



Archit. Namal Jayamanne

offers total new architectural interior design solutions and novel display techniques at

French Corner PARADE



French Corner Parade at Dehiwala

Architect Namal Jayamanne started his design 'Parade' with the latest addition to French Corner showroom chain at Dehiwala in 2001. The showroom named as 'French Corner PARADE', was originally a project awarded to an Indian designer and was shelved as being unfeasible. Namal with his fellow Architect Jayampath presented a total new interior solution which was quite novel in display techniques. The concepts were filtered through Islamic Cultural norms which restricted the use of common graphics of men and women in any form. Less demand for such icons limited façade exposure, but resulted in creating an image the customers could identify anywhere.

All forms of accessories, fixtures and flexible display methods were developed locally using skilled and committed construction teams. Quite successfully, the image of the shop was changed from an ordinary shop to a sophisticated one catering to a diverse section of fashion conscious people. The management made changes in their purchasing strategies, to cater to a more discerning customer.

A need to address the high market potential in and around Nugegoda with the concept of "comfort shopping" was then expressed. With the already operating show room in the ever busy Nugegoda Junction, a second showroom was planned with flexible display systems on a limited budget. To adjust in to changes for six peak buying

seasons in the year, and the need to standardize the chain of shops , required more convenient solutions for flexible displays .

Namal was asked to do a market study on this line in Thailand , the regional hub for marketing garments in Asia , and came up with a custom made display racking and accessory solutions for the new Nugegoda French Corner Parade show room .

When another showroom was proposed in a rented out former bank building in Wellawatte, the management had done their own market studies and found that the local population consisted of migrants from other parts of the Island . It was decided to adopt the concept of maximum utilization of display spaces as seen in congested but trendy cities like Hong Kong . Limitations were extreme as the building had concrete vaults in the basement, water leaks and also corrosion and cracks in the structure. Moreover , the building was literally violating the street lines which restricted the planned facelift . The architect responded to this situation by creating an environment for new experience through exposure to high-end display technology.

French Corner , then decided to upgrade their Colombo branch and re-launch it as one of their 'Parade' outlets. The 7000sqft showroom needed a facelift while the shop functioned. Set time target for the project was a mere 20 day period .



A new approach was taken to incorporate a touch of graphics with an advertising agency while the interior was planned. As always, being stationed in a rented building, had its own restrictions specially with regard to lighting and civil construction. Careful calculations had to be done due to power restrictions and failure of services (plumbing and drainage). The potential market for this outlet was identified as office workers. The architect decided to build up the project as an elegant addition to the neighborhood.

To visually increase the restricted volumes, spatial illusions were created and the stairway was used to create a mini atrium to combine floors spatially. Graphics compartmentalize the display pockets, yet the flow of space is successfully carried out with perforated rails and panels. Directional movement is suggested with the flow of the ceiling patterns and the backlit display panels dramatize and highlight each display item. Spatial restrictions have been turned into architectural features. For example the stairway niches have become display features and columns are part of display units. Space beyond the reach of the hand is utilized for visual graphics.

The architect through the design of an *architectural Interior* attempts to open up a design dialogue with the sophisticated discerning customers and attempts to individualize yet maintain the same standards at all the outlets linking them through the use of common design elements so the French Corner Parade can be identified anywhere in the city as a part of the chain.



before renovations



French Corner outlet at Wellawatte

Through architect Namal, French Corner embarked on a journey to create an identity as the largest garment retail outlet chain in the island. The chain has now grown to a size difficult for any similar organization to compete. He has not only created an identity for French Corner showrooms, regardless of the location or the buildings they occupy but also by using the exposure given to the industry and standardization of interiors, made the show room operationally successful.

Even the rather eccentric steps taken to box up the entire showroom and have curious little entrances was tolerated by the Client and was found to be acceptable to the customers as a design dialogue offered right at the doorstep! Perhaps another reason that contributed to for the successful merging of Client and Designer was similarity in thinking and sharing of knowledge. ▲

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