

# Retailing Outside the Box

Christy Sports' new flagship store was designed with customers and the brand in mind

by CRAIG GUILLOT

In the age of mass global retail, big boxes and instant online shopping, specialty retail customers want a rewarding, personalized in-store shopping experience. A compelling and carefully designed space can go a long way toward branding a company's name and reputation.

Ski and snowboard equipment retailer Christy Sports recently redesigned a building from the ground up in Boulder, Colo., to serve as the company's flagship store. The retailer worked with a local architect to create a unique layout that showcases the company's products while appealing to customers' passion for the outdoors.

First opened as a small ski shop in 1958 in Lakewood, Colo., Christy Sports is a well-known, family-owned merchant with more than 40 locations in Colorado and Utah. The company's main areas of focus are ski and snowboarding equipment, which it sells in the winter, and patio furniture, sold in the summer.

Christy Sports Director of Real Es-

tate Hugh O'Winter says a lot of planning went into remodeling the Boulder store to give shoppers a sense of space and a connection to the surrounding environment. In a highly competitive retail environment, O'Winter says it's essential for specialty retailers to create an "emotional connection" with the customer through the store experience.

"Anything you can do to create a sense of warmth, to create a seamless environment between the indoors and the outdoors and tie that emotional connection to the customer is of critical importance," he says.

Christy Sports wanted to make that connection in its Boulder location — but it had to be balanced with the need for dualism. Retailing seasonally and visually contrasting products was an interesting challenge. The building needed a layout that was optimal for selling ski and snowboarding equipment when there is snow on the ground and patio furniture in the sunny days of summer. Everything from the curb appeal to the layout and elements of the interior had to make

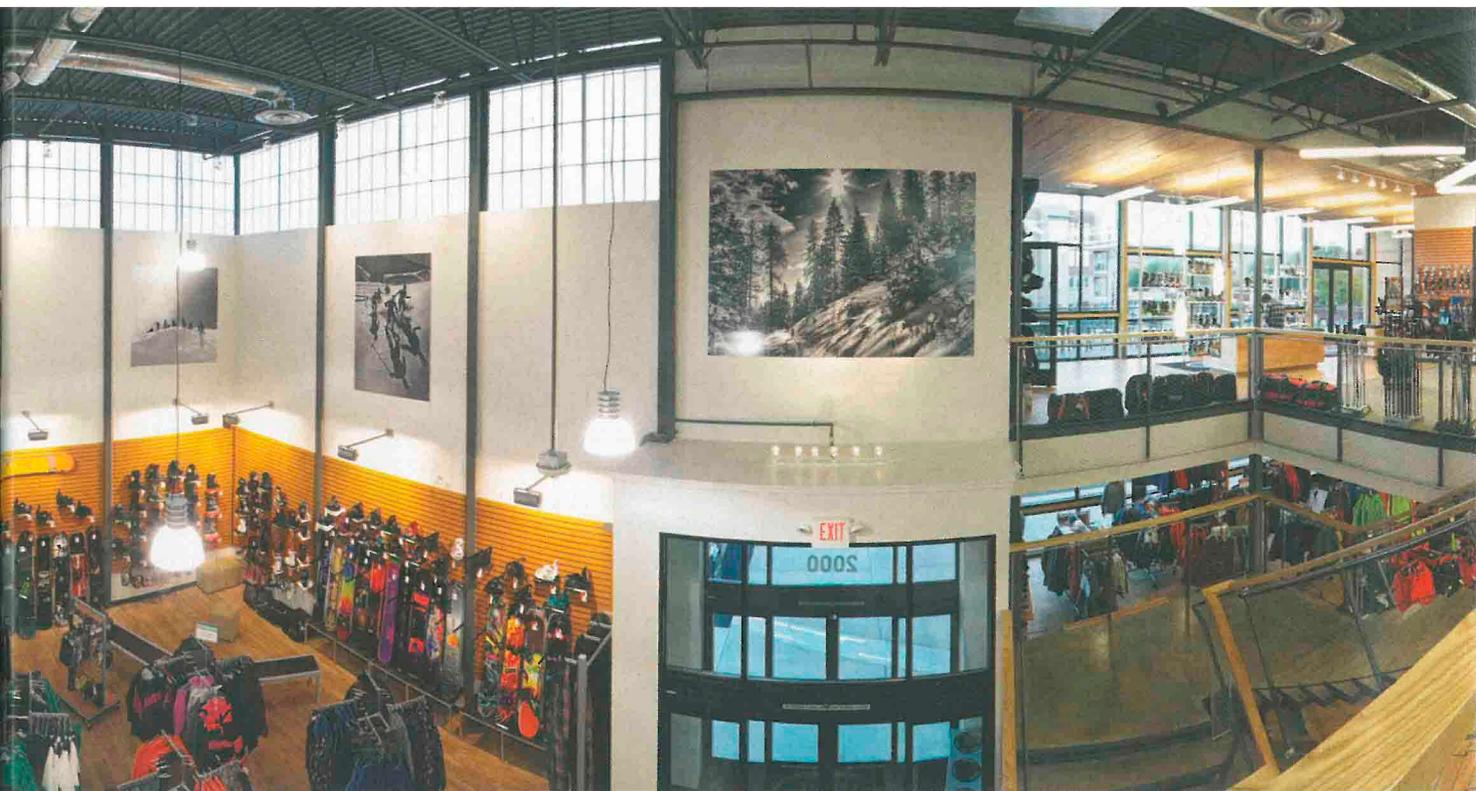
a statement that Christy Sports was about enjoying the outdoors.

