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Brilliant, masterful and efficient: The relighting of Dussmann das KulturKaufhaus in Berlin

- Culture Department Store Dussmann das KulturKaufhaus GmbH, Berlin / Germany
- Interior design: ROBERTNEUN Architekten, Berlin / Germany
- Photographer: Rudi Meisel, Berlin / Germany
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Established almost two decades ago, Dussmann das KulturKaufhaus in Berlin is now in the process of upgrading its in-store design experience. At the heart of its modernised concept is a new lighting system with advanced ERCO LED lighting tools. The project illustrates the advantages of cutting-edge digital shop lighting - particularly for challenging merchandise such as books, DVDs and other read-intensive media.

The KulturKaufhaus: Merchandise with substance in a new light

Since its establishment in 1997 as a department store selling culture, Dussmann das KulturKaufhaus on Berlin's Friedrichstraße has become an institution of sorts - firmly established as a fixture in the city's cultural landscape, it is, as well, a popular destination for shoppers. The store boasts a wide array of books, CDs, DVDs and sheet music on around 7,000sqm divided over five floors, rounded out by a stationery section, a neatly arranged specialist department for English books, as well as a café combined with event area for regular readings and concerts. The popularity and sustained success of the KulturKaufhaus is less a result of the store's size or its unusually long opening hours than of the quality and relevance of its product mix as well as the highly competent and well-informed sales team.

Almost two decades after opening, the store management decided it was time for a radical design overhaul of the interior. Even a successful store such as Dussmann das KulturKaufhaus feels the pinch of competition from online rivals. With this in mind, brick-and-mortar retailers must take a comprehensive approach in raising their appeal if they want to remain profitable in the long run. This naturally includes the interior, especially in consideration of its increasingly important role in maximising the in-store shopping experience. Today, it is more crucial than ever to welcome the customer with an inviting ambience that, at the same time, facilitates orientation, whilst attracting their attention with eye-catching product presentations. The right lighting goes a long way to creating an enhanced customer experience.



An institution in Berlin's cultural and shopping landscape: Dussmann das KulturKaufhaus on Friedrichstraße.



View of the Dussmann atrium - still with its original lighting.

„not all LEDs
are the same“

The planning process: The decision for ERCO

As planning got under way in 2013, Dussmann engaged the architectural services of ROBERTNEUN in Berlin to develop a spatial concept as well as design a range of presentation furniture. With this backbone in place and the specific requirements of the KulturKaufhaus in mind, the next step was to optimise the lighting concepts. Several lighting suppliers were invited to present a proposal in an on-site mock-up of their design solution. This was the point, says Mario Buchholz, head of construction management at the Dussmann Group, where he became acutely aware that “not all LEDs are the same”. The lighting solution which ERCO presented clearly offered the highest quality. Next to quality and the guaranteed longevity of ERCO luminaires, Buchholz was impressed with the ready availability of the ERCO lighting tools if ever substitutes were needed. The significant investment costs would easily be compensated by the efficiency of the ERCO lighting solution, adds Julia Claren, Managing Director of the KulturKaufhaus. Once the project was completed, the energy costs for the lighting would reduce from six figures before the refurbishment to then five figures. The shareholders as investors of the Dussmann Group were won over by ERCO's attractive cost to performance ratio in the long run, says Claren.



ERCO demonstrates the potential of precisely aimed light in a mock-up.



ERCO's lighting solution delivers compelling benefits based on superior quality and efficiency.

The challenge: Read-intensive merchandise

Das Relighting von Dussmann das Kulturkaufhaus erwies sich als anspruchsvolle und vielschichtige Aufgabe, die nach einer hochgradig differenzierten Lichtlösung verlangte. Mit Hilfe des Lichtes die Stimmung des Raumes beeinflussen und eine für Kunden und Mitarbeiter gleichermaßen angenehme Atmosphäre zu schaffen - so beschreibt Julia Claren ihr Hauptanliegen bei der Neu-Beleuchtung des Geschäftes.

