

Atmospherics as a Marketing Tool*

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One of the most important recent advances in business thinking is the recognition that people, in their purchase decision-making, respond to more than simply the tangible product or service being offered. The *tangible product*—a pair of shoes, a refrigerator, a haircut, or a meal—is only a small part of the total consumption package. Buyers respond to the *total product*. It includes the services, warranties, packaging, advertising, financing, pleasantries, images, and other features that accompany the product.

One of the most significant features of the total product is the *place* where it is bought or consumed. In some cases, the place, more specifically the *atmosphere* of the place, is more influential than the product itself in the purchase decision. In some cases, the atmosphere is the primary product.

Businessmen, however, have tended to neglect atmosphere as a marketing tool. This is due to two factors. First, men of business tend to be practical and functional in their thinking; if they were poetic they probably would not be businessmen. Therefore they have tended to neglect the aesthetic factor in consumption. Secondly, atmospheres are a “silent language” in communication. It is only recently that recognition and study has been given to various silent languages such as body language, temporal language, and spatial language.¹

* The author would like to thank Professor Sidney J. Levy, Reinhard Angelmar, Bernard Dubois, and Christian Pinson for their critical comments.

1. See Edward T. Hall, *The Silent Language* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1959); also see his *The Hidden Dimension* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1966).

The aim of this article is to develop a systematic exposition of atmosphere as a buying influence. We will look at the following questions:

- What are the historical antecedents of the concept of atmosphere?
- What is an atmosphere?
- In which marketing situations is atmospherics most relevant?
- How are atmospheres supposed to affect purchase behavior?
- What are some real life examples of the effective use of atmospheres?
- What are the major steps in planning an atmosphere?
- What are the key issues in advancing scientific research into atmospherics?

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

One of the mixed blessings of human history is that man increasingly lives, works, and plays in artificial environments. Fewer and fewer people live out their lives in a natural environment of trees, grass, and streams. Modern man spends his time in a brick-and-mortar environment often marked by overflowing crowds, polluted air, and constant noise. Safe from the hazards of the natural environment, he pays by exposure to the many hazards of urban life.

Artificial environments—homes, stores, factories, churches, whole cities—need not be unattractive. The concept of *designing attractive artificial environments* goes back to ancient times. Architects in ancient Greece created magnificent temples that were fitting edifices to their gods. Medieval architects created soaring cathedrals that stirred the religious feelings of the faithful. Renaissance architects created magnificent palaces to support the royal fictions. Historical examples abound of men adorning their edifices with powerful aesthetic and social meanings.

In recent times, man has taken steps to enhance his everyday *work environment*. The soot-ridden, ill-ventilated factories of the nineteenth century have given way to clean, well landscaped factories in the twentieth century. The new factory aesthetics represent a desire to help men work under dignified conditions. They also represent a sound business investment to increase worker productivity.

Aesthetics are also appearing in the *places where men buy*. The crowded market stalls of yesterday are giving way to comfortable,

spacious stores. First designed along primarily functional lines, these stores have lately become objects of decorative arts. In the simplest cases, they are pleasant and comfortable; in the extreme, stores such as Harrods' of London or Marshall Fields of Chicago are *consumption palaces*. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition that store interiors and exteriors can be designed to create specific feelings in shoppers that can have an important cuing or reinforcing effect on purchase.

This recognition has gone so far in certain quarters as to be christened a new decorative aesthetic, that of *total design*. Total design is the philosophy of creating a unified decor and tone throughout a building. Instead of leaving space to evolve naturally according to the individual temperaments of users, a uniform design is adopted and followed consistently and effectively throughout the space.

WHAT IS AN ATMOSPHERE?

