

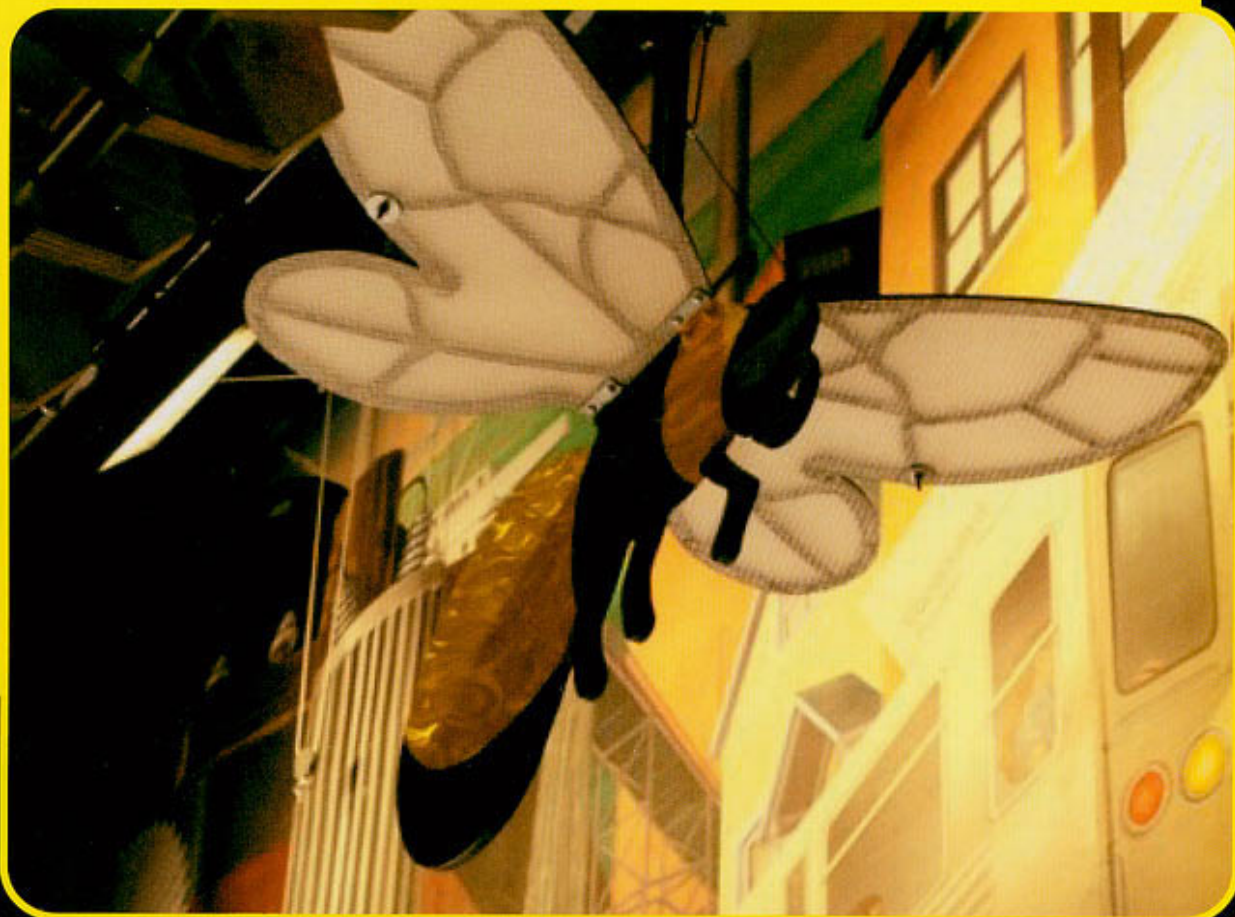
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Levi's: A Living Legend

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In 1969, Jane Trahey, herself a legendary marketing figure, created an ad campaign for Blackgama® furs: "What becomes a legend most?" Pre-empted many times for many less exotic uses, the tagline easily comes to mind when the subject is San Francisco, the Golden Gate Bridge, cable cars, China Town -- and Levi's® jeans.

This past spring, to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Levi Strauss & Co. (specifically on May 1, to immortalize the 5-01, the original Levi's style blue jeans), the company enhanced its legendary status with the opening of a new visitor's center at its corporate headquarters in San

Francisco. Open to the public for self-guided tours, the atrium exhibit was the result of four months of intense engineering, graphics production and fabrication by General Graphics (GGE), who also completed the installation. The project itself was designed by West Office Exhibition Design, Oakland, CA.

