

shop!
DESIGN
AWARDS²⁰₂₆

ENTRY KIT

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The Shop! Design Awards celebrate achievements in areas such as new store design, renovations, fixtures, visual presentation projects and in-store communications. Entries are cited for excellence in design, originality in use of space and materials and quality of concept execution.

DEADLINE: Jan. 23, 2026

ENTRY FEES: (per submission)

Members: **\$509**

Non-members: **\$665**

Element Add-On: **\$130 per element**

WINNERS ANNOUNCED: At Shop! MarketPlace, May 6-7, 2026, New Orleans, LA

Questions about the Design Awards? Email designawards@shopassociation.org.

To verify your membership status, contact Dina Meindl at dina@shopassociation.org.

ELIGIBILITY

Entries may be submitted by retailers, designers, architects or suppliers of projects installed in operating retail environments between Jan. 1, 2025 and Dec. 31, 2025. A project may be entered by only one company. Once it is entered, it is eligible for additional consideration for additional fees. Entries not complying with competition rules will be disqualified.

REFUND POLICY

Fees will not be refunded if entry is disqualified at any stage of the judging process.

JUDGING PROCESS

An independent panel of judges determines a gold award and up to two silver awards in each category. One overall store entry is also awarded Store of the Year. All awards are determined at the judges' discretion; decisions are final.

Principal criteria for judging:

- excellence in design
- originality in the use of space and materials
- quality in executing the total concept
- in some cases, the highest return for dollars spent

CATEGORIES

One gold award winner from qualifying categories (those with an asterisk [*] below) will be selected as the Store of the Year:

Brand Activation

A campaign, event, or experience that drives consumer interaction with a brand.

Branded Shop Within a Store

A single branded shop or department within a department store, e.g., Chanel Cosmetics within Saks Fifth Avenue or Timberland PRO within Ritz Safety.

Convenience Store

Small grocery stores predominantly selling convenience items, including snack foods and sandwiches. Gas station c-stores are encouraged to submit.

* Department Store (New or remodeled)

A traditional department store with several distinctive areas devoted to various product classifications or brands, which might include apparel, cosmetics, home goods, linens, electronics, etc.

Department Within a Store

A single specialty department within a department store, e.g., menswear, shoe department, etc.

* Hardline Specialty Store (New or remodeled)

Stores, including themed environments, where at least 50 percent of the merchandise is hardlines, such as toys, electronics, audio visuals, hardware, eyewear, cosmetics, jewelry, appliances, equipment, furniture, or variations thereof. Additionally, floral, bath and body products, and books are defined as hardlines. Stores in this category are further divided by square footage.

Pop-Up Store

Any retail environment that sells merchandise/ services or offers a brand experience in a temporary installation of one year or less. This category may include tented spaces, moving vehicles, barges and other mobile retail, as well as seasonal and special promotional events held in retail or non-retail buildings.

Restaurant/Casual Dining

Any store that sells meals for immediate consumption at moderate prices, including casual and family restaurants, delis and cafes.

Restaurant/Fast Food

Any store that serves meals prepared for onsite, drive-thru or take-out consumption that can be prepared in 3-5 minutes or less while the customer waits. Must be classified as a fast food chain.

Restaurant/Fine Dining

Any store that serves meals prepared on-site for immediate consumption and creates a fine dining experience that features a high level of service, comfort and décor.

* Service Retailer

Any establishment that sells a service rather than a product, such as banks, brokerages, financial services, hair salons, spas, business service centers and travel agencies.

* Softline Specialty Store (New or remodeled)

Stores, including themed environments, where at least 50 percent of the merchandise is softlines, such as apparel, shoes, textiles and linens. Stores in this category are further divided by square footage.

* Specialty Food and Consumables Retailer

Any store that merchandises and sells as its main product specialty foods, beverages, or products that are consumable such as tobacco and cannabis. This category differs from the Restaurant categories in that the food product sold is not generally for immediate consumption, with the exception of some food retailers that offer food and drink bars as an added service.

