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M PENNER

Uptown Park, Houston, TX



DESIGN: Michael Malone Studio @ WKMC Architects, Dallas, TX
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M Penner has presented the most fashionable and the finest of European clothing to men in Houston, TX, for the past three and a half decades. According to Michael Malone, of Michael Malone Studio @ WKMC Architects of Dallas, the store has had "a contemporary point of view and a strong fashion direction supported by impeccable taste"—and these were the qualities he had to make self evident in the new 8000 sq. ft. store he designed for the company in Uptown Park, Houston.

The original store was designed primarily as a clothing store with multiple levels and was poorly adapted to the display of sportswear—a category that had become one of the company's fastest growing areas. There was no room for expansion in the shoe and accessories area and the newly introduced women's wear was stalled for lack of space and acceptable dressing rooms. Thus, the new store—double the size of the previous one—instead of compartmentalizing merchandise categories "allowed each



department to flow seamlessly into a larger merchandise mix. Organized as one contiguous open space, defined by floor fixtures and ceiling fixtures, the space is expansive but carefully divided into subtle groupings around category and lifestyle." From the entry, circulation flows in a modified racetrack and the Zegna shop draws shoppers to the rear of the space. A stone and marble main aisle serves to lead shoppers to the various areas in the store. Since sportswear, as a category, is so important at M Penner, it is located up near the entry and fills in the center of the racetrack. The fixtures here include open legged, marble topped tables and rolling bins on casters that make re-configuration fast and easy.

The women's shop appears—prominently—on the left of the entry. The wall hanging units are visually treated similar to those in the men's area but there are floor cases for accessories and T-stands for dresses and gowns. There are also two spacious, salon-sized dress-

ing rooms for the women.

Also given prominence up front is shoes. There are illuminated shelves for the display of men's shoes along with a wall for socks and belts making a major statement for footwear and leather goods. A bench, used for fitting the shoes, was especially designed for this store and the back of the unit is a flat tabletop for display. More accessories and specialties, such as cuff links, fragrances, eyewear etc., appear as part of the cash/wrap counter that is located adjacent to shoes. The long counter can be used to service several customers at the same time and illuminated towers, on the back of each side, show additional small items.

The shirt and tie area consists of two walls of shirts on illuminated shelves and a massive, tiered tie display table. There are also tables where shoppers can assemble the shirts and ties that go with the suits or jackets the shopper has selected. This section is located immediately off the clothing area and "this



complex the pattern of circulation."

The previously mentioned Zegna shop, at the rear of the store, was especially designed for the M Penner shop. It is separated from the clothing area by the made-to-measure space with its conference table for the lay-down and display of fabric books and catalogues. Built-in shelves, along one of the walls, holds reference materials and samples of the custom lines available in this shop. "Like many better men's stores, made-to-measure has a role of growing importance to M Penner and provision of a dedicated area for this activity was central to the design."

In the clothing area, illuminated wall bins with adjustable standards for the hang rods hold the suits and sport jackets. The center of the floor contains the pants racks and the lay-down tables for mis and match. The dressing rooms are clustered around a large fitting room with seating provided for those who wait. A wet bar provides the hospitality in this area—"which is still the backbone of the business."

White-washed oak was used for all the fixtures and the wall paneling, except in the Zegna shop. The oak is accented with brushed aluminum hardware and trim. Thin panels of backlit alabaster form a valance over the hanging clothes bins and indirect fluorescent are used in the bins and the light cove. Metal halides serve for the high-lighting and displays. "The result is a cheerful, open, comfortable yet sophisticated place to shop that fits the beautifully made things on sale in the store and the welcoming warmth and expansive nature of the owners—Murry and Karen Penner."