Wie in jedem überzeugend gestalteten Verkaufsraum steht auch hier die Präsentation der Ware im Zentrum. Bücher und CDs, so erklärt Claren die Herausforderung im Kulturkaufhaus, sind leseintensive Waren. Für den Kunden darf das keine Anstrengung bedeuten. Er soll den gesuchten Titel möglichst einfach und schnell entziffern können und gerne auch schmökern. Entsprechend hat das Licht hier für optimalen Lesekomfort zu sorgen. Eine gute Farbwiedergabe ist dabei ein genau so wichtiges Kriterium wie Blendungsfreiheit und eine stabile Lichttemperatur.

Light is the perfect means of attracting attention whilst at the same time illuminating the products with brilliant effect. But a store of such sizable proportions requires a further stipulation: light in the store must subdivide the extensive space by defining separate, distinct zones that facilitate orientation and create hierarchies of attention. Ideally, the lighting accentuates the architectural concept. Julia Claren refers here to a “level of enhancement” that can only be achieved with the right light. These complexities were solved in the end with just three luminaire ranges.

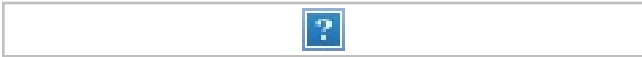


The old lighting system failed to accommodate the requirements of read-intensive products such as books.

The lighting concept and its implementation

The lighting concept put into effect was built around vertical illuminance to achieve optimal illumination of the considerable shelf space. It is supplemented by dynamic accent lighting with efficient ERCO spot and oval flood distributions setting off individual zones and product displays. The interior of the KulturKaufhaus is defined by bookshelves lining the walls or acting as space dividers. They are illuminated uniformly using Light Board recessed luminaires with 24W and flood lens. Where technical aspects prevented the installation of recessed luminaires, the designers used luminaires from the Logotec range with the same wattage and light distribution. At approximately knee level, the shelves are flanked by horizontal ledges that are used primarily to focus attention on important and frequently requested titles. This long and narrow area is emphasised by efficient, linear light with oval flood distribution at 12W, which at the same time ensures a high level of visual comfort to facilitate reading at the shelf.

Other presentation units in the store include mid-height racks with slanted shelf boards, known as book display gondolas, as well as low tables with stacks of books or CDs, complemented by high information counters, computer desks for the sales staff, and reading zones. These items are also illuminated by 12W Logotec with the striking, linear oval flood distribution, whereas 12W Logotec with wide flood lens combine with 18W Quintessence downlights to provide the aisles and circulation zones with ambient lighting. In order to create a friendly and inviting atmosphere in the store whilst rendering the colours accurately in brilliant light, all luminaires in the KulturKaufhaus emit a pleasant, warm white light.



Whereas ERCO Light Board recessed luminaires are directed precisely to illuminate the shelving, the horizontal ledges in front are emphasised using 12W Logotec spotlights with oval flood distribution.



The presentation units positioned as required throughout the room, such as the low book tables shown here, are accentuated by ERCO Logotec spotlights. The warm white light enhances the colours of the book covers whilst creating a pleasant atmosphere.

„This precision adjustment is a fascinating process that takes many hours“

Refurbishment in stages

To avoid closing the store for several months, the refurbishment of Dussmann das KulturKaufhaus is carried out in stages. Work commenced in autumn 2014, starting with the basement, which was followed by the 3rd floor in summer 2015. The whole project is scheduled to be finished by the autumn of 2016.

Once the refurbishment is complete, the Berlin team of ERCO consultants will step in to ensure precision adjustment of all lighting tools in the KulturKaufhaus. Finely calibrated luminaires with the right lens for the task at hand are highly crucial in a sophisticated lighting concept. This stage often involves regular communication and close collaboration with the sales team to optimise the lighting of individual workplaces or other sensitive areas in the room. This precision adjustment is a fascinating process that takes many hours, in which the initially abstract design of the lighting concept gradually takes shape, demonstrating impressively even to untrained eye the evocative power of precisely aimed light.



Working closely with the Dussmann sales team, the ERCO consultants on site apply their expertise to optimise the illumination of the workstations.



Ideal reading conditions are a critical aspect of precision calibrated lighting.

A quantum leap: From monotonous light to perception-orientated illumination

Das Relighting von Dussmann das Kulturkaufhaus markiert sowohl lichttechnisch als auch planerisch einen Quantensprung. Das kann gerade während der Umbauphase, in der im Haus alte und neue Beleuchtung nebeneinander existieren, hervorragend beobachtet werden. Der Vorher-Nachher-Effekt, der sich im Wechsel von einer Etage zur anderen nachvollziehen lässt, bietet eine eindruckliche Lehrstunde in Sachen Lichtgestaltung.

