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**SAVVY STORE DESIGN IN AN AGE OF INSTANT BOOKS AND ENDLESS ‘APPS’  
--Veteran store design consultant Joseph Bona of CBX highlights 21<sup>st</sup>-century challenges  
as part of National Retail Federation panel**

NEW YORK (1/11/2010)—Store design has long been driven by the need to make the customer experience as compelling as possible. But in a society where shoppers can download Kindle bestsellers in a flash or shop on-the-go with iPhones and netbooks, today’s retailers must rethink how they use design to drive traffic—and more importantly, boost sales—in brick-and-mortar stores, said Joseph Bona, President of the Retail Division at CBX, the strategic branding and retail design consultancy.

“Shoppers are redefining how the game is played,” Bona said yesterday during *‘The Power of Retail Design,’* a panel discussion at the National Retail Federation’s 99<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention & Expo, in New York City. “Yes, they still go to brick-and-mortar stores. But they are taking full advantage of high-tech tools that are powering up and evolving at a blistering pace. This puts the onus on designers to create extraordinarily compelling in-store experiences—experiences that are fully integrated with retailers’ brand identities, operational capabilities and the fast-changing behaviors and preferences of their core customers.”

Speaking to an audience that included top retail executives, store designers and architects, Bona cited bold moves in store design that have enabled specialty retail and other chains to set themselves apart from their competitors. “One example is Hollister,” he noted. “The teen apparel retailer changed the way people think about its stores by bucking the status quo at the mall. Instead of having floor-to-ceiling glass storefronts, Hollister actually ‘boarded up,’ so to speak, and created cave-like entrances to its stores. This gave shoppers the sense that, simply by walking in, they were about to embark upon a distinct experience. The oversized photos of sexy models, meanwhile, provided a tantalizing suggestion that what could be found inside would be compelling.”

Skillfully executed, such game-changing approaches can work in any retail category, said Bona, who has worked with brands and stores on six continents in his 30-year career in store design. “Our firm, for example, transformed Petro-Canada’s Neighbours concept into something that looks and feels more like Panera Bread Co. than your typical convenience store,” he said. “The result actually changed shopper behavior and turned Neighbours into much more of a destination for planned purchases vs. impulse-driven purchases. Through design, Neighbours’ stores now have a warm-and-inviting atmosphere—a blend of both convenience and experience that calls to mind something between a corner store and a café.”

Clear communication, too, is a critical component of effective in-store design, commented Bona. “The in-store experience, of course, is also a key communication channel,” he said. “All of us in branding and design should keep in mind that shoppers today demand authentic and transparent messaging as never before. It’s a bit of a backlash in the wake of the housing collapse, Wall Street bailouts and trends like green-washing.”

Bona cited Patagonia as a brand that understands the importance of transparency. Shoppers who visit Patagonia.com can click on the image of any garment and read about its ecological upside, he noted, but they can also learn exactly what is *not* green about the product. “For example, one pop-up info box on their Web site tells all about how the garment’s down came from humanely raised geese and how its light shell is of recycled polyester,” Bona explained. “Under the heading ‘The Bad,’ however, the site then explains that the zipper is treated with a synthetic chemical and is not recyclable. Patagonia is basically saying, ‘We know this isn’t perfect, but we’re working on it.’ ”

Bona and his team seized an opportunity for such authentic communication when Freson Bros., a

family-owned grocery chain with more than 50 years of history in northwestern Canada, asked CBX's Retail Division to revamp its stores. The regional chain had been concerned about competition from Wal-Mart and other multinationals. "If you go in Freson Bros.' conference room, they have black-and-white photos literally lining the walls—a chronological history of the different generations in the business," Bona said. "To this day, their customers know all the owners and managers of these stores on a first-name basis, and they know their customers just as well. That's something the competition cannot offer."

Bona's redesign for Freson Bros. highlighted this mom-and-pop feel. The CBX team literally took pages from the family's photo albums and integrated these sepia-toned images into the store redesign, hanging poster-sized portraits of company founders on the walls and integrating candid shots from early in the company's history into the signage. "In the old original photographs, the managers wore bowties every day," Bona noted. "Our new Freson Bros. logo has a little bowtie, too. It's a subtle thing, but all these cues, taken together, reinforce the brand and bring you back to a time when communities were more intact."

As important as it is to communicate effectively, craft compelling experiences and develop innovative retail concepts, Bona told the audience, such efforts must stay grounded in operational and budgetary realities. "An integrated approach is what is required," Bona said. "When you're looking to do a game-change—something totally new that actually changes consumer behavior—you have to make sure you have the internal capability to deliver."

Likewise, store design should be about the customer experience rather than an abstract reflection of ethereal ideas about brand. "Pressure is being created on all fronts—from traditional online shopping to retail-focused iPhone apps to the Amazon.com Kindle, and who knows what else in the future," Bona said. "Today, store design is all about the end-user: 'How do we communicate from the exterior? How do people interact with and within the space? How do we communicate the point of difference we offer?' Self-referential branding with an interior focus is a thing of the past."

As a full-service consultancy, CBX offers architecture, interior design, merchandise and store planning, identity and branding, graphics and environmental graphic design, media design, product design, master planning, construction detailing, and consumer research. Well known for its work within the grocery, drugstore and convenience store-petroleum industries both domestically and internationally, CBX's Retail Division has a prolific portfolio spanning multinational and regional chains. With several key staff additions, it recently expanded its capabilities to service the specialty retail and department store sectors, with its team now working with a major American fashion chain.

New York-based CBX's Retail Division is exhibiting this week at the NRF convention's DESiGN STUDiO for Store Design and Visual Merchandising, a resource area for suppliers.

### ***About CBX***

CBX, [www.cbx.com](http://www.cbx.com), is a fully integrated creative agency specializing in retail design and operations, brand and corporate identity development, packaging, research, and motion branding. The award-winning company maintains offices in New York City, Minneapolis and San Francisco in the U.S., and in Seoul, South Korea. The CBX Worldwide Partnership has operating offices in Santiago, Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo, Mexico City, Melbourne, Shanghai, London and Amsterdam.

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