

# Shoe Retailing

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## RENOVATING YOUR STORE

### WHAT TO EXPECT FROM A PROFESSIONAL DESIGN FIRM



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# Renovating Your Store – What to Expect from a Professional Design Firm

LYN FALK

It's time to renovate your store – is it time to hire an experienced retail designer, or try doing it yourself (again)?

The decision to hire a design firm often comes down to experience and time. Do you or any of your team members have the expertise to layout a store properly, create a strong branded design/look, find the right fixtures to best display your merchandise, specify the correct lighting that will make your products “pop,” and develop a consistent sign system that customers will read? If not, it's well worth the money to hire a firm so you and your team can continue to keep the business going and growing.

A good store designer will take into consideration the ROI of the renovation, making sure it occurs in a reasonable amount of time (especially if lease



Lyn Falk

renewals are involved). Be sure to ask the designer or design team up front for a design portfolio, list of three references, experience in your industry, past successes and failures, timeline, and how they determine their fee structure.

The typical process for working with a retail design firm is as follows.

## Phase I: Site Visit/Exploration/Discovery

Information is gathered about the store's history, brand, mission, target market, product lines, sales per sq. ft., and desired inventory changes; project budget, timeline, and goals; and team roles. A site visit is often necessary for measuring and photographing the space and interviewing and meeting with key team members.

*Estimated turnaround time: 1 week*

## Phase II: Design Development

Store layouts are created, finish palettes selected, fixtures specified, custom pieces identified, lighting layout determined. Fixture plans and 3-D renderings are provided to illustrate the overall look of the store.

*Estimated turnaround time: 4 weeks*



Before



After





Before



After

### Phase III: Final Design Documents Created

Changes are made to initial designs and final documents are created:

- > Storefront plan (if being addressed)
- > Demolition plan
- > Floor/dimension plan
- > Fixture plan
- > Finish plan
- > Signage plan
- > Reflected ceiling plan
- > Wall elevations
- > Cabinetry drawings for custom pieces
- > Specification schedules for fixtures, furnishings, finishes, lighting, signage, decorative accessories/elements
- > 3-D renderings

*Estimated turn-around time: 3-4 weeks*

Depending on the size and complexity of the renovation, an architect may be needed for a code-compliance review, and stamping drawings for state/local reviews and permits.

Documents are sent out to two or three general contractors for bids. And knowing if you need to be open during the construction process, or critical timelines to meet, are super important pieces of information for the general contractors to know up front when they are bidding.

*Estimated turnaround time: 2-3 weeks*

Bids are reviewed and a contractor is hired.



### Phase IV: Implementation of Design

Being available throughout the construction process is key – as items can suddenly become out of stock and a substitute will need to be specified, or, during demolition, something was found which changes direction of part

**A good store designer will take into consideration the ROI of the renovation, making sure it occurs in a reasonable amount of time (especially if lease renewals are involved).**

of the layout. However, if Phase II is done well, there really shouldn't be a lot of questions that arise.

*Estimated turnaround time for this phase can range from 14 days to 3 months. It's all dependent on the size and complexity of the project.*

### Phase V: Merchandising and Store Setup for Soft Opening

The importance of this phase should not be overlooked. It's the way to make sure the design is being used in the way it was intended. Merchandising products so that they achieve "visual critical mass" is key to presenting your products in a way that they reflect and celebrate your brand. Installing the signs that have been properly designed in locations where customers will actually read them and adjusting track heads to make sure displays and focal points are well illuminated. Cleaning, organizing, and doing dry runs on the new selling floor is key to a smooth opening. You can only make one first impression, so

make it great!

*Estimated time on site: 1-2 days*

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## Phase VI: Post-Occupancy Evaluation

After a few weeks, make notes on anything that needs to be tweaked or fixed. Get the issues remedied ASAP before they become forgotten.

After six months, make notes on the effectiveness of the store layout/design. Make changes if necessary or keep them in mind for the next renovation.

Hopefully these phases help you understand what all is involved in working with a professional design firm. Decide if it's worth the investment for your next renovation. ■

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# Karavel Shoes Looks Back on Recent Renovation

Michael Wittenstein, General Manager of Karavel Shoes in Austin, Texas, shares his thoughts on working with a store design firm. (*FYI: the design firm was not located in Austin.*)

### **Lyn Falk: Why did you decide to hire a retail design firm this time around?**

**Michael Wittenstein:** We felt it was instrumental to our company's success in opening a new store. It's not something we had undertaken in quite a long time, and one thing that we certainly are experts in is the shoe business, but we knew we were not experts in store design/layout. We figured what it cost to use a designer can save us time, improve our image in the eyes of our customers, and create more revenue.

### **LF: Would you have approached your project differently without the design assistance?**

**MW:** Most definitely. We would have not ever come to a consensus on what direction we'd want to go. Especially with the time deadline we were on.

*(Note: Hiring a firm though is still no guarantee the project will be free of obstacles. They will, however, be more manageable.)*

## We figured what it cost to use a designer can save us time, improve our image in the eyes of our customers, and create more revenue.

### **LF: What were the biggest hurdles you had to deal with throughout the process (regardless of working with a design firm)?**

**MW:** Things that you don't expect to happen will happen! We discovered a

leak in a whole section of two walls that were rotting. We had a U-Haul truck run in to our window on moving day. You have to learn to roll with the punches a bit and plan for the unexpected.

### **LF: Were there any surprises you encountered along the way (regardless of working with a design firm)?**

**MW:** The initial "budget" may not be the final budget. You should come up with a general idea for budgeting purposes and plan to overspend to get what you want.

*(Note: It's important to set a budget*



Before



After

initially. However, most store owners underestimate the cost of remodeling in today's market. And sometimes the designs present some ideas that are worth a few extra dollars to get a bigger bang for the buck over time. Also, it's important to have a contingency fee for things that may go awry.)

**LF: What advice would you give to other independent shoe retailers who are moving a store?**

**MW:**

- > Begin planning as early as you can. Do not wait.
- > Communicate with your staff and customers as much as possible about the move.

- > Take inventory before you leave and when you are fully moved.
  - > Update all your contact information and address on your website, all social media, and all other marketing materials and any online business listings.
  - > Hire a professional commercial moving company – do not do this yourself.
  - > Post your new address at your old location.
  - > Hire a retail design firm – it was the best decision we made as we would have been lost without them. ■
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