

Keeping up appearances

The façade is a reflection of the retailer

By KRISTEN D'ANDREA

When Woodbury Common reopens this month, following the upscale shopping center's fifth expansion and renovation, it will be with a fresh, modern look.

Originally built in 1974 as a small boutique shopping center, Woodbury Common was initially designed to look like a European village, according to Neal S. Kaplan, managing partner of Woodbury-based Kabro Associates, the center's owner.

With half-timbers and a new light-gray background highlighted with white trim replacing its token brown exterior, the façade of Woodbury Common will now complement its newest storefront: a 20,000-square-foot gourmet grocer, Fresh Market.

"We are changing the entire look of Woodbury Common to match the new look of the supermarket," Kaplan said, noting the entrance has also been expanded to include more parking.

Individual tenants will maintain their own storefronts, however, Kaplan said.

"We believe the tenant dictates what's best for the customer," he said.

For instance, Krinti, one of the tenants moving into a new 16,000-square-foot building at Woodbury Common, has chosen an accordion-door façade for its storefront. Additionally, the Mediterranean restaurant plans to make its sidewalk space more inviting with tables and chairs.

"We recognize a storefront façade is a reflection of what the retailer has to offer," Kaplan said. "It's so important to have the right image projected by the façade."

To be sure, maintaining and renovating a business' façade is as important – if not more so – as investing in its products and services.

Customers choose restaurants, for example, based on three main criteria: service, cost and quality of food, said Alex Badalamenti, managing principal of Baldassano Architecture in Patchogue.

"Your interior and exterior environments are part of that quality of service," he said. "They say a lot about who you are and what you're providing."



RAY CALIENDO: Most tenants are interested in sleek, smart, modern-looking façades.

Community pride

An updated façade is not only a reflection of the business but of the community, as well. Some Long Island villages are offering incentives to retailers to help business owners improve their building and, in turn, their commitment to the community.

The Patchogue Business Improvement District is on its third round of New York Main Street grants from the New York Office of Homes and Community Renewal. In 2008, the BID received \$200,000 in grant money, which grew into \$1 million in improvements of downtown businesses. And in 2010, \$500,000 in grants propelled another \$1 million in renovations. Currently, nine projects are either underway or being considered for another \$250,000 in grant money the BID received last December. The current reimbursable grants will cover 50 percent of façade improvements, up to \$20,000, said Dennis Smith, executive director of the improvement district.

Local businesses have been eager to attain the grants and "stay in step with the rest of the village," Smith said. "There are still a few naysayers, but the majority of businesses are on board."

Cost-efficient materials

Particularly in the villages, the current trend is toward more contextual architecture, as well as more transparency, Badalamenti said.

Most clients today are looking for up-to-date, sleek, smart and modern-looking

façades that include some techy elements, according to Ray Caliendo, founder and co-principal of Art of Form Architectural Services in Amityville. One of the biggest trends today is incorporating metal panels, generally aluminum, with glass framing accents and hanging canopies, he said.

Renovations using such materials can cost between \$25 and \$45 per square foot. More cost-efficient materials include exterior insulation and finishing systems, which are basically stucco over insulation and cost closer to \$7 to \$10 per square foot, and synthetic stone products, Caliendo said.

Façade renovations can be as simple or as elaborate as desired. In turn, the cost to revamp an average 20-foot-wide business can range from \$10,000 to \$200,000, Kaplan said.

A business doesn't always need a complete renovation, however.

"There might be a situation where only part of a façade needs to be revitalized," Caliendo said, noting a business may choose to upgrade only its lobby, which is a focal point. "Or, maybe it's just a matter of changing out the windows" and making them more energy-efficient simultaneously.

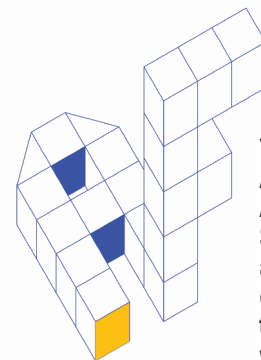
In addition to potential energy savings, the quality of tenants can be improved by upgrades.

"The quality of tenants correlates directly with the quality of your facility, particularly your architecture," Caliendo said, noting a landlord will most likely have a harder time trying to rent a space with a look from the 1970s than an up-to-date appearance.

The timeframe for making façade upgrades is generally site- and tenant-specific, Kaplan said. While Caliendo suggests building owners reevaluate their look every 10 years, Badalamenti said a façade should stand up for 50 years if done well.

"Often, architecture becomes about style, and it gets outdated quickly," Badalamenti said. "We try to be more modest so we're not following trends," noting his designs are more timeless.

"Signage and graphics can change, but architecture should fall into the background."



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