What has all this to do with marketing? A great deal. It suggests that in many areas of marketing in the future, marketing planners will use *spatial aesthetics* as consciously and skillfully as they now use price, advertising, personal selling, public relations, and other tools of marketing. We shall use the term *atmospherics* to describe the conscious designing of space to create certain effects in buyers. More specifically, *atmospherics* is the effort to design buying environments to produce specific emotional effects in the buyer that enhance his purchase probability.²

The key concept requiring further examination is that of *atmosphere*. Technically, atmosphere is "the air surrounding a sphere." The term is also used more colloquially to describe the *quality* of the surroundings. Thus, one hears a restaurant described as having *atmosphere* by which is meant that the physical surroundings evoke pleasant feelings. It is more proper to describe a restaurant as having a "good" atmosphere or "busy" atmosphere or "depressing" atmosphere. Atmosphere is always present as a quality of the surrounding space.

Atmosphere is apprehended through the sense. Therefore the atmosphere of a particular set of surroundings is describable in *sensory*

2. It should be noted that atmospherics also covers the deliberate design of "negatmospheres" to discourage demand as part of a "demarketing" program. See Philip Kotler and Sidney J. Levy, "Demarketing, Yes, Demarketing," *Harvard Business Review*, November-December 1971, pp. 74-80.

terms. The main sensory channels for atmosphere are sight, sound, scent, and touch. Specifically, the main *visual* dimensions of an atmosphere are:

- color
- brightness
- size
- shapes

The main *aural* dimension of an atmosphere are:

- volume
- pitch

The main *olfactory* dimensions of an atmosphere are:

- scent
- freshness

The main *tactile* dimensions of an atmosphere are:

- softness
- smoothness
- temperature

The fifth sense, taste, does not apply directly to atmosphere. An atmosphere is seen, heard, smelled, and felt, but not tasted. At the same time, certain artifacts in an atmosphere can activate remembered tastes.

Thus the atmosphere of particular surroundings can be described in sensory terms. The typical atmosphere of a funeral parlor is subdued, quiet, and orderly. The typical atmosphere of a discotheque is bright, noisy, loud, and rough.

An important distinction exists between the *intended atmosphere* and the *perceived atmosphere*. The *intended atmosphere* is the set of sensory qualities that the designer of the artificial environment sought to imbue in the space. Thus EL AL Airlines (Israel) wants its airline offices to be “gay, warm, and friendly” and seeks to achieve this effect by appropriate color scheme and lighting.³ On the other hand, the *perceived atmosphere* may vary for different customers. One’s reactions to colors, sounds, noises, and temperatures are partly learned.

3. For further details, see James Pilditch, *Communication by Design: A Study in Corporate Identity* (London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1970), pp. 18–21.

People of different cultures have different ideas about colors: the funereal color in the West is black, and in the East is white. What might be noisy to a Scandinavian might be quiet to an Italian. What might smell sweet to an oriental might smell unpleasant to an American. The more dissimilar the customers of a particular establishment, the more varied their perceptions of a given intended atmosphere.

WHERE ARE ATMOSPHERES IMPORTANT?

Atmosphere design is not of equal importance to all sellers or all societies. The following propositions are tentatively advanced to suggest where this marketing variable assumes the greatest importance.

Proposition 1. Atmospherics is a relevant marketing tool mainly in situations (a) where the product is purchased or consumed; and (b) where the seller has design options.

Atmospherics is a highly relevant marketing tool for retailers and a less relevant marketing tool for manufacturers and wholesalers. This is because manufacturers and wholesalers have little control over the atmosphere of the retailing establishments where the final goods are bought. Their main control comes in the process of choosing outlets whose atmospheres are compatible with their goods. Manufacturers and wholesalers may pay some attention to the atmosphere of their own offices to the extent that it affects intermediate buyers who visit their premises. But even in this case, atmosphere is normally not a potent buying factor among organizational buyers as among family buyers. Retailers tend to give the most thought to atmospherics because family buyers tend to have great choice in where they buy and atmosphere is part of the total product. However, even within retailing, atmospherics will vary in importance. It is of small consequence to the individual retailer in open markets because he has limited control over the total atmosphere. It is not a meaningful tool in mail, phone, or door-to-door selling.

Proposition 2. Atmospherics becomes a more relevant marketing tool as the number of competitive outlets increase.