* Specialty Store Over 25,000 square feet (New or remodeled)

A store specializing in one or more product lines, generally but not necessarily incorporating both hardline and softline goods. Shop! reserves the right to further subdivide this category as necessary in order to ensure accurate, equitable store comparisons.

* Supermarket/Grocery Store

Any store that merchandises and sells a variety of food and beverage types. May include some prepared food sections as one of many departments.

Window Display

A store or shop window displaying items for sale or otherwise designed to attract customers into the store.

ELEMENT CATEGORIES

Add one or more element categories to showcase individual aspects of your main category entry for only \$130 more each!

Brand Flooring

Any aesthetic or functional enhancement to flooring within a retail environment

In-Store Communications

Signage, interactive technology and/or digital media presentations within a retail environment

In-Store Visual Display

Any visual or thematic element or elements, including cosmetic presentation (seasonal or other); graphic communication; mannequin displays or groupings; seasonal presentation; themed prop or Environment; and window display

Lighting

Any aesthetic or functional enhancement to lighting within a retail environment

Signage/Graphics

Static signage/graphics including brand and lifestyle graphics as well as wayfinding, exterior/storefront, and retail brand messaging signage.

Store Fixture

Any unit, units or kiosk used to hold or display merchandise in a store, shop, or as a freestanding center

Storefront/Exterior

Retail exterior/facade that reinforces the store as a destination, exemplifies branding, creatively solves an architectural challenge, or adds aesthetic beauty while meeting functional needs.

Sustainability

Any sustainable element or innovative sustainable aspect of your project

Use of Technology

Application of technology in-store or on the storefront to enhance the in-store experience, engage consumers, reinforce brand positioning, increase dwell time, attract attention, increase sales, assist with product selection, provide customized products or services, etc.

Wall Treatment

A decorative process or art form used to enhance a wall within a retail environment

ENTRY PREP TIPS

- 1 Follow the rules and formats provided. Your entries will fare better.
- 2 Make sure to include all key vendors in the credits list. Including company and the retailer!
- 3 Despite its many positive qualities, your project will be critiqued primarily on the images submitted. When possible, contract with a professional photographer.

If taking your own pictures, make sure that they are high resolution. Use a digital camera of at least 5 megapixels. Make sure that the camera is set for the highest possible resolution AND highest possible image quality (with least image compression).
- 4
- 5 Make sure you have good lighting when photographing the store or fixture. Use additional lighting or adjust the room lighting as necessary.
- 6 Clear unnecessary items from the area before you photograph so the judges can concentrate on the design.
- 7 If your store element has a unique function that can be demonstrated, take a picture showing that, or replace one image with a 45-second video. Again, make sure the picture is well lit and organized.
- 8 If your store element has a special component, include a closeup of the element so the judges can better understand its uniqueness.

Send enough visuals to adequately tell your project's story. If 4-10 images are requested, send 10 whenever possible. Include one 45-second video and/or a floor plan in place of an image. The judges need ample visual information to judge your project.
- 9
- 10 Be concise and provide specifics in your project descriptions. Use bullet points as much as possible. Judges have a limited amount of time to review the descriptions, so help them identify important points at a glance.
- 11 If possible, number the images in a proper sequence that will help walk the judges logically through the store or project so they can better understand it.
- 12 Make sure you have copyright permission from the photographer and/or the retailer and that you have provided an accurate list of contributors to the project. If your photographer wants a credit, they must be added to the credit list.
Please Note - Any images submitted may be published on-line and in print.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Entry questions/general inquiries:
designawards@shopassociation.org

CATEGORY LIST

Main Categories:

Brand Activation
Branded Shop Within a Store
Convenience Store
Department Store
Department Within a Store
Hardline Specialty Store
Pop-Up Store
Restaurant/Casual Dining
Restaurant/Fast Food
Restaurant/Fine Dining
Service Retailer
Softline Specialty Store
Specialty Food and Consumables
Retailer
Specialty Store Over 25,000 sf
Supermarket/Grocery Store
Window Display

Element Categories:

Flooring
In-Store Communications
In-Store Visual Display
Lighting
Signage/Graphics
Store Fixture
Storefront/Exterior
Sustainability
Use of Technology
Wall Treatment

