

# CEILINGSG... THE FIFTH WALL

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What do you think of the ceiling over your selling floor? Is it working for you or against you?

The ceiling is often an overlooked design element in a retail space; however, I have found the jewelry industry to be one that does pay some attention to this surface. Mostly because illuminating jewelry cases from above is so critical, that it causes jewelry store owners to think about how the lighting interacts with the ceiling, and how the ceiling is interacting with the selling floor.

## 1 Finish Type

The most common types of ceilings in a retail store are as follows



**Smooth, painted drywall** – this is a great option for bringing an elegant look to a selling space. It allows for creating multiple levels (stepped look, dropped soffits), shapes and designs, houses recessed light fixtures nicely for a minimal look, and is easily painted.

**Exposed ceiling** – these are nice options for spaces that have good looking rafters, HVAC ductwork, and an underroof finish (i.e.: painted plaster, corrugated metal). These can provide the feeling of an industrial look or celebrate the uniqueness of a brand.

**Decorative ceilings** – wood covered, and original pressed tin, are often used to create a special look for a brand. Running electrical to light fixtures can be an issue with these ceilings as they are attached directly to the substructure, but painted conduit can certainly be added along the surface.

**Decorative dropped ceiling elements** – with super tall ceilings (usually exposed as noted above), a retailer can drop



acoustic panels in fun shapes to absorb sound, or build drywalled soffits to house lights over showcases. These lowered elements can make the space feel more intimate, provide visual interest, and allow for departments to be quickly identified.

**Acoustical Ceiling Tiles** – the 2x4 lay-in tiles are really meant for office spaces, NOT a retail selling floor. They do nothing to add to a store's brand/personality, or professional look. Because they are inexpensive, they often become the default selection but think twice about keeping/using them! If you must work with them until you can afford a better option, at least consider a 2x2 tile – they even sell 2x4 tiles "scored" to create the illusion of a 2x2 tile. These at least provide a more elevated look if you have to use them.



## 2 Height

Many ceiling heights can't be altered, but anything under 9' is considered a residential height and is generally not supportive of a professional/commercial atmosphere. (If you have <500sf of space, then a lower ceiling is acceptable.)

If you have acoustic lay-in ceiling tiles, push one to the side and see if there is something hidden above worth uncovering, or, if a few feet of additional height might add to the overall feel and look of your store



The downside to ceilings that are too high for the size of the floor plan (>20'), are: poor acoustics on the selling floor, ceiling fans needed for air circulation, and light fixtures suspended to a height that will allow for good illumination of the space and showcases. (See "decorative dropped ceiling elements" above to remedy these issues.)

## 3 Color

Stick with medium neutrals such as greys or taupes. These colors tend to hide dust coming out of HVAC vents, don't attract a lot of attention, or absorb a lot of light.

White painted ceilings can work if the lights are directed downward. Because the eyes are always attracted to the most illuminated/brightest place in a room, we want your customers looking at your product lines, not at your ceiling!

Super dark or black ceilings should be saved for nightclubs. They are visually heavy and reduce the overall visual size of a space. If it's a lower ceiling, it can actually make someone sense "heaviness" above them. Finally, they absorb a ton of light, so more lights are necessary to illuminate the selling floor

Special note: when considering a dark color or any color with deep value and hue, the ceiling must be far enough away from your cases to keep the color from reflecting onto your diamonds

Don't overlook how your ceiling affects the "feel" of your space. It's not just a surface to hold/house lighting. It's an important design element that, when thoughtfully planned, can help guide customers through your space, intentionally directing attention.

In summary, if your ceiling is not attractive, then make it disappear by lowering the lights and only having lights that shine downward. If you want your ceiling to work for you, think about the finish that best reflects your brand, how dropping shapes or soffits can define departments that guide customers and absorb sound/noise, and how they can house lighting that directs eyes to your product lines.