## UPDATING CURB APPEAL

Christy Sports hired local architects Arch11 in 2013 to take on the task of converting the building into its vision of a flagship store. The architecture firm has worked with specialty retailers and is known for its ability to repurpose buildings.

Arch11 Principal Ken Andrews says concise and careful design in retail is no longer just about profitability, it's about appealing to emotions. He says even big boxes are "starting to question their model" and points to companies like Target and Walgreen Co. as examples of larger retailers that have begun to pay more attention to aesthetics in recent years.

Andrews says design is even more important for specialty retailers because it helps build excitement and emotion in customers about where they are and what they're shopping for. Consumers usually go to big boxes because they have to, he says; they go to boutique retailers because



they want to.

“Smaller boutique retailers are realizing their store environments are [part] of an atmosphere and culture that speaks to the clientele and makes it inviting,” he says.

The original building was a drab, nondescript bunker-like facility, not visible from the street. Arch11 helped transform the space into a two-story store with a lively, loft-like retail environment. One of the first steps was to enhance the building’s appearance and curb appeal in relation to adjacent buildings. The transition included raising the roof to the maximum height allowed in Boulder’s building codes.

Arch11 also moved the building’s west facade closer to the main thoroughfare to improve visibility for an appealing new entrance with enhanced window displays. O’Winter says because the store is in a stand-alone location, Christy Sports needed to improve its visibility and give customers a compelling reason to visit.

“There’s no dependency in the immediate vicinity,” he says. “We were kind of tucked off behind 30th Street and wanted to create a dynamic and appealing retail environment that would bring customers into the store.”

The store was also designed with an

open-air element to showcase patio furniture. Rather than display the products in a cramped indoor space during its selling season, the new design features a second floor outside deck where customers can test-drive the furniture in the spring and summer months. Crafted with residential wood surface flooring and facing mountain views, it allows customers to experience the furniture as they might at home.

#### FINDING THE RIGHT DESIGN

Arch11 worked with Christy Sports to identify and select the right materials for the interior of the store. Andrews says a lot of the preliminary work involved learning more about the company’s customers to present the right look and feel. It went with a design that incorporated more exposed elements with a hint of a mountain chalet feel.

The new space brings the outdoors inside with 12-foot windows and daylighting features that create naturally lit showrooms and displays. There are also two main entrances with high ceilings and an expansive loft. All combined, it allows Christy Sports to offer a greater selection of ski and snowboarding equipment while maintaining a spacious layout for shoppers.

Andrews says because ski products are high tech and high performance, Christy Sports wanted a space that also demonstrated those characteristics.

“We selected materials and used them in a way that speaks to the technical qualities of skiing and snowboarding and the high-tech modern-minded community of Boulder,” he says. “We worked hard early on to program the space and find the psychology of what they wanted it to be.”

Christy Sports worked diligently to ensure that the architect fully understood the company’s customers. O’Winter walked them in detail through the components of the company’s operations, ranging from how customers enter the store to how it wanted to display merchandise. O’Winter says everyone from floor staff to store managers to regional managers had insight into how the store should look.

“We went through a lot of iterations,” he says. “It was an interactive and collaborative process and we were able to find exactly what we were looking for in the space.” **STORES**

**Craig Guillot is based in New Orleans and writes about retail, real estate, business and personal finance. Read more of his work at [www.craigguillot.com](http://www.craigguillot.com).**