



HELLO, SAN FRANCISCO
A DESIGNERS GUIDE

THE SCULPTED CITY
3D MAPS

SIGNAGE IS
GOLDEN

SKETCHBOOK
JAN LORENC

At the back of the store, a laminate feature wall in the signature International Orange is studded with rivets like those found on the bridge. A large media display on axis with the entrance helps pull visitors to the rear of the space and then back out to the cash wrap near the exit.



Client
Golden Gate National Parks
Conservancy

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Architecture
Jensen Architects

Building System Design
Project Frog

Retail/Interpretive Design
Macchiatto

Design Team
Jeremy Regenbogen,
Michelle Regenbogen
designers

Fabrication
Cinnabar *exhibits and retail
fixtures*, Thomas Swan Sign
Company *signage*, iZone
Imaging *digital high pressure
laminate*

Photos
Mariko Reed

(DON'T) EXIT THROUGH



The new Golden Gate Bridge Pavilion is a 3,500-sq.-ft. visitor center and gift shop made from a pre-engineered kit designed by Jensen Architects and Project Frog. Exterior signage (designed by Macchiatto and fabricated by Thomas Swan Sign Company) consists of dimensional metal letters in Gotham typeface.



The new Golden Gate Bridge Pavilion is an engaging hybrid of retail and interpretive experiences.

By Pat Matson Knapp

San Francisco's most famous landmark turned 75 last year and in honor of the occasion, and in anticipation of the rush of visitors it would inspire, the Golden Gate Bridge Highway and Transportation District (the bridge operator) partnered with the Golden Gate Bridge National Parks Conservancy to rethink the entire visitor experience. The most dramatic outcome is the new Bridge Pavilion, a 3,500-square-foot retail store and visitor center.

Designed by Jensen Architects in collaboration with Project Frog, the pavilion is painted the famous International Orange of the bridge and constructed from an innovative pre-engineered green building kit of standardized structural elements, wall panels, and glazing units. The components were fabricated off-site and installed on-site in advance of the anniversary celebrations.

Like the building itself, the interior was designed to seem like a natural extension of the bridge, bringing its signature color, industrial materials, and architectural features into a natural light-filled space.

Within this new space, the Conservancy and design partner Macchiatto (San Francisco) were looking to create something more than the typical "exit through the gift shop" store, and they knew that infusing just the right balance of storytelling into the space would make for a richer, more compelling experience than just trinket shopping.

THE GIFT SHOP

(DON'T) EXIT THROUGH THE GIFT SHOP

Since interpretive information and merchandise compete for the same space in the “magic band” two to six feet off the floor, Macchiatto placed high-impact graphics above the retail offerings, adding a quick-read history of the bridge construction.



“What we had before was a very basic gift shop selling tee-shirts,” says Robert Lieber, Vice President of Interpretive Sales for the Conservancy, which operates seven shops in the Golden Gate Parks. “My vision was to tell a story with interior design, interpretive graphics, and product development.”

Lieber, formerly with the Guggenheim, the Whitney, and SFMoMA, knew that linking merchandise to the stories behind it could activate the retail space, engage shoppers, and lend credibility to the products it offers—ultimately boosting sales. He and Macchiatto Principal Jeremy Regenbogen had already seen this work in the gift shop at another San Francisco tourist attraction—Alcatraz prison.

Lieber says he had an “a-ha” moment during the Alcatraz project, when he appropriated one of the prison’s fascinating stories—this one about a missing cell key used in a failed escape attempt—and designed a replica of an actual skeleton cell key to sell in the store. His design team created a large-scale wall graphic and designed free postcards to support the merchandise, and the keys flew off the shelves.

“We put that big graphic up with the story and the keys below it, and sales increased 30 percent,” he recalls. “After that, I realized this is the way to really tell a story.”

Regenbogen, who is working on his third visitor center for the Conservancy, says the retail/interpretive hybrid is an unusual approach that can be confusing to visitors if the balance is off. “But we’ve discovered that, done right, it helps visitors make a deeper connection with the site by learning about its rich history, while being able to take home a product that represents that history.”

So merchandise sits alongside historical artifacts and interpretive elements. And far from the tchotchke shot glasses and tee-shirts found in most gift shops, each piece of merchandise is carefully selected—and many are developed specifically for the store—to support the interpretive goals.

At the Golden Gate Pavilion, for example, a 12-foot-tall test model of the bridge tower, built in the 1930s and gone missing for more than 30 years, was pulled out of a storage shed, cleaned up, and put on display. Regenbogen elevated it to hero status by designing a base for it and creating graphics to tell its story. It sits alongside bridge replicas and books that interest shoppers even more once they’ve gotten the backstory.

Acknowledging that the space must perform well as a store, the team carefully balanced the retail/interpretive mix to ensure it wouldn’t disrupt the natural visitor flow. Interpretive elements must be a quick read, so the team opted





A 12-ft.-tall test model bridge support—made in the 1930s and missing for more than three decades—was pulled out of a storage shed and elevated to hero status in the store. Macchiatto designed a base and interpretive graphics and the Conservancy’s interpretive staff developed merchandise to help tell its story.

for large-scale historic images that quickly tell the story of the bridge’s construction. They leveraged the natural architectural rhythm of the space—multiple structural columns and trusses—by establishing a repeating visual of product display and interpretive graphics. And because retail and interpretive elements naturally compete for the “magic band” two feet to six feet off the floor, Macchiatto developed a graphic hierarchy that allows large-scale interpretive information to exist higher than usual, but with smaller interpretive elements embedded alongside product.

The building’s unique construction created some fabrication and installation challenges, particularly in securing retail/interpretive components, as well as the exterior signage system. The wall panels are essentially solid foam, with structural members integrated in the panel fabrication process. The exterior is clad in cementitious panels that float off the foam panels. Macchiatto worked closely with Frog/Jensen to devise unique attachment methods for displays and shelving and to find alternative design solutions that shaved weight from the interpretive/retail/signage elements.

Materiality extends the store’s feeling of being a part of the bridge itself. Plastic laminate in the signature orange is augmented with faux rivets echoing bridge details. Other fixtures were designed to mimic the bridge’s faceted Art Deco concrete structural anchors. When set on the concrete slab, these fixtures seem to rise from the slab itself, providing a neutral backdrop for the product.

Regenbogen was also responsible for signage, and he nodded to heritage elements on the site by choosing dimensional metal letters pinned off the façade and atop the roof. He chose Gotham (in all caps for primary identity) as “appropriate but not overly figurative in an Art Deco way. It’s a nice hybrid of the Deco look with a modern twist.”

Lieber and Regenbogen say the store has been a big success, efficiently moving a lot of visitors through the space while extending their experience at Golden Gate Bridge. They credit the store’s unique retail/interpretive mixture. “Each on its own has the power to engage a visitor,” says Regenbogen. “Together, they truly take on a life of their own.” ■