

BEST OF
2007
AWARDS

Uniqlo Flagship

PROJECT OF THE YEAR: Retail

Hoping to turn heads and attract people to its first Manhattan location, Uniqlo USA selected a Soho storefront to house its Big Apple flagship store.

"The idea of this store was to make an impression on the U.S. market with its flagship being larger than the other stores," says Michael Leonetti, project executive with construction manager Richter + Ratner of New York.

Uniqlo is one of Japan's most popular apparel retailers. The company has 733 stores worldwide.

It had operated three stores in New Jersey malls, but sales had disappointed the company. Uniqlo decided it wanted a bigger presence and knew that meant a store in the fashion capital – New York City.

In a way, it was coming home. Tadashi Yanai, chairman and CEO of FAST RETAILING, the parent company of Uniqlo, came up for the idea for Uniqlo while visiting New York as a young man in the late 1960s. He was inspired by the city's bustling energy and its retailers presenting calm, organized environments that let shoppers explore at their own pace.

"We wanted to create a store that expresses the Japanese modern culture," says Shin Odake, chief operating officer with Uniqlo. "Cleanliness is important and so is a futuristic image and minimalism."

Rather than opting for a sleek, contemporary building Uniqlo, chose a 36,000-sq-ft, historic landmark, built in the 1800s, and infused it with sleek stainless steel and glass. The \$14 million project combines two old cast-iron-and-timber-constructed buildings into one.

Richter + Ratner opened up the two levels, creating three large atria, so customers can look from one level to another. The work involved shoring, bracing and adding steel and cast iron.



Crews enveloped the existing 14- to 16-in. cast-iron columns, including one that was cracked, in 6- to 7-in. steel girdles. Each column was drilled through every few inches and bolted tight to the 4-ft-tall girdles. The new steel attaches to the girde and enabled the removal of floors to create the atria.

"Every day there were new surprises," says Odake, offering as an example that all the fixtures arrived straight but the building was off plumb.

One building was skewed four to five degrees, Leonetti says. Richter + Ratner buried the discrepancy behind furred-out walls.

"Whenever you get a 100-year-old building, you find a lot of things, including cracked columns and out of alignment," Leonetti adds.

Load tests of the floors were performed with steel-framed "swimming pools" to measure deflection for occupancy loads. Crews shored each section, removed wood and replaced it with new. Significant and precise phasing and sequencing >>

Key Players

Owner: Uniqlo, New York

Owner's Representative: Excelsior Realty Management Inc., New York

Architect: Wonderwall, Japan, and Greenberg Farrow, New York

Construction Manager: Richter + Ratner, New York

Structural Engineer: Goldstein Associates, New York

MEP Consultant: Lilker Associates, Consulting Engineers, New York

Demolition: Manhattan Demolition, Long Island City, N.Y.

Concrete: Malatesta Paladino, Jamaica, N.Y.

Structural Steel: Maspeth Welding, Maspeth, N.Y.

Plumbing: Pace Plumbing, Brooklyn, N.Y.

HVAC: AFGO Mechanical, Long Island City, N.Y.

Electrical: Absolute Electric, Rosedale, N.Y.

allowed this work to continue while other construction progressed.

Ash wood covers the upper floors, with walnut in the basement.

Plans called for a 700-ton cooling tower to be placed on the roof. But during installation, crews found the parapet walls were severely deteriorated between the exterior and interior wythes. Rubble, debris and power had replaced fully mortared brick, necessitating an emergency restoration.

The heating system required installation of 23 heat pumps. Codes prevented using the existing timber beams to hold the heat pumps. Richter + Ratner added structural-steel supports at great expense to the project.

To highlight the building's history, Uniqlo decided to enclose one of the original 150-ft-long by 22-ft-high brick walls in structural glass so customers could see the old brick but it also would be protected.

At the front of the store, 30 life-size manikins, wearing Uniqlo cloths, spin. Motors and drive shafts, placed under the illuminated glass floor, power the mannequins, which were imported from Japan. The tolerance for the construction of the mechanisms was minuscule. Each pin had to be placed precisely as designated for the system to work. Only minimal adjustments were needed to bring the concept to life.

Crews added a free-standing elevator in a glass shaft with exposed mechanisms in one of the atria, stainless-clad staircases to the mezzanine, stacked glass wall systems, acres of wood flooring and a tin ceiling similar in pattern and material to the original.

The store features brightly colored, casual, ready-to-wear clothing stacked 25 ft from floor to ceiling. Construction crews placed catwalks behind the displays, giv-

ing sales associates ready access to the products through panels that open to the catwalk.

Codes in the landmark district prevented exterior alterations and Soho zoning limited store size to 10,000 sq ft. Architect of record Greenberg Farrow of New York came up with a plan to break the store into separate establishments, divided by glass partitions, each entity with its own means of egress, with doors that can shut it off.

Richter + Ratner began working on the complex project in March 2006, with an unmovable November 2006 finish. The owner had already mailed party invitations before the design was completed.

"They had a short lead time but did a wonderful job pulling through a miracle in terms of schedule," Odake says.

During construction, about 150 craftspeople worked 12-hour shifts, seven days a week to meet the deadlines. <<