In the case where only one outlet exists for a particular type of good, the merchant is not under much pressure to invest in atmospherics. He can display his merchandise in almost any fashion and assume that essential demand will keep customers coming to him. However, even in this case, the "monopolistic merchant" must recognize

that atmospherics might be of some help in increasing the buyers' rate of consumption. Consumers can spend their money in several ways and every merchant is inevitably competing for the consumers' dollar. As the number of outlets for a given product increases, the competitors are likely to increase their use of atmospherics. Atmospherics becomes one of the chief tools for attempting to attract and hold a specific segment of the market.

Proposition 3. Atmospherics is a more relevant marketing tool in industries where product and/or price differences are small.

Normally, buyers use product and price differences as key factors in selecting retail outlets. Where these differences are minimal, buyers need further discriminative criteria. Such discriminative criteria may be provided by locational convenience, parking facilities, owner personality, or atmosphere. In some cases, atmosphere differentiation may be pushed so far by a particular retailer that he uses this as a basis for creating price differences for essentially undifferentiated products.

Proposition 4. Atmospherics is a more relevant marketing tool when product entries are aimed at distinct social classes or life style buyer groups.

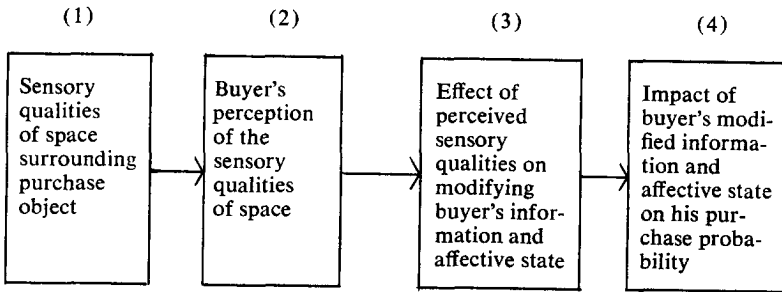
Where goods or services are intended for specific social classes or life style groups, the vendors try to create an overall atmosphere suggestive of that market segment. The atmosphere provides cues as to the intended market segment and also enters as part of the consumption product since the consumer wants to enjoy the class qualities of that product. One can find clothing stores, restaurants, and jewelry stores differentially designed to cue buyers as to their intended market. Thus, stores appealing to upper-class patrons usually are laid out more spaciouly and display less goods. Stores appealing to mod youth use moving lights, piped-in rock music, and bright colors.

HOW DO ATMOSPHERES INFLUENCE BEHAVIOR?

What is the mechanism by which the atmosphere of a place affects purchase behavior? Atmospherics is based on the causal chain shown in Figure 1. In words, (1) the purchase object is nested in a space characterized by certain sensory qualities. These sensory qualities may be intrinsic to the space or may be designed into the space by the seller. (2) Each buyer perceives only certain qualities of this space. His perception is subject to selective attention, distortion, and reten-

FIGURE 1

The Causal Chain Connecting Atmosphere and Purchase Probability



tion. (3) The perceived qualities of the atmosphere can effect the person's information and affective state. (4) The buyer's modified information and affective state may increase his purchase probability.

Atmosphere can have an effect on purchase behavior in at least three ways. First, atmosphere may serve as an *attention-creating medium*. Thus a vendor may use colors, noises, and motion to make his establishment stand out among others.

Secondly, atmosphere may serve as a *message-creating medium* by which the vendor expresses various things about his establishment to potential and actual customers. The atmosphere communicates the store's intended audience, its level of concern for customers, and so on. The atmosphere delivers discriminative stimuli to buyers that enable them to recognize vendor differences as a basis for vendor choice.

Thirdly, atmosphere may serve as an *affect-creating medium*. The colors, sounds, and textures of the establishment may directly arouse visceral reactions that contribute favorably to purchase probability. Just as the sound of a bell caused Pavlov's dog to think of food, various components of the atmosphere may trigger sensations in the buyers that create or heighten an appetite for certain goods, services, or experiences. In this respect, atmosphere plays the role of a very specific situational factor helping to convert behavioral intentions into actual buying behavior. People walk around with many wants and buying intentions that don't materialize, until situational factors, such as motivating atmospheres, tip the scale in favor of purchase.

