

July 2013 | www.ddionline.com



Presenter of
GLOBALSHOP2014
Sponsored by: ARE

DDi

Store Design | Architecture | Branding | Visual Merchandising | Marketing

Karl Lagerfeld

debuts in Paris

page 24

Walgreens | Fred Perry | World Department Store Forum | Fixture Leaders | ICFF Products

High-fashion produce

One of my favorite memories as a kid was the annual Central Washington State Fair in Yakima, Wash. Between the daredevil fair rides, cotton candy, dusty cowboy rodeo and endless livestock shows was the “Hall of Produce,” featuring elaborate displays of local fruits and vegetables. Oftentimes depicting 3-D dioramas of local points of interest or words made entirely out of world-famous Yakima Valley apples and other produce, these creative displays no doubt helped to influence my appreciation and interest in visual merchandising.

In a similar way, what really catches my eye this time of year are the sprawling seasonal farm stands that sprout up along country roads, as well as the New York farmers markets that flourish with their casual yet carefully arranged inventory of delicious fresh produce. In turn, this increases my awareness of even the corner supermarket’s fresh produce section. All of which make me appreciative of the planning and care that goes into even the most basic of produce displays.

Summer is a perfect time to get creative with fresh produce and acknowledge the individuals and teams who work within this important sector of the retail design and visual merchandising industries. Whether you are at a quiet roadside farm stand, a bustling urban farmers market or a bright, air-conditioned suburban supermarket, take a step back and appreciate the merchandising skill within the summer abundance—it’s high-fashion season for local produce.

For centuries, humans have depended upon produce markets to provide essential provisions and ingredients for daily life.

The care in how a market stall would display its produce no doubt helped influence customer interest, sales and repeat business.

The tradition continues today, from the colorful chaos of produce markets in India to the artful arrangements of global produce offered at the newest Whole Foods.

The “art and science” of produce display employs the skills and talents of many, including entry-level produce associates, produce merchandising managers and décor directors. It can be a tough job not suitable for all. A recent job posting for a produce merchandiser noted the position required “the ability to work in cold environments, the capability of lifting 75 pounds on a regular basis, and a creative eye and talent for display.” Sound familiar?

As challenging or unfamiliar the merchandising of fresh produce may be, it certainly does draw upon the same basic skills and principles of good display that form the basis of all visual merchandising—whether it be a carefully edited luxury retail handbag display, or multiple stacks of folded colored sweaters on a table or wall shelf. Color blocking at the local UNIQLO is not that far away from color blocking seasonal greens and legumes.



As with most displays, what can look simple to reproduce and maintain is not always so easy. And, there are several unique factors that can influence where and how fresh produce is displayed, including:

Adjacencies. Placing compatible produce next to each other. Did you know that certain produce gives off ethylene gas and can shorten the life of other produce if placed too close? It’s similar to merchandising the right mix of designer accessories to work well off of each other.

Shelf life. Fresh produce is perishable, and therefore has a limited shelf life (aka shrinkage). Think of it as the “fast fashion” reality of fresh produce.

Customers. Frequent handling and constant depletion of displayed inventory means that perfectly organized stack of fresh oranges can look less enticing after just a few busy minutes of sales. Ditto for that T-shirt table at H&M. From a retail design and fixture point of view, most grocery stores appear to be leaning toward what continues to be a strong trend in retail design—primarily, the vintage/authentic design trend that evokes a homegrown, natural, rustic, urban-country, nostalgic place. Think Rag & Bone, Urban Outfitters and Anthropologie. The produce area acts as a direct extension of the grocer’s nostalgic farm stand and farmers market heritage. Frequent use of vintage-style orchard crates and carts, open wagon-inspired display tables and chalkboard price signs all lend an air of authenticity to the produce area.

So, here’s a summer shout-out to our fellow visual merchandisers in the world of fresh produce. Thank you for making a mundane pile of fruits and vegetables turn into the enticing, mouthwatering composition of color, texture and shape that makes us want to buy just a few more of each. **DDI**

—New York-based Peter-Tolin Baker’s involvement with visual merchandising includes PTB Design Services (owner), Fashion Institute of Technology (adjunct professor), Retail Design Institute New York Chapter (board president) and DDI (regular contributor). Contact him at ptb@ptbdesignservices.com.