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project
Barbie Shanghai
China

architect
Slade Architecture



BARBIE, THE DOLL, WAS BORN fully developed as Barbara Millicent Roberts in New York City at the American International Toy Fair, on March 9, 1959. Although she never lacked a stylish wardrobe, not until Barbie turned 50 did she get her own house – in Shanghai, China. The six-story temple devoted to this diminutive icon cost less than \$10 million and is the first flagship store in the world designed just for Barbie and related products. Why Shanghai? Mattel, Barbie's owner and creator, has faced disappointing returns in the U.S., where sales of Barbie fell 15 percent in 2007. Worldwide gross sales for the second quarter of 2009 are also down 15 percent. No wonder a potential 1.3 billion customers in China, where the retail market is reportedly strong, appeals to Mattel.

The store, known as Barbie Shanghai, stands out on the city's Huai Hai Road, owing to its Modern architecture and design sparked up by vivid "Think Pink!" colors. The New York City firm Slade

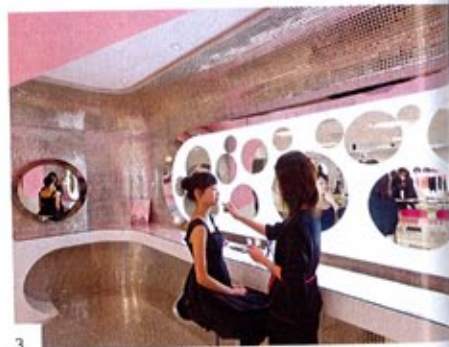
Architecture – cofounded by architects James Slade, AIA, and his wife, Hayes – worked with BIG, the branding and design division of Ogilvy & Mather, to create the feminine phantasmagoria inside. "We wanted an engaging and cohesive physical space to introduce the entire breadth of the Barbie brand to Shanghai and China," says James Slade.

In renovating the concrete-and-steel structure, Slade created a fritted-glass facade (patterned with Barbie icons) over molded translucent polycarbonate interior panels, where LEDs emit a pinkish glow – or other hues – by night. A fuchsia-toned-fluorescent-illuminated escalator spirits visitors from the pearlescent white entrance lobby, past a spa on the second floor, to the white (and fuchsia) double-height space on the third floor. Here begins a three-story circular stair wrapped in a glittering backdrop of Barbie dolls, which "makes Barbie physically and conceptually central to the store," says Hayes Slade.

A special twist shows that

demographics matter. Since most Barbie fans are usually under eight years old, Mattel expanded the brand: While the fourth floor is devoted to Barbie dolls and their paraphernalia, the fifth carries Barbie-inspired girls' attire. The third floor caters to grown women who desire Barbie-type clothes and jewelry. They can even get a "Plastic Smooth" facial at the spa on the second floor. Those seeking to heighten the experience can stop off at the sixth floor's glossy pink-and-black restaurant for a "Barbitini" (a Barbie martini, if you need to ask).

Not surprisingly, with this kind of multipronged appeal, store traffic shows promise: Mattel says the total number of visitors between March 6 and July 31 was 302,763. Of that number, 63 percent were new to the Barbie doll. Next? The unoccupied seventh and eighth floors could be turned over to Barbie home furnishings, pets, or Ken dolls. The opportunities are endless. *Suzanne Stephens*



1. The exterior of the renovated building turns pink with LED lighting.

2. A circular stair links three levels of retail, beginning with the third floor.

3. A beauty salon on the third floor is wrapped in mosaic-tile walls with mirrors set in a backlit panel.

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4. Inside the circular stair, visitors can view 800 Barbie dolls while gliding between the third, fourth, and fifth floors.

5. An escalator, illuminated by fuchsia-toned fluorescent lighting, takes visitors from the lobby to the third floor.

6. The store carries apparel for grown women and young girls, along with the Barbie dolls.

