

design WEEK



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Olympic heroes
games graphics that struck gold

On a pedestal

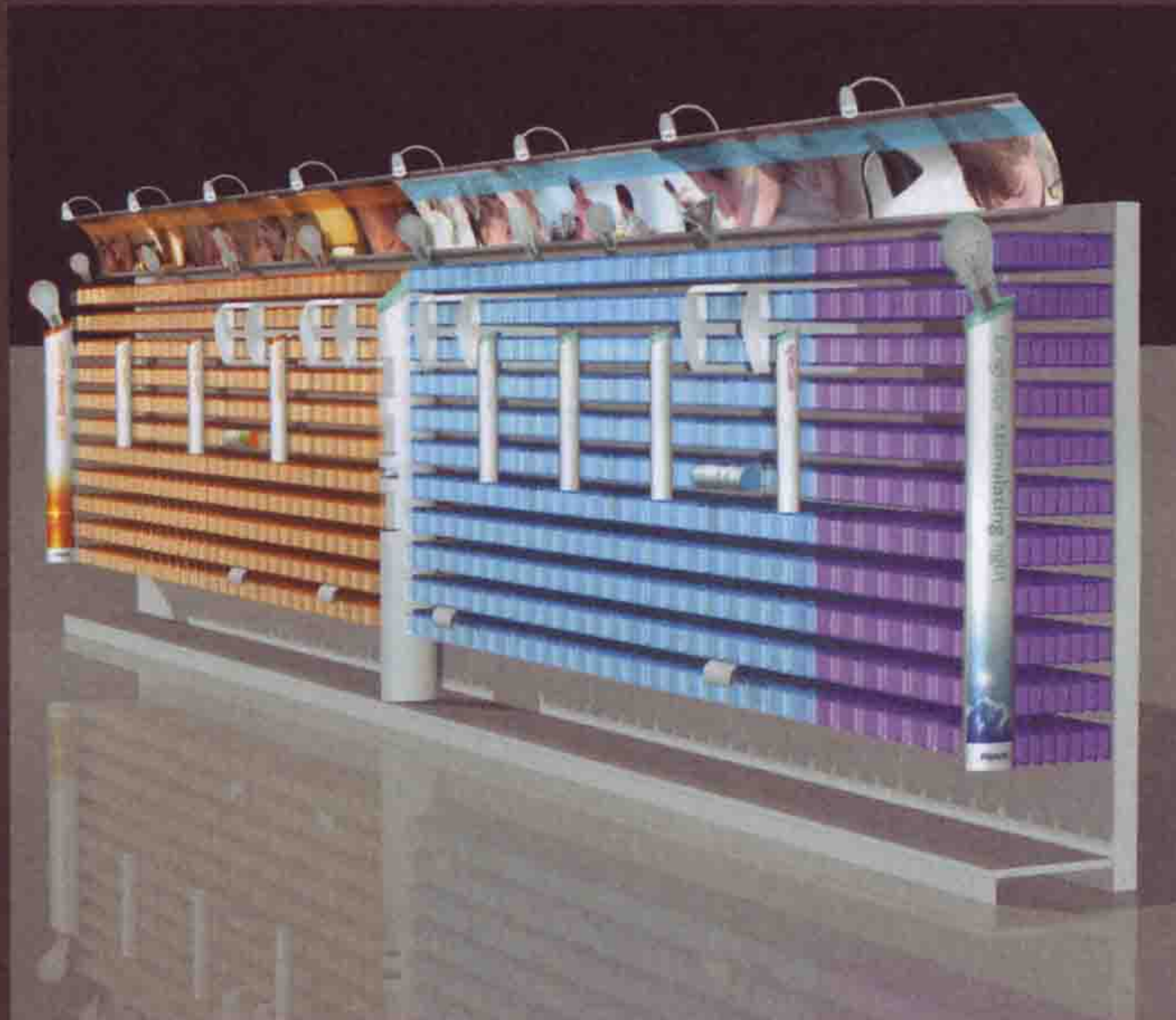
A black fridge, intriguing drawers, a showcase for comparing light bulbs and a wall for 1500 pairs of shoes – creative and innovative retail displays will always be in demand, according to **John Stones**



