More than thirty years ago, when specialty retail was still a nascent industry, there was no such thing as an RMU, and a mall cart was an afterthought with large clunky wheels and a cash register hastily tacked on. Fast-forward to the present and we see sleek design, with sight lines integrated into the very fabric of specialty retail visual merchandising. Take a look at this year’s Visual Victories winners and you will be blown away by the ingenuity of the best in our industry, and the ways they make their RMUs and kiosks stand out.

In our 19th edition of these awards, we introduce temporary and pop-up stores into the mix, and you’ll even see some creative uses of parking lot spaces. As specialty retail evolves and grows, so do our annual Visual Victories awards. We hope you derive plenty of inspiration from these “stop-in-your-tracks” displays. Especially impressive is the Before and After section, where even small tweaks such as the addition of storage can yield jaw-dropping results. All our winners, drawn from a record-breaking number of entries, know that it takes more than just a great product to make a sale. Image, as they say, is everything.

The Visual Victories Awards celebrates achievements in seven categories:
- Best RMU Merchandising Display
- Best Overall Kiosk Design
- Most Creative Promotional Cart or Kiosk
- Most Creative Pop-Up Store Design
- Most Creative Temporary Store Design
- Most Inspirational Pop-Up / Temporary Store Window Display
- Most Improved Retail Display (RMU or Kiosk)
Everything about this winner, where a small space is designed for high impact, emphasizes the primary identity the company is looking to communicate: professional. The black and white display fixtures not only let the black and colored makeup items stand out but also reinforce the marketing look. Notice the gradation of shapes from left to right, with linear brushes and sticks on one end slowly moving toward more rounded shapes on the right. Enclosing makeup in glass cases is a smart business strategy to prevent shrinkage. Subdued but focused lighting outlines the test area while underscoring the “professional” message throughout. Ample storage space at bottom accentuates the sleek design. Judge Maryam Samadi points out that the display and visuals are what one would expect to see at any high-end department store makeup counter, which is a very difficult task to execute on a small RMU.

When you think of honey, you think of bees and honeycombs. That word association is brilliantly illustrated here with honeycomb-accented shelving. The natural warm tones of the wood fixtures further underscore the back-to-nature look that the retailer is looking to achieve. Bright yellow highlights on the wheels and handlebar draw customers’ attention back to the top shelf, ensuring that none of the many honey-related products is overlooked. Charming handcrafted wood signage adds to the earthy farmer’s market-style appeal of this unit. The “Save the Buzz” cart addition is a great way to further underscore the business’ underlying marketing message.

This display serves as a textbook example of how color can impact sales. The green accents on the vertical panel are tied together with green slats on bottom sides to create a unified look. The mellow wood paneling is a perfect color to emphasize the word “Organics” in the company’s name. Judicious use of darker wood paneling prevents the mellow hues from getting too drab. Grass plants add flair and height, while symmetry is maintained through placement of circular wooden platters on either side of the bar soap displays. Wooden crate and basket catchalls add a touch of whimsy and warmth.
Judge West Fisher loves the appealing details, especially the faux wood sides and the large glass windows in back. “The rich pipe racking, Edison bulbs, and white manzanita add to the overall California charm of the concept,” Fisher says. Shoppers have the ability to go inside the truck and are invited to do so by the sneak peek that the windows give them. Notice the business name on the truck’s license plate; this is an unexpected touch, which along with the white wicker chair parked outside, adds to the overall whimsy and Boho chic vibe. String lights outside the truck mirror the track lighting inside, which ties the overall design together.

Judge Jessica Suarez loves how his kiosk showcases the “simplicity of Sonoma and the rustic appeal of Italy,” and appreciates the branding that is integrated into the millwork. The large steel gray counter resembles a kitchen unit and invites shoppers for a tasting. Warm wood accent chairs are complemented by similar toned elements throughout. Efficient lighting behind the bar keeps focus on primary merchandise and the red countertop fixture adds a bright splash of color. The white caddies distributed throughout efficiently corral potentially unruly product. Judge Lori Butler points out that quality construction and rich finishes make for a very upscale aesthetic.

Meat Me, Wrap Me
Retailer: Tony Cammarotta
Location: Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, United Kingdom
Center / Owner: centre:mk / Hermes
Entry submitted by: Tom Brice
Visual Merchandiser: Robin Bliss, Display Queens

Cleo’s Oil Bar
Retailer: Cleo’s Oil Bar
Location: Bethesda, Maryland
Center / Owner: Westfield Montgomery
Entry submitted by: Liza Cantu

