

CHAIN STORE AGE®

THE NEWSMAGAZINE FOR RETAIL EXECUTIVES

MID-DECEMBER 2007

www.chainstoreage.com

A LEBHAR-FRIEDMAN® PUBLICATION

STORE PLANNING / DESIGN

Waves of the Future

La Maison Unique Longchamp's staircase entices shoppers to the next level

By Marianne Wilson

An innovative staircase provides a memorable centerpiece in La Maison Unique Longchamp, the stunning flagship of the French luxury-goods company Longchamp. The majority of the store's selling space in the store, located in Manhattan's SoHo neighborhood, is on the second floor. The design firm, Heatherwick Studio, London, chose to connect the two levels with an unusual stair landscape that features ribbon-like forms and balustrades made from copolyester resin.

The staircase, which appears to float, is the first thing that customers notice upon entering the space. It is designed to emulate the organic and dynamic nature of flowing water. The metal steps are covered with natural ribbon laced with steel-ribbon strips. The panels entice shoppers up to the second level.

"It was a very delicate process of getting the rubber to stick without showing the imperfections in the metal," said Oliver Cassegrain, managing director, Longchamp USA.

Walking up the staircase, the balustrade panels made from the copolyester resin become the focal point of the 55-ton installation. Draped like fabric, the clear panels are fabricated with PETG sheets made from Eastman Spectar copolyester, a design-friendly material from Eastman Chemical Co., Kingsport, Tenn., which offers the beauty of glass with fewer limitations. (PETG is the abbreviation for polyethylene terephthalate glycol, a type of plastic.)

"Heatherwick wanted to make sure you see where people walk," Cassegrain said.

Forty-four of the panels line the three levels of stairway. No two are alike, ensuring a different look each step of the way to the second floor. The panels are 4 ft. high, 5 ft. or 6 ft. wide, and slightly more than three-eighths of an inch or 10 millimeters thick.



The striking staircase at Longchamp's Manhattan store features ribbon-like forms and balustrades made from copolyester resin.

"What's most amazing is how the panels match the steps," Oliver added. "Everything is curved."

The panels in the staircase were created by Talbot Designs, London, which took advantage of the material's flexibility and versatility to achieve the desired "slumped glass" effect. ■