflage the skylight's frame, Ippolito Fleitz designed a system of white baffles. At night, a blue LED strip behind the baffles transforms the entire skylight, simulating a daytime view.

White baffles mask the skylight's frame and turn blue at night, thanks to an LED strip.



FAST FACTS

- Gerber was crafted for a target demographic who would respond to high-end design.
- 31 illuminated rings are the mall's signature element.
- The contrast between the gray storefronts and lighted escalator gives the mall a museum/gallery-type ambience.

Gerber Mall was the recipient of an IALD Award of Merit 2015 and acknowledged in the 2015 German Lighting Design Award program. Commented an IALD judge: "The lighting successfully fills the entire mall with glow and electric energy . . . evoking a sense of movement and flow. I loved the simple and futuristic design . . . an elegant lighting solution that furthered the design's intention." □

Vilma Barr is a freelance writer and contributor to LD+A.

THE DESIGNERS



conferences.

Gerd Pfarré, Fellow IALD, is the founder and design director of Pfarré Lighting Design, Munich. He is a lecturer at the Technical University in Munich and speaks frequently at international design



Dominik Buhl has been with Pfarré Lighting Design for nine years as a project director and senior lighting designer.