

# design:retail

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# Indigo

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# Once Upon a Time

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Photos by BEN RAHN,  
A-FRAME STUDIO

...there was a store that sold books. Just like a fairy godmother in pumpkin-to-stagecoach fashion, **Indigo** has transformed something simple into something extraordinary. Bonus: it is not going to change back at midnight. The cultural department store is a new concept for selling books, a retail story that has only just begun.



# Y

our favorite book is a page-turner, right? When it comes to bookstores, Indigo Books and Music is full of stories to tell, and the stories are not just buried within the bound products it sells. Shoppers will want to turn each corner and take note of every detail. The retailer has reinvented the bookstore and is introducing the world to a new concept: the cultural department store.

One of the world's preeminent booksellers, Indigo currently has more than 200 locations across Canada. The company introduced its new concept at Indigo Sherway Gardens in Toronto, in the form of a 31,732-sq.-ft. store designed by Toronto-based design firm Burdiflek.

Heather Reisman, chief executive of Indigo Books and Music, had a vision for a "cultural department store for book lovers." While the company wants to maintain books as the primary offering, the intent is to complement the books with gift items and products that tell a story around a book category. Creating a marriage of products within a book category reinvents this retail experience, encourages more exploration within the store and repositions the company in the marketplace.

"We wanted to design the world's first cultural department store, a store that would ensure a holistic, approachable and joyful shopping experience for customers by creatively weaving cultural experiences, theatrical moments and beautiful products in human-scaled boutiques and 'rooms,'" explains Chris Hope, senior vice president store design, development and construction at Indigo.

The materials palette sets the scene for this unique shopping narrative. Burdiflek wanted to achieve a Tribeca loft appeal that is both industrial and gallery-like with a contemporary feel. An exposed ceiling maintains a rawness, while a porcelain wood floor tile in a neutral taupe adds a soft texture with the weathered look of ceruse oak. Bronze and charcoal metal finishes add to the industrial aesthetic. The interplay of light and dark elements creates a strong and sophisticated backdrop that infuses a touch of drama within the space—the perfect setting for storytelling.

"The material and finish palette provides a neutral and harmonious backdrop that is subtly dramatic," Hope describes. "The architecture is confident, democratic, thoughtful, and filled with moments of surprise and delight. The fixtures are approachable, adaptable and theatrical."

With the large, open floorplan and expansive collection of books, the key to the success of this



"As a whole, the final Indigo design offers a little bit of everything, something for all ages and design sensibilities."

—PAUL FILEK, BURDIFILEK



→ Feature walls can be updated seasonally.

↘ Glimpses of a “next room” entice shoppers to move deeper into the store.

→ [Opposite page] The marriage of products and books enhances the power of storytelling.

new concept was in the space planning. The Burdifilek team worked closely with Indigo to determine programming requirements and establish key adjacencies. The Indigo team had specific ways they wanted to move people through the store.

While the foundation of the floorplan was still a division between fiction and nonfiction, the team worked to create non-traditional configurations. Zones or “rooms” were used to elevate the store experience, creating a wayfinding strategy based on a sense of discovery rather than a distinct pattern of aisles. Just like reading a good book, the sense of discovery moves customers forward, taking them on a journey within the store. The zones were proportioned to provide a sense of intimacy like someone’s home, a room that you truly enter, experience and then exit as you move on to the next space.

“Every time you walk into a zone, you are enveloped by that area and then turn to enter another zone,” describes Diego Burdi, creative partner with Burdifilek. “Customers move naturally from one area to the next rather than through a system of aisles. Shoppers are lured by vignettes with focal points, such as the fireplace wall and art installation in [the] Home [zone].”

Categories within the store include: Room of Her Own, Joy of the Table, Paper Shop, Indigo Tech, and Art and Photography, to name a few. A beautifully edited product line from Indigo’s New York studio complements the books, building a rich narrative around each category. Focal points, such as feature walls, can be updated seasonally. These vignettes are opportunities to infuse color and play with the power of storytelling with different product displays. This space planning and display strategy allows for the main categories to be repeated in different store locations, yet be varied in shape and size depending on the inherent nature of the space.

While the Home area uses a fireplace focal wall to create a mood and sense of place, Room of Her Own offers a more feminine appeal with a softer palette. This area features a stunning apothecary unit of metal and glass. For the Indigo Kids area, the team created a fun portal to Alice in Wonderland, a space inspired by fantasy and full of color that appeals to adults and kids alike.

“Every area is designed with its own sensibility, so all the freestanding fixtures were custom designed by our studio—from the accent tables and



bookshelves to the unique merchandising elevations, etc.,” says Paul Filek, managing partner with Burdifilek.

The lighting strategy provides the finishing touch to the retail journey. Fixtures were selected to provide focus to the light in order to direct it to walls and table surfaces. This creates a warm and dramatic effect within the large open space. Providing warmth within each zone was important to achieving the feeling of being in a room within a home. Special attention was paid to the color rendition of the light on the books and how that may change from season to season.

Technology also was integrated to support the experience. There are specialty kiosks to aid shopping, as well as digital displays that highlight a zone or product, or even provide an art installation.

“We are first and foremost a bookstore that is punctuated by great storytelling and inspired moments,” Hope says. “We focused on amplifying

the essence of various merchandise categories to evoke a mood and a sense of place. Combined with a soothing palette of colors and materials, and a controlled but leisurely procession throughout the entire store, we aimed to be a retailer where a process of discovery is very much part of how a customer experiences our brand. We seem to have succeeded. We are seeing significant and sustained sales growths where these ideas have been put into play.”

As a whole, the final Indigo design offers a little bit of everything, something for all ages and design sensibilities, Filek adds. “Future bookstores need to offer more than just books,” he says. “What this bookstore is doing really well—and it’s not only about design—is that they have created a platform to make the book shop a meeting place where the community can come together with special events, gather knowledge and experience different product lines.”

<div>📁</div> <div>PROJECT FILE</div>	
<b>Indigo</b> Sherway Gardens, Toronto	<b>FLOORING</b> Stone Tile, J+J Flooring Group, Mondo Contract Flooring
<b>RETAILER</b> Indigo Books and Music	<b>SURFACING</b> Wanderosa, Abet Laminati, Ciot
<b>CONTRACT DESIGN FIRM</b> Burdifilek	<b>SIGNAGE/GRAPHICS</b> Roberts Signs and Awnings, Superstructure, UB Signs
<b>GENERAL CONTRACTOR</b> APM Construction Services Inc.	<b>PAINT</b> Benjamin Moore
<b>CONSULTANTS/ENGINEERS</b> The Mitchell Partnership, Hammerschlag + Joffe Inc., Exp Services Inc., Marcel Dion Lighting, Sereca	<b>METALS</b> Tiger Drylac
<b>STORE FIXTURES/MILLWORK</b> Provincial Store Fixtures Inc.	<b>SOUND SYSTEMS</b> Sound Products
<b>LIGHTING</b> Sisternalux	<b>TECHNOLOGY</b> Christie
Information in the project file is provided by the retailer and/or design firm.	