



**PICTURED**  
Orlando Amway  
Arena Lobby

# A DIFFERENT BALL GAME

Images courtesy of Rip Bang Studios,  
Los Angeles, USA

ENTERTAINMENT-LED ARCHITECTURE IS A FAST CHANGING FIELD, AS THE TREND TOWARDS EXPERIMENTAL BRANDING RISKS STALLING INNOVATIVE DESIGN PRACTICE. TWENTY YEARS INTO THE GAME, BOB BANGHAM, ARCHITECT AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR OF RIP BANG, LOS ANGELES, USA, SAYS IT SHOULD BE ABOUT AUDIENCE INTERACTION AND GETTING BACK TO BASICS. LEDETTA ASFA-WOSSEN REPORTS

Although an architect by trade, Bob Bangham has always kept illustration at the core of his projects – he admits the 90s and the incessant trend for theming is partly to blame.

Along with artist Charles White III, Bangham started a design collaborative project, Olio Inc, to explore environmental graphics such as signage. 'Our early work included Las Vegas' Treasure Island Casino, Crayola Fun Factory and Universal City Walk. We designed a lot of casinos and huge commercial thematic projects. We were very busy being artists, very successful and broke,' says Bangham.

It was only when he joined NBBJ Sports and Entertainment, 'the first architecture firm to view sports venues as entertainment destinations', that he began to understand the potential of merging illustration with architecture to create active sculptures. 'Three-dimensional illustration is about melding sculpture and artwork to define a space. It should be something you walk into, that helps unravel a story,' he explains. 'From a design standpoint, it has always been about creating places that people want to repeatedly visit. Homing in on interiors is what creates that choreography of experience'.

### MAGIC TOUCH

This is most clearly visible in his latest work as Creative Director at Rip Bang, based in Los Angeles, USA. For the new Orlando Amway Arena, home of the USA's Orlando Magic basketball team, his group is working on over 10 core features for the stadium grounds and 90 fan amenities, identity and signage-related concepts. This includes the 6,900sqft O3 bar, featuring kinetic sculptures, a 3,200sqft Box office Plaza and the 2,400sqft Stuff's Magic Castle.

Interactive is a word Bangham likes to use a lot when designing commercial venues in a quest 'to turn viewers into participants'. He says, 'My concern is that cities and often large commercial venues are over-

screened. Video boards, digital billboards, TVs, computers and iphones have turned us into passive viewers unaware of our surroundings, unless it is delivered in a video. Generally speaking, venues end up playing advertisements and gratuitous computer animation. We try to use video boards in a sculptural way, giving them a shape, form and function that adds to a space – locating them in a way that interacts with the users of the space'.

The openings between the seating bowl of the Amway arena and the concourse are a prime example of this. On the arena's upper deck, seats have been removed to create a stage called the Ozone to provide visitors with an 'equal experience', eliminating the traditional cheap seats at the back concept. The space is enhanced with fixed sculptural aluminium cylinder towers, embedded with LED lighting systems and 'applause meters' that create geometrical patterns and adjust the level of lighting based on the audience's voice levels. If visitors shout loud enough, pyrotechnics are activated at the base of the cylinder and release a ball can to shoot out T-shirts or fan amenities. The ball cans have also been adapted to change the level of lighting in the stadium, so the architecture attempts to lead the crowd, rather than the crowd leading the stadium.

Yet Bangham warns that too many architects rely on technology as a means of quickly updating a structure. 'Many architects seem to be wowed by technology in the commercial entertainment field. They will specify the latest and greatest new gadget or fixture, rather than using the technology to create a specifically intended result.' Another factor, he adds, is that technology changes so rapidly, the danger is that it could outdate the interior design.

### LIGHTEN UP

Light-integrated architecture is another design

area Bangham feels is under-explored.

'Good lighting is really the design of shadows, not light sources. It should be about lighting objects within a space and not the space itself. This creates shadows that, in turn, create more movement, depth and visual interest, resulting in a more comfortable space.'

In the arena circle at the Amway Centre, LED lights have been integrated to create warm and inviting lines throughout the space, eliminating the cold harsh lighting commonly associated with venues of this size. 'We tried to punctuate the lighting by dramatically lit objects, rather than one continuous level of lighting. [We are] using LEDs due to the flexibility in colour, temperature and output. They also last longer,' outlines Bangham.