EXAMPLES OF EFFECTIVE ATMOSPHERES

Atmospheric planning has been used by a number of industries and companies. Several examples are given in this section.

SHOE RETAILING

Through most of history, shoes were bought to protect one's feet. As long as this motive prevailed, the rate of demand matched very closely the rate of population growth. In recent times, shoe manufacturers have attempted to increase demand by creating a fashion interest in shoes through new styles, colors, and materials. The new thinking is reflected in the following statement of Francis C. Rooney, a modern shoe executive:

People no longer buy shoes to keep their feet warm and dry. They buy them because of the way the shoes make them feel—masculine, feminine, rugged, different, sophisticated, young, glamorous, “in.” Buying shoes has become an emotional experience. Our business now is selling excitement rather than shoes.

Rooney has redefined shoes away from a *utilitarian* concept to a *pleasure* concept. Once this view takes root, it spreads to the whole shoe buying experience. Nunn-Bush shoes recently opened a chain of men's shoes stores called the Brass Boot. A Brass Boot store recreates the atmosphere of “a Victorian English club”:

Customers relax in leather-covered seats beneath tinkling chandeliers. Goblets of red wine and piped-in sitar music stimulate the buying hormones. . . . Orgiastic collection (of shoes) . . . designed to blow your mind.⁴

The atmosphere is designed to give the buyer the feeling of being rich, important, special . . . and that he deserves the very best in shoes.

4. “Sex, Wine, and Sitar: Shoe Fashion for the Groovy Male,” *Journal of Footwear Management*, Spring 1970, p. 22.

FURNITURE RETAILING

The typical retail furniture store or department is typically overcrowded and unimpressive. Its atmosphere does not tend to reinforce the act of purchase. A few stores, however, are pioneering positive atmospheres. One development is the featuring of mock living rooms exhibiting a related line of furniture in an integrated setting. This has two favorable effects. First, the customer can more easily visualize how a particular piece of furniture functions in a total setting. Secondly, shoppers seeking to outfit an entire room may buy the whole ensemble. The creation of mock room atmospheres helps the customer go through his problem solving more comfortably and confidently.

Progressive retailers are trying to create positive atmospheres consistent with the quality of their furniture. Colby, a large Chicago furniture retailer, opened a spacious suburban store nestled in a beautifully landscaped acre of land. Shoppers drive off the main highway and enter an ample parking lot. They proceed toward the main door passing handsome windows featuring tasteful living room ensembles. They enter the store and pass a leisurely collection of fine furniture. The store is finely scented of leather and maple furniture. Piped-in music provides a leisurely background and the buyer strolls from room to room immersed in a positive feeling toward furniture and Colby's. This store has designed an atmosphere to soothe the anxious buyer, give him a visually gratifying experience, and reinforce positive feelings toward the purchase of fine furniture.

BARGAIN BASEMENT RETAILING

Not all atmospheres are engineered to create a pleasant, leisurely set of feelings. It depends on the items being sold, their pricing image, and the customer's expectations. Large department stores often operate a bargain basement which sells less expensive lines of merchandise or marked-down merchandise. Customers going to the basement are pursuing "bargains." The atmosphere of the basement is usually stark and functional. Aisles are narrow, and counters are loaded with merchandise often arranged chaotically with respect to sizes and colors. Everything suggests merchandise available at bargain prices.

