



HUGH A. BOYD ARCHITECTS, WINNER OF THE 2008 WILL CHING DESIGN COMPETITION, TURNS A CAVERNOUS BASEMENT INTO A BRIGHT, CONTEMPORARY MARKET AND FOOD COURT.





# *retail* Therapy

BY MICHELE MEYER





upermarkets aren't known for being the most exciting spaces, and grocery shopping can seem like a chore for many consumers. But in designing the new Landmark grocery store in Manila, Philippines, Hugh A. Boyd Architects thought outside the cereal box.

"The whole space is very theatrical. It's like taking the entertainment genre and applying it to a supermarket. It's very bold and exciting," says Bill Grant, President and Creative Director of Grant Design Collaborative in Atlanta. Grant was among four judges to name Hugh A. Boyd Architects the winner of IIDA's 2008 Will Ching Design Competition, honoring firms of five or fewer designers, for the Landmark design.

The talent behind the 86,000-square-foot market is Hugh Boyd, FAIA, who runs the one-man firm that bears his name from his home's attic in Montclair, N.J., almost 9,000 miles from Southeast Asia.

Judges were "really impressed with the level of detail," Grant says.

"We were astonished that a firm of fewer than five people could accomplish this level of craft and exquisite finishes in this space. Even the legs on the meat display case were incredibly thought out."

#### A HISTORY OF OVERCOMING HURDLES

Boyd is no stranger to tough parameters. For his design of the Salad Bowl, a 3,900-square-foot takeout and self-service café in New York, which was completed more than 15 years ago, he was challenged with a limited budget and difficult layout: a narrow, windowless and utterly charmless storefront. Inspired by a book he'd just reread – Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* – Boyd created excitement through a dreamlike décor using giant bowls, a nod to the book's magical nature and the café's name. Interestingly, he won the first-ever Will Ching Design Competition in 1993 for that design.

This time around, Boyd's challenge was a tough interior: a cavernous basement with only 11-foot-high ceilings, versus the 20-foot ceilings of many supermarkets. "It was an existing structural column layout, and we had to live with that footprint," he says. "That much space under 11 feet can be oppressive."

He also had never been to Asia before accepting the assignment and being sent by Landmark to visit supermarkets in Hong Kong and Bangkok for inspiration. "The stores were very upscale, gourmet, small stores," he says. "They were beautiful and designed with stones, woods and metals. Realistically, it's very difficult in the Philippines to get those materials. They



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Hugh Boyd turned a cavernous space with 11-foot-high ceilings into a bright and airy supermarket.



don't have a good distribution network to get the materials, and as such they are very expensive."

Additionally, because of heavy deforestation in the Philippines, the use of wood is highly restricted, so Boyd couldn't warm up the vast sprawl with wood. He couldn't afford marble or other rich materials given the project budget, so he was stuck with drywall and kingstone. Nor could Boyd rely on a rich palette of dark shades because it would make the store seem claustrophobic.

These weren't typical ingredients of appealing or award-winning design. "It's a lot easier when you can design around something precious and exclusive like jewelry than when you're designing around Kellogg's Corn Flakes," Boyd says.

#### A WHIMSICAL AND PRACTICAL SOLUTION

Boyd had to rely on imagination and playfulness, as he did with the Salad Bowl café. To highlight the food and make the shopping experience entertaining, Boyd used wrap-around aisles, floating kiosks and a fun tropical motif on paintings near escalators.

It worked. "The judges agreed we'd go out of our way to visit this place if we could," says Mark Harbick, IIDA, AIA, Design Principal and Vice President,

Huntsman Architectural Group in New York. "Coming down the escalators, I imagine people's first experience would be wonderment"

Huge bowls reaching the ceiling are adorned with vines and flowers to signal the food court, support the ceiling and break up a 1,500-seat space into appealing vignettes. Silver-painted screens with egg-like oval cutouts pull together the food service area and grocery, while echoing the curved shapes of the ceiling, display cases and shopping aisles.

The ceiling is made of two layers, a visual trick to add airiness. The highest flat layer is painted black, while the lower layer consists of three-dimensional, white, rounded shapes. "The shopper senses a much greater space. They don't know how much is above because it's painted black," Boyd says.

While the white palate seems impractical, it is essential to transform a cellar into a place where shoppers want to linger. And sea-inspired jewel-toned graphics light up the space.

Additionally, the design's slick surfaces are durable and easy to clean. Food counters, handrails "and any place the public could smack up against" are made of sturdy kingstone, Boyd says.