As legend has it, in 1853 Levi Strauss, a Bavarian immigrant, made his way to San Francisco to capitalize on the Gold Rush by starting a dry-goods business -- and the rest, as they say, is history. Today, 150 years later, not only is Levi Strauss & Co. legendary in San Francisco history, the company has sold more than 3.5 billion pairs of jeans and its products are sold in more than 100 countries, making it one of the most recognized and trusted brands in the world. Levi's jeans have been worn by virtually everyone from the cowboys who forged the West to the workers who tore down the Berlin Wall.



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The visitor's center features a permanent exhibit containing six pavilions. Each highlights an aspect of the company and all work together to give both an historical perspective and a dynamic experience to the visitors flocking to the center.

The *Back to the Future* pavilion chronicles events and milestones in the company's history. The exhibit contains a number of archival pieces, such as an early sewing machine from a Levi Strauss & Co. factory, "Flat Eric," the puppet who was used in one of the ad campaigns, a piece of the Berlin Wall and a statue of Roy Rogers wearing Levi's jeans. Symbols on the timeline encircling this pavilion juxtapose Levi Strauss & Co. against local and global events.

Brand Builders is the pavilion documenting Levi Strauss & Co.'s domestic and worldwide marketing through imagery. On the exterior of the structure, print and other advertising images are reproduced in translucent layers. Inside, TV advertising is projected in a 20 minute loop that runs commercials from the late '60's to the present. The marketing images tell a colorful story about not only Levi's jeans but the times in which they were sold.

In *Profits Through Principles*, the tradition of Levi Strauss & Co.'s active social involvement is told in both text and images. Two display cases house a rotating display of charitable and humanitarian awards the company has received. This pavilion is not only about history -- the structure opens to be used as a station for employees to sign up for volunteer projects. In images and actions, the message is that the tradition of ethical conduct and social responsibility is a living entity.

Dear Levi, a structure shaped like a giant pincushion, floats reproductions of letters written to Levi Strauss & Co. on 18" long rods. The pavilion features amazing letters illustrating how Levi's products have played an important role in people's lives. The stories are fascinating, ranging from letters written by miners who wore out their jeans and wanted to know how to get another pair, to letters about how Levi's products have literally saved lives, to a letter from Clint Eastwood talking about his Levi's jeans. An alcove in the exhibit with a writing desk provides a place for visitors to write their own letters to Levi Strauss & Co. and drop them into a mail slot.

A pavilion called *Product Innovations* focuses on the company's histo-

ry of product development stretching back over 100 years. Examples of vintage clothing from the first jeans in 1873 during the mining era are displayed alongside the birth of the Dockers® and Levi Strauss Signature™ brands. The products within the display change out periodically.

And finally, there is the *Latest and Greatest*, a 36' tower structure, highlighting the latest offerings from the company. An 11' x 8' video projection screen continuously displays imagery and two tiers of banners hang from the tower, announcing a new marketing message each month. Mannequins on the ground level platforms display current highlighted product. The structure was engineered and built by General Graphics in-house using 6061 aluminum tubing, welded and bolted, then powder coated.

This particular pavilion was a major accomplishment because it is free-standing, anchored with through-bolts to the slab of the building; there are no guy wires tying it to the building (a trick, given San Francisco's earthquake code requirements). The tower was built from the top down -- after the upper section was assembled it was raised using material lifts (weight limitations prevented bringing forklifts into the building), then the middle section was assembled in position directly underneath. The top was then lowered and the two bolted together. The lifting process was then repeated so the lower triangle supports



could be positioned, followed by setting the structure down on the base.

A challenge in this project was that, in spite of the huge size of the atrium itself, access was limited to a 6' wide x 8' high doorway at the front of the atrium, with off-loading having to be done on the street. This mandated construction being broken into smaller modules to make handling into the building possible. There is extensive use of aluminum throughout the entire project in order to keep the structural weight down for both handling and for loading of the facility slab itself.

Most of the cladding is Plexiglas® with duratrans and other graphics mounted on the second surface, and all Plex was annealed to prevent the long-term effects of

out-gassing on the lamination. Wood veneers and hardwood are used in select areas. There is a 12' diameter circular leather seating area, and 40' banners float from the building. Dimensional corporate messaging is mounted on two of the building walls, while custom mannequin bases tie the look and feel of the mannequins to the other exhibits.

"What becomes a legend most?" A dynamic future growing out of a rich history that is integrated with the history of a city, the nation -- indeed the world -- and set in the context of cultural and commercial milestones. *eb*