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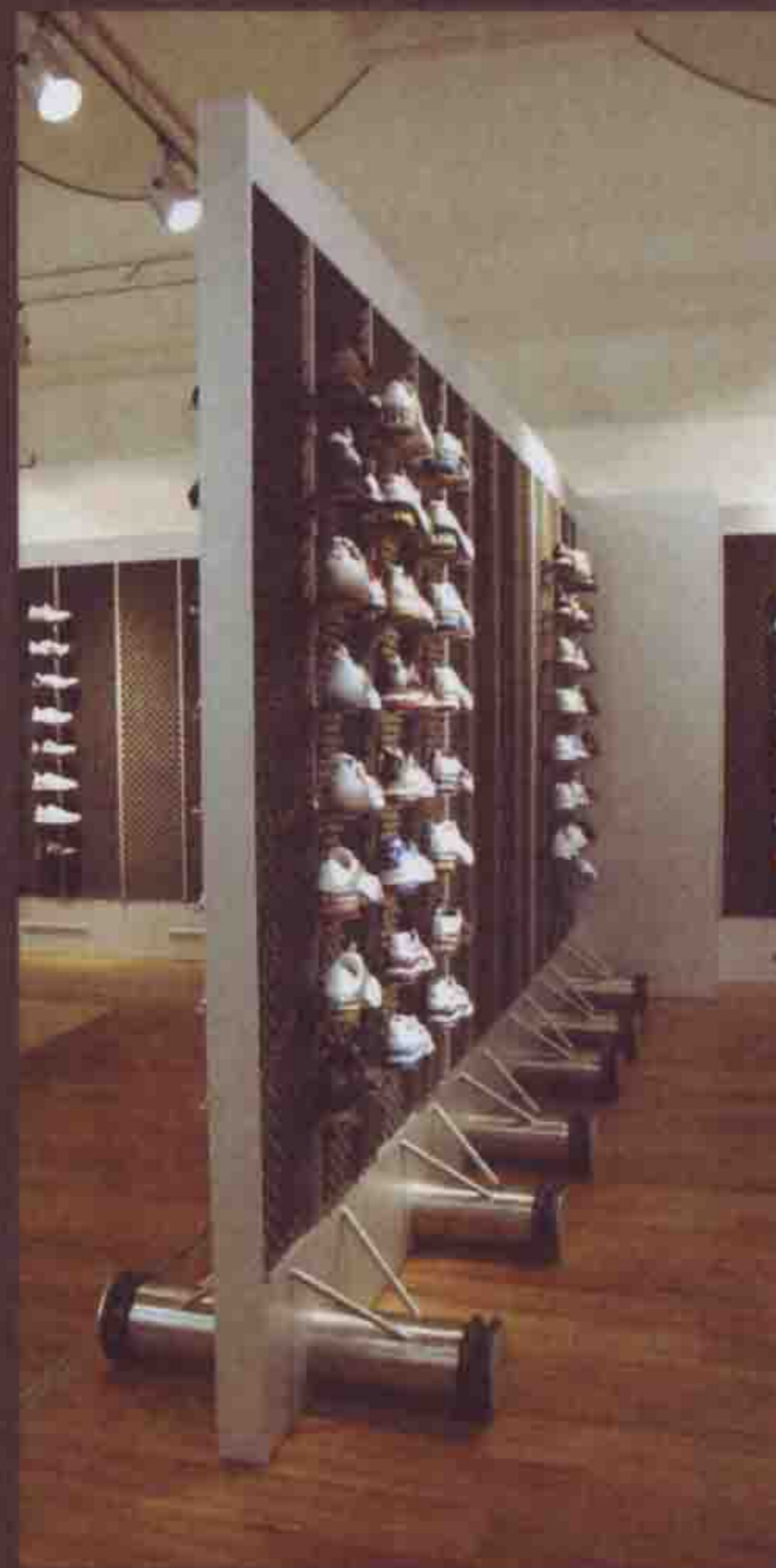
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TAKING a stroll down the high street, you are currently more likely to be confronted by the desperate and brash red and white proclamations of sales than exquisite design work. It's not really a surprise given that, according to the British Retail Consortium, the industry is going through its worst period for a decade. But this hasn't stopped a selection of designers and clients from keeping the faith and putting their energies into creating interesting displays to tempt consumers into opening their wallets or purses. Of course, interesting display systems are not solely the preserve of retailers, but of exhibition designers too. Showing simple, yet ingenious, responses to the question of how to display objects, here are four recent projects.

