

# Guitar Maker's CEO Designs Own Cutting-Edge Retail Store for Musical Instruments.



**Gibson Guitar's 8,000-square-foot Nashville store's high tech aesthetics & indoor air quality is a role model for other retailers.**

NASHVILLE — Gibson Guitar Corp.'s new Valley Arts factory store here proves that the 142-year-old musical instrument manufacturer knows just as much about retail store design and customer comfort as it does about manufacturing fine guitars.

Taking inspiration from trendsetter company stores by Disney, Nike, Harley Davidson, and Warner Brothers, Gibson CEO Henry Juskiewicz's store design strategy is a blend of cutting edge indoor air quality (IAQ) technology, interior design wizardry, and entertainment merchandising.

In fact, today's cutting edge retailers could take a page out of Juskiewicz's design book on indoor air quality, an emerging store design strategy because behavior pattern research studies indicates comfortable customers tend to stay longer thus increasing purchase possibilities. A comfortable retail atmosphere also increases employee productivity.

What attracts the customers is entertaining merchandising such as Valley Arts' centerpiece attraction — an antique bank vault that serves as a high-end product merchandiser — plus Gibson memorabilia of superstars

such as Willie Nelson, Sheryl Crow, and Vince Gill throughout the 8,000-square-foot store. But what subliminally keeps the customers in the store is the comfortable environment, according to Juskiewicz.



While most retailers today rely on costly recessed heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) duct or unsightly exposed round duct with drafty registers every 10 feet, Gibson's use of bright red round fabric duct adds as much festivity to the atmosphere as the musical instruments and merchandising.

While offering a significant cost savings over labor and materials of metal duct, fabric also offers a softer contrast to the sterile, industrial-style interiors Juskiewicz created after stripping the space down to its all-concrete surfaces. "We used fabric duct for its quietness in the tuning section of our Nashville guitar factory," said Darrell Baker, Gibson's maintenance manager, "but here fabric duct added quietness, plus the aesthetics we wanted."

The polyester-blended fabric duct, manufactured by DuctSox, Dubuque, Iowa, under the product name of TufTex® offers more than aesthetics, according to Juskiewicz. A sleek linear vent the entire length of each duct disperses a gentle airflow without drafts for employees as well as Gibson's fine wooden instruments. Hung from an H-track suspension system, the Comfort-Flow model of DuctSox's line duct doesn't collect condensation or dust because approximately 15 percent of the airflow is purposely dispersed through the fabric. "A concrete structure such as this generates a lot of dust and the fact it won't settle on the ductwork and the insides of the ductwork can be washed was a really big deal for us," Juskiewicz said.



The \$400,000 store, which commands the ground level of an abandoned 50,000-square-foot five-level office building in the oldest section of Nashville, is already paying dividends. The International Music Products Assoc. (NAMM), Carlsbad, Calif., reports that musical instrument retail sales average \$160/square foot, however Gibson's Valley Arts store is already tracking at \$275/square foot and Juskiewicz's goal is \$500/square foot.

Helping attain that goal is the store's ongoing inventory changes which include more impulse items such as t-shirts, hats, and other "tour ware" to attract the general public.

Also part of the air comfort is the HVAC equipment that supplies the fabric duct. The building has a 100-ton R-Series Trane, Tyler, Texas, chiller and a Lochinvar, Lebanon, Tenn., CB-Series, 2.4 million BTU boiler that supplies air conditioning and heating, respectively, to

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a Trane 2,000-cfm air handler for each floor, including the retail floor. To keep wooden instruments in a proper environment as well employees and customers, Baker's department maintains a 44 to 55 percent relative humidity in the store with a commercial humidifier.

The Valley Arts store is serving as a prototype for future Gibson stores, according to Juskiewicz. "We don't want to open a lot of stores, but pick and choose the right location with a large amount of semi-professional and professional customers that want the high-end service and atmosphere that we can provide," he said.



One other advantage is flexibility. In the short time the store has been open, the sales floor strategy has changed twice leading to a quick and easy reconfiguration of the duct system. To keep the IAQ top rate, Juskiewicz plans to disassemble the duct once a year and launder them as part of the store's maintenance policy. "The retail business changes almost on a daily basis, so our floor plan today can be changed tomorrow with moveable store fixtures, an open floor design, and the ductwork system," Juskiewicz said.

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