These red chairs have the power to draw a lot of attention in the common area. Judge West Fisher says that this striking use of color, textures and style makes Meat Me a true achievement in kiosk design. The distressed wood is crafted to accentuate the vertical lines in the company logo and is neatly broken by the horizontal gray stripes all around. The inlaid patterned tiles add just the right pop without distracting from the overall look. The kiosk’s open sight lines also add to its appetizing visual appeal. The signage placement at the bottom keeps the customer’s focus on the food offerings.
A popular sales strategy is to encourage the customer to visualize how a product will fit into his or her home or everyday life. This promotional kiosk is a powerful example of such a method, where the warm pop-up "house" and the outdoor hot tub transport the customer to a tranquil place and essentially make the sale. Judge West Fisher says that the "selection of bricks, wood and marketing all work together to complement the spa's colors, and when combined with the Christmas décor, create a welcoming and warm environment." Judge Sean Keyes points out that the use of the planter, paver flooring, and cabin makes the customer feel like he or she could be at home. A sensation of coziness is created right from the start—with the dark warm wood paneling and stone elements—without losing the sales message, which is displayed prominently but worked well into the overall display.

This is the house that the Smith Brothers built. What better way to emphasize the home-delivery message than to construct a home? Judge Heather Epstein points out that the eye-catching display appeals to everyone's inner child in the way the containers are stacked like Lincoln Logs or Legos, and the stacks of dairy containers clearly convey the primary use. "The lower signage is in a font that is easy to read and the information cleanly organized, against a background color that draws the attention of passersby to the display," she adds. Red fixture colors work with the green of the store sign, and are tied together effectively in the cartons used.

Do you have sullen teenagers or bored husbands tagging along when you visit your local mall? You just know this eye-catching kiosk is going to be a magnet for them. The sleek chair with chrome styling begs to be taken for a ride. The wraparound game is not only fun for the participant but also holds enough appeal for those waiting their turn. Other visitors can stay engaged through interactive displays positioned at just the right level to maintain interest. Additional red chrome chair seating encourages friends to join in the fun.
Northern Grade uses displays that fit their product, says judge Brenda Kinsman, who loves the use of galvanized pipes for display, partnered with raw wood shelving. “They have not overstocked the store, which invites a customer to stay awhile and shop,” Kinsman says. Note the effective use of cubbies to corral small items, such as hats, wallets and bags. Staggered slat wall fixtures add height and drama to the store, and the impression is further accentuated by the tic-tac-toe arrangement of brown and black leather goods. Minimalist brown stick decor in oversized glass vases, mixed in with a measured dose of succulents, adds a touch of glam to the natural and distressed wood accents. Scatter rugs break up the monotony and deliver a pop of color, while the cushy indigo couch encourages dwell time, a much sought-after metric.

If you ever doubt the power of accents to tell a story, take a look at this display. From the tribal print couch cushions to the rattan planter, from the driftwood hangers to the Marley coffee sign, every aspect signals not just the Jamaican origin but also the handmade nature of the shoes sold. The tropical foliage and the picnic bench fixture complement the décor, and the rubber tires even add a touch of street cred.

Everything about this store, from the giant orb outside to the sleek curves of the building (See page 93) to the inspired lighting inside, says futuristic—a very inviting look for today’s young, chic customer. The jaunty white mesh ramp outside adds an element of excitement that draws in passersby. Inside the store, smooth waves and lines showcase product without distracting from it. Touchscreen computers and other computer-generated elements not only dish out additional information but also underscore the store’s contemporary appeal. Light-colored hardwood flooring is trendy without being overly jarring. The track lighting blends into the decor seamlessly while serving its essential function well.
A shipping container has been modified to create one hip, temporary store. As Judge West Fisher points out, the bright orange, white and natural wood styling lend a fun, vibrant and eye-catching look. The subtle patterns in the design add a vibrant spark, and the modern furniture is very appealing. Simple touches such as hiding the sides of the monitors are appreciated, especially in a small space like this, to keep everything looking clean, Fisher says. Raising the interior walls off the ground, and creating the large window layout go a long way to make the space feel more open. The orange cups and pens and planters on the patio add to the charm and overall cohesive planning, while the tangerine balloons add a touch of whimsy. “Outside it looks cold, but inside it looks warm and cozy,” Fisher says.

Notice the vertical slats that are repeated in the wrap; they tie the unit into a cohesive display. The vegetables, which are the stars of the show, are given prime space in the center, segmented into neat bins for a decluttered look, and angled just right to draw attention. The distressed wood and blue colors at the top are carried through around the store, including in the countertop units. The decor’s paler colors let the customer’s focus linger on the vegetables and other goods being sold, while reinforcing the healthy nature of the concept. Judge Lori McGhee calls this a great use of food court space.