Is this atmosphere coincidental or calculated? In the following account, Howard Raiffa leaves little doubt:

. . . I was given a free hand to investigate how a department store could become more efficient in its sales effort. I very quickly became interested in bringing order out of the chaos that was a daily affair in the women's blouse subdepartment. On one counter, in particular, blouses were strewn about everywhere and the poor shopper was beside herself trying to locate her size. She wasted precious minutes because of the inefficiency of management. How easy it would be to arrange the merchandise neatly, and inaugurate a simple inventory replenishment scheme that would cut down the service times and make an orderly queue possible! After writing what I considered a masterful analysis of the problem I was invited to visit the store at opening time to see how the chaotic melange developed over time. Just before opening time, after the employees had got the entire stock neatly arranged and checked styles and sizes very carefully, they took the blouses out of their boxes, threw them on the counter, and very methodically mixed them up. Things were so inefficiently arranged that half an hour after opening there was a crowd of women milling about the counter, and this crowd, like a magnet, lured other bargain hunters into the melee. I learned.⁵

ANTIQUÉ RETAILING

Many antique dealers also make use of "organized chaos" as an atmospheric principle for selling their wares. The buyer enters the store and sees a few nice pieces and a considerable amount of junk. The nice pieces are randomly scattered in different parts of the stores. The dealer gives the impression, through his prices and his talk, that he doesn't really know values. The buyer therefore browses quite systematically, hoping to spot an undiscovered Old Master hidden among the dusty canvasses of third rate artists. He ends up buying something that he regards as a value. Little does he know that the whole atmosphere has been arranged to create a sense of hidden treasures.

5. Howard Raiffa, *Decision Analysis* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1968), pp. 264-65.

NEW HOMES

Atmospherics can contribute to the selling of new homes in planned communities. The builder's job is to sell the prospect on the home and on the community. His particular tactic is to do "life style" selling. Presumably the community has been designed with a particular socioeconomic group in mind. This is reflected in the housing quality, landscaping, and prices. The major device for suggesting the intended life style of the inhabitants is through the *model home*. The model home is furnished in a manner to help the prospects see that the home and community will be a fulfillment of their life style. One particular housing development in a northern Chicago suburb is aimed at the college-educated, young adult market. As a family enters the model home, they see a living room with built-in book cases, a hi-fi set, and quality reproductions of well-known paintings hanging on the wall. They enter the kitchen and see a copy of *Gourmet Cooking* opened to a sumptuous recipe. They enter the dining room and spot a bottle of fine French wine and two goblets set tastefully on the dining room table. These, and a dozen other visual impressions, convey a life-style image to the family, one calculated to induce purchase if it fits the family's self-image. A designed atmosphere is used to stimulate the buyer's appetite toward the product.

RESTAURANTS

Restaurants provide both a physical product, food, and the culinary services of cooking, serving, and cleaning up. Historically, the quality and the prices have been the decisive factors in determining which restaurants prospered. Most food consumed outside of the home is eaten in diners and cafeterias where the atmospheres are at most pleasant, but rarely a major factor in restaurant choice. In recent years, however, there has been an increase in the number of *atmosphere restaurants*. Some restaurateurs are coming to the opinion that atmosphere can be the major factor in making a successful restaurant. According to the owner of Pier Four in Boston, one of the nation's most successful restaurants: "If it weren't for the atmosphere, I couldn't do nearly the business I do."⁶ According to another res-

6. "More Restaurants Sell an Exotic Atmosphere as Vigorously as Food," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 4, 1965, p. 1.

taurateur: "Customers seek a dining experience totally different from home, and the atmosphere probably does more to attract them than the food itself." ⁷ This is reminiscent of Elmer Wheeler's adage, that "you sell the 'sizzle,' not the steak."

AIRPORTS AND AIRPLANES

A service industry that is relatively advanced in its use of atmospherics is the airline business. Their relative sophistication arises from the food itself." ⁷ This is reminiscent of Elmer Wheeler's adage, that many people have. They cannot address this concern directly, for to talk about the low air fatality statistics will only remind people that there is a safety issue. Therefore airlines have had to deal with this issue indirectly. Their approach is largely an atmospheric one. Confidence in flying is built up through several devices:

1. The air terminal is modern, bustling, efficient. Music is piped-in, and the colors are soothing. Restaurants and bars are plentiful and attractive.

