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## Gensler Brings American Girl to New York City

*Destination place in Rockefeller Center offers branded experience from building facade to chair buttons*

American Girl Place® New York, a new 43,000-square-foot retail and entertainment destination designed by Gensler—Architecture, Design & Planning Worldwide, opened November 8 in New York's Rockefeller Center area on the corner of 49th Street and Fifth Avenue. Every design detail of the store's five floors immerses visitors in the experience of the enormously popular American Girl dolls, books, clothes, and accessories aimed at girls age 3 to 12. The store includes boutiques, a cafe, and a theater on the first three floors and mezzanine, with office and support functions on the fifth and basement levels. In addition to architecture and interior-design services, Gensler provided graphic design and custom fixtures and furnishings design. Vanguard Construction & Development served as construction manager.



The 1925, 13-story building's wide, column-free spaces and high ceilings allowed Gensler to design both cozy corners and grand atriums, the architect reports. Carefully planned circulation areas offer comfortable seating areas, and accommodate strollers, parents, and children of all sizes. Details such as terrazzo flooring in primary circulation areas and heavy cornice molding at the ceilings create a traditional flavor in keeping with the brand and its sophisticated surroundings. "Gensler's mission was to create a place that would combine the educational with the entertainment objectives of the American Girl brand through experiences that celebrate girlhood, affirm self-esteem, and enhance mother-daughter relationships," says John Bricker,

Gensler's design director for the project. "It's less about shopping than it is about having an interactive, meaningful experience."

American Girl establishes its presence directly at street level, even before visitors enter the building. Awnings of the brand's signature berry red adorn 20-foot-high windows that invitingly reveal the interiors, while etched stars referencing the American Girl logo appear in the top portion of the windows.

Working closely with Pleasant Company, the owner, Gensler customized lighting, carpet, and fabrics to create whimsical touches in keeping with the brand. In some cases, the new designs even inspired new packaging and branding solutions for American Girl products, according to the architect. The American Girl star motif graces custom-designed carpeting in the theater, lighting fixtures, and cutouts on the library lampshades. Gensler also designed two 13-foot-diameter star-shaped chandeliers for the main floor.

### A special treat on each floor

The ground floor and mezzanine levels house various retail spaces for American Girl brands as well as a 1950s-style doll hair salon, doll hospital admissions (for repair of "injured" dolls), plus ancillary customer services. Although several other store sections integrate books into their displays, the bookstore owns the ground floor, encouraging girls and their mothers to sit and read or shop for books.



treated to a visual feast of black-and-white striped walls, berry accents, and custom-designed furniture with beaded hanging lamps.

The second floor features The American Girl Collection®, which includes historic dioramas of all the American Girl characters plus a 133-seat live-action theater featuring an original musical revue that embodies the lessons and values taught through the American Girl stories. The top-floor, 161-seat American Girl Cafe offers yet another setting through which mothers and daughters can "create lasting memories," according to the architect. At scheduled times, when a maitre d' whisks open padded double doors, visitors are

American Girl Place New York draws its cues for look and feel of the brand's first, highly successful retail space in Chicago, which opened five years ago. "We are thrilled to bring American Girl Place to New York and to one of the world's most prestigious shopping districts," says Ellen L. Brothers, president of Pleasant Company's American Girl brands. "Gensler's design infuses the sophistication and excitement of New York City into the American Girl experience."