The sleek curves of the store fixtures, and even the giant orb outside, accentuate the futuristic look and are especially inviting to today’s young and chic customers. Touchscreen computers and other computer-generated elements help customers check out additional product information and appeal to the store’s tech-friendly demographic. Light-colored hardwood flooring seamlessly melds into store décor, and the track lighting matches the prevailing aesthetic while serving its essential function well (See page 91).
Take a design idea and turn it right on its head—in this case, quite literally. Imagine this same window with the furniture laid out all boring and straight. Would you have stopped to take another look? Maybe you’d stop to see those giant blossoms. But with this unconventional approach to display the window becomes an instant attention grabber. These furniture pieces look like they want to break free of their caged confines and head to your home, which is what the end goal would be. Elements of symmetry, both in terms of design (Moroccan print) and colors, are neatly emphasized. The large flowers add much-needed height to this window display. Judge Beth DeSista adds that this is an “interesting way of combining color blocking, while adding height to otherwise low-profile products.” West Fisher likes the way “everything is stacked, jumbled and embellished to look like it’s either piled in a moving truck, or about to be placed in your new dining room.”

Accents @ Home
Retailer: Deepak Uppal
Location: Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
Center / Owner: Oakridge Centre / Ivanhoe Cambridge
Entry submitted by: Tania Cerantola
Visual Merchandiser: Lisa Roy, Spacelift Design

Most Inspirational Pop-up / Temporary Store Window Display

Karma•
Retailer: Manfred Vollmer
Location: Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
Center / Owner: Oakridge Centre / Ivanhoe Cambridge
Entry submitted by: Tania Cerantola
Visual Merchandiser: Manfred and Nancy Vollmer; Karma Athletics

Shop Local
Retailer: MICH, LLC
Location: Bloomington, Minnesota
Center / Owner: Mall of America / MOA Mall Holdings LLC
Entry submitted by: Lisa Taylor
Visual Merchandiser: Natasia Moose, Mall of America

A rustic wood lodge look that would appeal to the jolly old guy, Santa, himself. This window display has classic textbook examples of merchandising: a ladder to add height and showcase product, staggered tables that again show height and variety, and a strong continuous element at the bottom—snow—to tie it all together. The window frames offering a peek at offerings is an ingenious idea, as is the addition of antique gears that accentuate the rustic charm.

Action is always a desirable element but often difficult to execute. It’s captured perfectly with this window display, which also perfectly enforces the store’s brand image, which is geared toward the active shopper. As judge Heather Epstein says, “Although a simple display at first look, the window display clearly conveys the store is about movement, from drawing the eye across the window with the black window vinyl in a ‘Y’ shape, to the mannequin in mid-stride, jamming to tunes on what feels like a moving treadmill. The figures don’t just fill the space, they tell the story that this store is where active people go to shop.”
The food truck is fun and vibrant but the kiosk is a definite upgrade to upscale eating. The new treatment preserves the original colors while adding fluidity and curves. Judge West Fisher says: “The curved upper styling, like that of a slice of mango, is a delicious touch of creativity that really is the sweetest element of the design. The incorporation of modern LED menus and iPad stations helps draw even more attention to the kiosk and really puts the point across that this is something you have to try. Once you add in the fun logo, vibrant lighting [and] modern images, Mangoland is sure to please.” Clean seating, which is well incorporated into the kiosk build-out, also invites customers for a refreshing treat. Strategic lighting highlights the food kiosk in the busy common area of the mall. Judge Mary Piggott says the kiosk is a good way to fill the craving for a snack while promoting health and wellness.

Looking to capture customers’ attention in the common area? This before and after shows how to do it by shining light in the right places: under the fixtures so it looks like the whole RMU is floating, and on the side panels tinged with a touch of purple. Note that the model no longer smothers the products; she accentuates them. Repetition of elements throughout means customers have access from any side, especially since the unit now looks more inviting and open. “Coupling the purple light with their yellow-capped products was also a stroke of genius that I hope they exploit more in future designs,” says judge West Fisher.

Royale Hair
Retailer: 1844188 Alberta Ltd.
Location: Rocky View, Alberta, Canada
Center / Owner: CrossIron Mills / Ivanhoe Cambridge Inc.
Enter submitted by: Teresa Spencer
Visual Merchandiser: Natasia Moose, Mall of America

Mangoland
Retailer: Mangoland
Location: Rocky View, Alberta, Canada
Center / Owner: CrossIron Mills / Ivanhoe Cambridge Inc.
Enter submitted by: Teresa Spencer
Visual Merchandiser: Jose Jarava and Laura Ochoa, Mangoland

Soccer Club
Retailer: Sebastian Calarota
Location: Hialeah, Florida
Center / Owner: Westland Mall / Starwood Retail
Entry submitted by: Julie Katz
Visual Merchandiser: Yohany Albornoz, ARY Concept & Design LLC

Before
After

Before
After

Before
After

Before
After

This before and after is a stellar example of how to sell more with less. Experienced merchandisers know you don’t have to display each and every product you have to sell it all. A cluttered look is a huge turnoff for the customer. So, while both kiosks have the same lighting elements, the redesigned one has storage fixtures that are painted over with soccer motifs to tell a “story” about the products being sold. It’s an appealing makeover that is bound to net a winning goal.