2. The aircraft's interior and exterior are designed sturdily and attractively. Movies and stereo music are available on the longer flights to help the passengers forget they are flying. The large 747's are advertising bars and cocktail lounges to imply fun and comfort.

3. The airline personnel are chosen to create confidence or distraction. The pilots are tall, handsome, and experienced-looking. The stewardesses are attractive and sometimes coquettish. Even their costuming has become a part of the atmospheric effort.

Airlines have skillfully used these and other features of the flight to create in nervous flyers a state of euphoria or distraction so that their flying fears will not come to the surface.

PSYCHIATRIC OFFICES

Consider the atmospheric problem facing psychiatrists in designing their offices. Most psychiatrists have eschewed the temptation to "put themselves" strongly into their office. They prefer to reveal as little

7. *Ibid.*

as possible about their personal lives and tastes. Such revelation, they say, might interfere with the process of “therapeutic transfer.” Ideally, the psychiatrist should be vague to the patient, so that the patient can “project” his own emotional states onto the psychiatrist. The psychiatrist uses these projections as data that help reveal the patient’s emotional makeup. Thus the ideal atmosphere of the “classical” psychiatrist’s office is neutral in color, devoid of art objects, simple in furnishings. It should be added, however, that newer forms of psychiatry, such as “implosive psychiatry,” warrant different atmospheric solutions.

ADVERTISING AGENCY OFFICES

Advertising agencies have to overcome a basic distrust of businessmen toward the “productivity” of advertising and advertising executives. Businessmen often carry the image of advertising men as fast talking, fly-by-night con-men with little real knowledge or theory of advertising processes. Advertising men, to overcome these feelings, have partly resorted to atmospherics:

Appearance (the perjorative word is “front”) means a great deal in advertising. At the agencies . . . decor is a means of expression; the agency tries to say something about itself by its use of space, color, and design. At Young & Rubicam . . . the spaces are large, the upholstery material is leather and the color is green—walls, carpets, chairs and couches are green. . . . A visitor to the executive floor of Y & R could be pardoned the feeling that he was in a bank; a long, spacious, deeply carpeted hall . . . the monochrome green enforcing an impression of solidity.⁸

Not all advertising agencies attempt to put across a solid, business-like image. Many agencies choose atmospheres that will create or reinforce an image of a “hot, creative shop.” The “look” of their agency is bright and arty. The creative personnel wear long hair and offbeat clothes and work amidst blaring rock music. The client is really impressed with the look of creativity. One agency is rumored to have created such a look because several of its clients expected it. The real

8. Martin Mayer, *Madison Avenue, U.S.A.* (New York: Pocket Books, Inc., 1959), p. 7.

creative talent was located on another floor, in the persons of men past their forties wearing plain business suits, who went undramatically about their business.

ATMOSPHERE PLANNING

The preceding examples are intended to establish the role that atmospheres play in the buying process. Buyers may choose vendors as much for their atmospheres as their goods. In fact, to the degree that the goods of competing vendors converge, atmospheres may become the chief form of competition. People will become as concerned with how the store or office “feels” as they will be with the goods that are offered.

This does not mean that there is an ideal atmosphere appropriate to each industry. Every market is made up of individuals with varying tastes. The choice of an appropriate atmosphere is arrived at in much the same way as any other marketing decision.

The following sequence of questions must be asked:

1. Who is the target audience?
2. What is the target audience seeking from the buying experience?
3. What atmospheric variables can fortify the beliefs and emotional reactions the buyers are seeking?
4. Will the resulting atmosphere compete effectively with competitors' atmospheres?

Management must first define its target audience as a prelude to atmosphere planning and any other type of marketing planning. If it is going after a homogeneous audience, this definition will make it easier to develop the appropriate atmosphere. For example, the dress shop catering to wealthy women knows that it must design a store that appears exclusive and expensive. The more varied the target audiences, the more complex the atmospheric decision. The store going after multiple market segments has only two options. One option is to design different atmospheres in different parts of the store, much as the bargain basement differs from the upper floors of a department store. The other option is to design a neutral atmosphere that allows maximum “projection” by the different patrons.