Die bisherige Beleuchtung des Geschäftes stammt aus der Gründungszeit des Hauses und ist dementsprechend technisch und konzeptionell veraltet. Beim Thema Licht hieß das Motto im Kulturkaufhaus bisher: Helligkeit um jeden Preis. Das führte zu diffusem, wenig differenziertem Licht, in der die Vielfalt der recht kleinteiligen Ware kaum zur Geltung kam.

Those who make their way to the 3rd floor of Dussmann das KulturKaufhauses today, will be surprised to step into a different world. While it may initially appear rather dark in comparison to the other floors, it soon becomes obvious that the light shines precisely where it is needed, with optimised illuminance levels as well as superior quality. The power of the light to draw attention instinctively onto the books, CDs and DVDs is instantly felt. As well as this striking effect, the controlled use and meticulous aim of the light adds significantly to creating a pleasant, almost homely atmosphere in the upgraded store. Dividing the space into zones instils a sense of tranquillity that defies the size of the interior, transforming the expansive floors into an ambience that gives the impression of being embraced, almost sheltered.



Before the renovation:

Undifferentiated brightness, different light temperatures and glare impair the shopping experience.



After the renovation:

Masterful accent lighting emphasises the merchandise and ensures that customers easily find what they need.

„expectations have been met to the fullest extent“

Conclusion: Expectations met

Asked how she personally feels about the lighting of the recently completed upper level, Julia Claren insists that her expectations have been “met to the fullest extent” – and is convinced that the positive effects of the ERCO lighting tools “will be even more in evidence in the autumn, when the days start to get shorter and the weather is grey”. The shop’s sales team matches this enthusiasm, as they appreciate workstations that are now illuminated as superbly as never before. The relative “darkness”

in the room as a result of accentuated lighting additionally allowed greater discretion, improving the concentration needed to deal with books. Staff still working under the old lighting conditions are anxious for the work to move ahead. "Once the renovations are finished," Julia Claren says with conviction, "I believe we will be the first department store in Germany to complete the migration to LED technology." A pioneering role that leaves Dussmann das KulturKaufhaus with a sense of achievement, and rightly so.



Precisely aimed, brilliant ERCO light gives emphasis to the books, accentuates the interior architecture and facilitates orientation.



Good light adds significantly to creating rooms with a high amenity value where customers enjoy spending time.

About the author:

Mathias Remmele works in Berlin as a freelance publicist and exhibition curator with focus on architectural and design history. As a critic, he also deals with modern developments in this field. In addition, he is a lecturer at the University of Design and Art in Basel.

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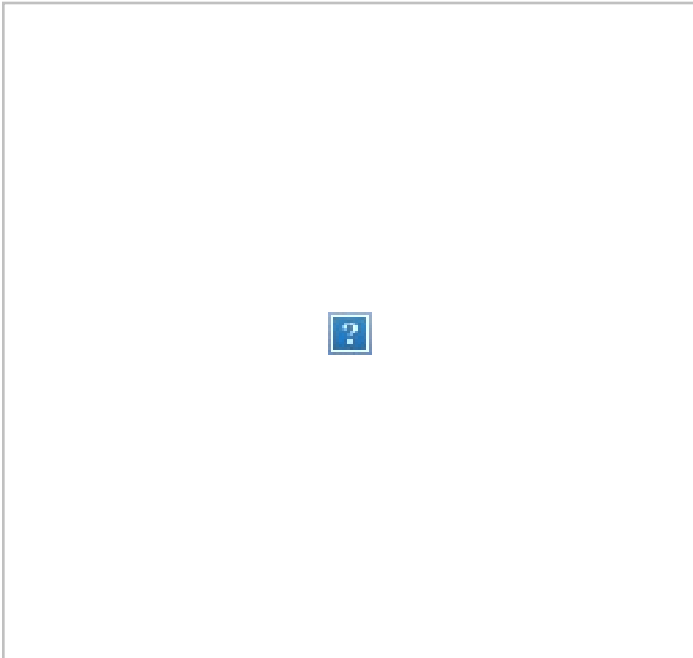
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