

# New Janeville Concept Hits Home

By Marianne Wilson

There is nothing sleek or white-box about Janeville. A new retail concept from The Gymboree Corp., the store is warm and inviting, with a residential feel and subtle, feminine look.

"The Janeville concept was inspired by Lisa Harper (CEO of Gymboree) and the store design reflects her vision of what a comfortable shopping environment for this customer should be like," says Craig Nomura, VP of retail development, Gymboree, Burlingame, Calif., which operates a total of 626 stores worldwide. "Lisa has a strong sense of the idea of home—of it being warm, comfortable and cottage-like—and that's the environment we wanted to create in the store."

Offering clothing and accessories for higher-income women in their mid-30s and older, Janeville breaks new ground for the formerly children's-only clothing retailer. But it shares the same re-

spect with regard to design integrity as Gymboree's namesake brand and its younger sister, Janie and Jack.

"Every store we create is an experience for the customer," Nomura says.

That experience starts on the exterior. The prototype, which debuted in April at Westfield Shoppingtown Valley Fair, Santa Clara, Calif., features a cottage facade, complete with front porch. The architecture, enhanced by cedar shingles and wood paneling, creates a residential environment.

"The exterior is meant to be evocative of a home in Sonoma, Calif., or the

Hamptons," Nomura says.

In addition to setting the mood, the facade gives Janeville strong "street" appeal and helps it stand out in the mall, where glass fronts are the norm.

"We wanted to get away from the sameness that is so prevalent in today's centers," Nomura adds. "The cottage facade separates Janeville from the other storefronts and piques customers' curiosity about what's inside."

The homey, cottage feel continues on into the interior. The layout consists of three distinct rooms. The entry room is bright and open, with residentially scaled windows. The middle room has an outdoors, courtyard garden feel, with faux brick walls. The changing rooms are located in the third room, or rear of the store, which has a more private feel.

"We know from our research that the fitting-room environment is especially important to this customer," Nomura says. "They want to feel comfortable and have a sense of privacy when changing."

Consequently, the decision was made to locate the fitting-room area away from the main space. An overhead arbor structure works to segregate the area even further.

"We do a lot of selling in the fitting-room area," Nomura adds, "and the space is designed so that associates can bring outfits back there, with plenty of spaces for hanging and display."

Each individual stall is outfitted with a small piece of furniture on which a customer can place her pocketbook, bags and the like, and three separate hanging bars.

"Women told us they wanted a differ-

Janeville, a new format from Gymboree, has a relaxed, residential environment.

## Project Resources

**Design:** BAT, San Francisco, in cooperation with The Gymboree Corp., Burlingame, Calif.

**Architect of record:** MBH Architects, Alameda, Calif.

**Lighting consultant:** Drago Illumination, Ardmore, Pa.





The exterior, above, evokes a homey, cottage feel. The fitting-room area, at left, is set off from the main selling space.

ent bar on which to hang the clothes: one for the clothes they didn't want, one for the tops and so on," Nomura explains.

Layout-wise, the more recent or most fashionable items are located up front and the more core components are in the middle of the store. Similar to Gymboree, Janeville is more outfit-driven than item-driven. The clothing is designed and displayed in collections to make it easy for customers to put together outfits and find coordinating separates.

The materials reflect and enhance the

cottage feel. They include distressed wood, decorative wrought iron, galvanized steel and brick, highlighted by contrasting, warm textures and a natural-toned color palette.

Gymboree uses pine flooring in its Janie and Jack division. Based on its performance in those stores, Nomura decided to use the same surface in Janeville.

"The pine has held up very well in Janie and Jack," Nomura says. "With heel marks, it gets a little bit worn and torn but that doesn't detract from its appearance at all. If anything, it looks more authentic and adds to Janeville's home appeal."

Feminine details abound. Product is displayed among one-of-a-kind antiques, plants and rustic tables. The found ob-

jects give each store an individual personality.

Comfortable armchairs and sofas, covered in "shabby chic" slipcovers, are found throughout the store. The furniture adds to the residential appeal.

In addition to its debut site at Westfield Shoppingtown Valley Fair, Janeville has opened in Bellevue (Wash.) Square and in Burlingame, Calif. Stores average about 3,000 sq. ft.

"We'll end the year with a total of 10 to 12 locations," Nomura says. "Our strategy is to open on the West Coast first so we can get the bugs out close to home."

If Janeville takes off the way the company hopes, it could well serve as Gymboree's most important growth vehicle in coming years, with a potential for 350 to 450 locations nationwide. ■

—mwilson@chainstoreage.com