An inconvenience turned out to be good luck: American grocery refrigerated cases were desired to achieve the highest food safety standards. But because of a better price offer, Boyd used a European company's version with undulating curves, which inspired rounded shapes







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throughout the store. Even aisles are rounded. “In the U.S., Whole Foods has earthy colors and a country feel that tries to capture the feel of a farmer’s market, which we’re rediscovering [in the United States]. In the Philippines, farmer’s markets are the typical place to buy, so they’re much more open to contemporary design for all retail,” Boyd says.

Theatrical lighting makes stars of sushi and red delicious apples, but also helps cut electrical costs, among the most expensive worldwide. “We placed lights to highlight products. It’s extremely energy-efficient,” Boyd says.

#### A ONE-MAN SHOW

Overseeing the project long distance and visiting the site only every three months was a challenge. Since Boyd and Susan Roberts, the U.S.-based graphic artist he hired for the project, couldn’t do the painting themselves, Roberts designed four stencils as patterns for Landmark’s window merchandisers to paint the oversized bowls in Manila.

This may have been Boyd’s first project in Asia, but since college, Boyd has had aspirations to work abroad. Raised in Stoneham, Mass., he studied architecture at the University of Notre Dame, choosing the program because it offered a year in Rome.

He has no regrets. “In Rome, I was surrounded by amazing baroque buildings,” he says. “There was so much creativity. I gained an appreciation for the artful way designers there integrated new construction in historic buildings.”

Upon his return to the states, Boyd became a preservation architect in New England. He moved to New Jersey after being hired to create shops inside the historic buildings of New York’s South Street Sea Port. At the project’s end, he chose to specialize in food retail and restaurant design, often for family-run businesses.

“I understand their business and unique economics. And since I’m a one-person firm, I give tremendous hands-on care,” he says. “Working on my own, I can have an easier lifestyle and can sit down and have a cup of coffee.” Boyd, who tends to wear flannel shirts and doesn’t own a suit, regularly takes his daughter to school and explores museums when he checks in with New York clients.

Curved European refrigerated cases were incorporated to both ensure high safety standards and evoke a contemporary feel.





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—Hugh Boyd, Owner and Principal of Hugh A. Boyd Architects







Boyd used theatrical lighting and curved shapes throughout the space to add to the whimsical, contemporary look.

## Out of Sight, Not Mind

Hugh Boyd's design for the Landmark grocery store may appear effortless and whimsical, but serious thought was given to public safety. During the design process, Boyd and his Filipino contractors hit a roadblock: Once the three stories of a department store were added atop the existing structure, they realized their pillars were inadequate to support the new weight. So they created massive pillars that get narrower toward the bottom. "We had to do huge armatures, and to make them seem less massive, we wrapped them in fiberglass and tapered them to the bottom to look smaller," Boyd says.

His design also imported American standards of food safety. "I convinced them to have refrigerated cutting rooms, but I wanted to expose shoppers to the preparation of food, so I put huge glass walls between the counters and the work area," Boyd says.

To keep the store sparkling and sanitary, he only used easily cleanable surfaces in the food prep area and for flooring throughout. He also placed many drains underfoot and hand-washing areas throughout the work area. And any area where food is cut required more intense lighting.

For the past 15 years, he's designed gourmet specialty stores and indoor public markets, including one in Portland, Maine. Elizabeth Cheng, CEO of Landmark Department Stores, discovered Boyd upon seeing his design of Grand Central Market, located in New York's Grand Central Terminal.

If anyone hesitated about having an architect do a job from across the world, it was Boyd himself. Accustomed to 10,000-square-foot spaces, "it was a real challenge to make the jump up in square footage. I put [Landmark Department Stores] off for six months to try to imagine how a small office like mine could do a large project overseas," he says.

Boyd relied on Landmark's staff and local contractors to complete his vision. When he finished, the 20-year-old chain's owners hired him to renovate one of their existing stores.

In many ways, the project revisits Boyd's first architectural inspiration: his year in Italy. "With this design, I feel as if I've come full circle, having curved counters and reflecting my exposure to baroque architecture in Rome," he says.

In the end, Boyd has both given shoppers an inviting place to buy food and provided food for thought for other designers. "It does for supermarkets what W Hotels did for hospitality and David Rockwell did for corporate space," Grant says. "Boyd recast an ordinarily mundane task as theater. If you can do it with a grocery store, you can do it with anything." 