The Fridge

When Afroditi Krassa of Industrial Design Consultants agreed to take on the mantle of creative director for Itsu, the Asian restaurant that is set to grow into a chain of takeaways under the guidance of Pret a Manger founder Julian Metcalfe, one of the primary challenges was how to display the food. The first takeaway has opened in London's Hanover Square, soon to be followed by another in Piccadilly. 'I wanted the food and the packaging to stand out, not the displays,' says Krassa.

Of course, the cold food unit has to double up as the display system. Determined to make the display look part of the overall architecture, Krassa struggled to find fridge manufacturers that supplied anything other than white-coated items. So the units needed to be sandblasted and sprayed in black to provide a traditional oriental – and dramatic – foil to the food. Lighting also had to be considered carefully, so that customers are guided to the hot and cold food by suitable light temperatures.

The Drawer

Gitta Gschwendtner's recent design for the Crafts Council's Making it Yours: Metal exhibition, which runs until June next year, makes prominent use of drawers to distinguish between the tiers of objects on display and literally draw visitors into the detail of the display. The primary exhibits – metal artefacts – are on open display, while the tools and subsidiary exhibits are stored in the red-painted interiors of the handsome drawers with inviting ceramic knobs, awaiting a keen visitor who, after reading the information (the graphics are by Marcia Mihotich), wants to delve further.

Gschwendtner says the inspiration for the drawers came not from retail, but from the cabinet of curiosities, originally a Renaissance idea. The drawers also answer what Gschwendtner saw as a need for tidiness – she felt that a similar exhibition last year featuring ceramics felt cluttered. The drawers are cut out of the same wood as the wall panel, creating a continuous grain effect when they are shut.

The Storyboard

Selling light bulbs is not an easy business – they're seen as a distress purchase, bought largely on price by a confused consumer. Philips, keen to take the fight to cheaply produced Far Eastern products, decided it needed to help consumers differentiate its light bulbs. So London consultancy Vivid Brand was enlisted to look at how retail fixtures could become a communications vehicle. The results, which are being rolled out throughout Europe, focus on what light is about, using subdivisions such as soft versus bright, allowing merchandising according to effect rather than the usual fixture category, says Charlie Mitchell-Heggs, integration director at Vivid Brand.

The Wall

In its lavish 4000m² Brandcentre in Nuremberg, which opened this month, Puma needed a display that could handle up to 1500 pairs of shoes. Intended as a kind of laboratory for the sportswear manufacturer, Decoprojekt's design makes use of a bespoke display system. Called the Nimbus 2000, the stainless steel elements function as displays and flexible room dividers, but also play an important acoustic role in preventing arbitrary sound problems in the space. ●

1 Itsu interiors, by Industrial Design Consultants

2 and 3 Close-up and overview of Gitta Gschwendtner's designs for Crafts Council exhibition Making it Yours: Metal

4 Merchandising units created by Vivid Brand for Philips light bulbs

5 and 6 Decoprojekt's display walls for Puma's Nuremberg Brandcentre