

# Transit lounge, revisited

Pics: Store Space



*Witco, the Chennai-based baggage retailer, is a year old in Bangalore and POPToday decided to check out if they had achieved what they had set out to. They had done more than that: two more new stores in Bangalore and a couple more in Chennai all in new format. And all set to open another one in Bangalore's upcoming mall, Forum.*

*It's not often that a store designer gets to work as a store in-charge, learn customer behaviour hands-on, understand their needs and then implement the learnings in other stores of the chain. Well that's what Seema Sameith Khan of Bangalore based Store Space got to do. And the difference shows. While the first store in Bangalore itself was quite a deviation from Witco's other stores in Chennai, the sequel to this store on Bangalore's shopping high-streets -- Cunningham Road and Jayanagar -- have incorporated subtle changes to increase customer convenience and maintain the retail identity of the store. The brief given to Seema was short but clear, make the store more premium than the existing ones. Since the first store in Bangalore on CMH road - premium and baggage-only Transit Store - comprising 70 per cent shoppers in the SEC A segment, was also designed by Seema, then with RD&M, challenge here was to give the store a more premium look and yet maintain the visual connection with brand Witco.*

The new stores in Bangalore have tried a new retail format: that of zoning the family of products instead of categories. "Frequent travellers eventually go in for the entire family of travel gear - one-nighter to cabin baggage to heavy luggage. We are only helping ease their decision-making by displaying everything they may need at one go," says V P Harris, managing director, Witco. In addition, this kind of zoned display of products is more visually appealing and adds a degree of transparency, says Seema. Price-based zoning has also been done by clustering different collections in different price ranges together.

Interestingly, Witco on Cunningham Road, Bangalore has done away with a loft and has introduced another new concept - library. The customer can walk into the library and see everything that the store has to offer though the main display area showcases samples of different brands. "This also reinforces the fact that Witco sells what it shows and has nothing to hide," says Seema and adds that this allows for more display area as the store is only about 1,450 sq ft.

The designer has also experimented with increasing street presence by using signages rather than loudly announcing the presence of the store in the upmarket Cunningham Road in Bangalore. A novel way of attracting attention through light towers on the pavement announcing the branches of the stores in different cities and products available has been used to deflect attention from the loud presence of other retail stores on the one-way street.

Fixtures used are made of perforated metal in white, glass and cable suspension instead of brushed steel frames and



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glass used previously. Lighting is predominantly white with hints of blue. Cable suspended glass shelves not only give a spacious look but are also sleek and trendy while white is



associated with everything premium," says Seema justifying the choice of materials. Other value added elements such as brochures with travel tips and particulars such as luggage specification for different airlines and destinations are also a part of the store's efforts to make it unique.

One visual element that hasn't changed is the presence of an aquarium, first installed at Witco's maiden store in Bangalore and then added on to all the stores of the chain. The aquarium is not only soothing but also reinforces the fact at a subconscious level that travel is pleasurable. It also functions as a crowd puller especially when perched on a high pedestal in stores that are lower than street level. All Witco stores have glass facades that offer a clear view of the inside.

Have all these changes paid off? "Of course, we have definitely witnessed an increase in traffic and sales. And we are going to implement the same design for all upcoming stores of Witco. However, I cannot say how much of this increase can be attributed to the new store design. It is something difficult to gauge as travel industry which went into a lull post-dotcom burst is showing signs of recuperation," says a very non-committal Harris. But for Seema, a look at the visitor's book is a testimony to the success of the store design! ■