### CHILD'S PLAY

Customised zones for children, using his story-telling techniques, is a concept Bangham understands well and is an area where he has nurtured his focus on interiors. His first-hand experience of designing children areas for Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) settings, such as Sesame Street, has taught him that one size does not fit all, so he began to customise play equipment.

'You have to have a point of access in your plan when designing for children as young as five year olds, in this case, a mascot – so you can design thematically from a narrative story line. Then you can develop simulation games or toys to support that structure. I am a drawer by heart so I storyboard my designs from a cinematic point of view – what you will see, what will happen there, which path to take – as opposed to designing in plan or elevation, or simply using a computer model.

'You never know when the child is visiting that space – beginning, middle or end.



**TOP**  
Orlando Amway Center  
Terrace

**ABOVE**  
Treasure Island Casino,  
Las Vegas, USA

**LEFT**  
Pirate Village at  
Treasure Island Casino

Three-dimensional illustration is about melding sculpture and artwork to define a space. It should be something you walk into, that helps unravel a story.

Therefore, your design has to present that same story in a variety of ways. A bored kid is a destructive kid, so you have to stimulate all of their senses with cooperative play components and play areas that have unique designs that encourage imagination and independence', he continues.

'Although, unfortunately, due to lawsuits, there are not a lot of bespoke play environments out there. Instead most are designed and manufactured by giant corporations to appeal to the average child. Since I don't know any average children, we try to design individual play and learn environments that inspire kids to explore'.

His design theory? To create play tools for individual projects 'using materials that children can engage with' such as recycled car tyre climbing frames, or the newly built indoor Info Garden at the Amway stadium that features custom-made furniture from recycled and found wood.

A further example is his use of local waste such as crushed beer bottles, olive oil bottles and jars for pigeon counters, tabletop designs and chair stools. 'One of the things we have tried to do with the use of materials is to form a hotel feel, rather than a conventional stadium [feel]. Arenas are usually made of concrete and hard surfaces and textures, [which make them] loud, cold and hollow. We wanted to do the opposite, to create a warmer, colourful and attractive space that was well lit and exudes comfort. Recycled materials can help offer warmth that is often out of context with this type of environment.'


The pressure for high traffic commercial environments to be more sustainably designed is another issue that concerns Bangham. He says, 'There are many more sustainable products available in the residential sector than in the commercial markets, which means that many of the environmental standards for commercial buildings deal mainly with the construction, disposal and removal of building materials rather than the actual product. Where we can find commercially graded products or materials that can be reused we will,

but there is a need for more sustainable materials that can both withstand a commercial environment and that our clients can afford'.

## BACK TO BASICS

The trend toward computerised design modelling as an industry standard, particularly in commercial venue design, is an area that Bangham is cautious about. 'Modelling has changed the business dramatically and has given us the ability to create non-rectilinear forms, such as the Herzog and Demuron's Bird's Nest in Beijing, China. It has potential to really loosen-up an otherwise uptight profession and result in buildings that are much more entertaining.

'Yet, while modelling tools can perform amazing rendering and suggest materials to work with, they can be limiting.' For instance, he says, 'If I use Google sketch up to do a hand rendering or a sketch, dashes and squiggles can mean a whole lot in a drawing without specifications. When you do a rendering, if you put a lamp in there, you actually have to design the light fixture or you get a standard soft light fixture put in there and it dilutes your design. In 25 years of doing this, and with all the technology that we have, it hasn't gotten one second faster, so it makes sense to put that handiwork in. All that happens now is that you change your mind lots of times. Back when you had to draw your own lines, you had to think twice before you could erase it!'

What does the future hold for commercial interiors? 'I expect it will increasingly be about relating to consumers, not just at the visited space, but following up that experience. Interiors will have to correspond with our iphones and daily technologies, increasing its dominance. In the future, form really will follow function. Perhaps this is the thing that will finally steer us away from German Expressionism?' 



## FURTHER INFORMATION

[www.ripbang.com](http://www.ripbang.com)