Next, management must consider what its target audience is seeking to obtain through the purchase and consumption experience. The target audience must believe and feel that the values it is seeking are potentially present at this establishment. These values must be projected through the establishment's products, prices, and communications. Atmosphere is one of the major communication media for expressing these values.

Management must next identify the major atmospheric variables that are available to produce the desired customer awareness and reaction. It must consider how sight, sound, scent, and texture can each contribute to attaining the desired total effect. For example, the Hampshire House in Chicago caters to persons who want the sense of staying at "the Grand Hotel." Consequently, the hotel has been atmospherized in a way which thoroughly suggests luxurious surroundings and service. "The rustle of silk. The smell of leather luggage. Palms in regal pots. . . ." ⁹

Finally, management wants to be sure that the atmospheric details have been worked out in a way which is believable, effective, and superior to competition. This means that any proposed atmospheric design should be pretested on a sample of potential customers through a scale model or set of drawings. This also means that implemented atmospheres must be periodically reevaluated in relation to new possibilities and competitive developments. Atmospheres exhibit a strong wear-out effect over time. Their initial potency declines because of imitation or changing styles. Management must be alert to signs calling for freshening or revising their atmospheres.

Responsibility for atmosphere planning and monitoring should be invested in a specific member of the management team. This executive must have familiarity with the three major art forms that contribute to atmosphere realization. They are: ¹⁰

- Architecture: the atmospherics of the exterior structure of buildings

9. From a Hampshire House advertisement.

10. Two other art forms, *styling* and *packaging*, window dress the product rather than the atmosphere surrounding the products. They are very close to atmospherics and contribute to the atmosphere. Styling could be defined as the atmospherics of the product's tangible surface and packaging as the atmospherics of the product's physical container.

- Interior design: the atmospherics of the interior space of buildings
- Window dressing: the atmospherics of the store's windows

RESEARCH ISSUES

With the exception of some airlines, restaurants, department stores, and professional businesses, it is fair to say that atmospherics has been a relatively neglected tool in the marketing mix of most firms. This is partly due to the dominance of the tangible product in the minds of most vendors. It is also due to the functional, as opposed to aesthetic mentality of most vendors.

Even firms which have consciously planned their atmospheres often make mistakes through failure to research their customers or pretest their designs. Many examples can be cited of atmospheric oversights or misplanning:

- A major motel chain uses a standard decor for its motel offices and one of its features is soft lighting. Travelers have reported that the soft lighting makes the motel look somewhat lifeless. They prefer another large motel chain where the bright lighting of the motel offices as seen from the road suggests a bright, busy, and cheerful place.
- A multimillion dollar shopping center was recently completed with an enclosed mall and "look" suggestive of the twenty-first century. People who visit this shopping center for the first time are quite impressed. From the second time on, they complain of a feeling of claustrophobia and stuffiness. The designers were evidently gifted in imagination, but they failed to pre-test their futuristic concept on a sample of shoppers.
- A new bakery was opened up in a shopping center and attracted considerable attention initially because of its fine fixtures, window treatment, and exotic pastry. Everything about the atmosphere suggested fine pastries fit for a king. Yet customers failed to materialize in sufficient numbers and the bakery went out of business. The owners made the mistake of overdesigning the shop for the clientele. The store's atmosphere suggested high prices and special occasion pastries whereas most shoppers wanted low prices and more everyday pastry. The owners had mismatched the atmosphere to the clientele.
- A fish store in an ethnic neighborhood did a thriving business. The store was very unkempt and unattractive. Someone talked the owner into remodeling the store to give it a clean, attractive look. The owner did this, and business fell off. Somehow the modernization connoted higher prices to many customers

and also they felt less comfortable in the place than before. Once again, atmosphere was mismatched to the clientele.

There is a great need for further research into the subject of optimal atmosphere. Four questions appear particularly important at this stage:

1. What is the extent of conscious atmospheric planning in different industries? What is the level of atmospheric sophistication and investment in each case? How important does it seem to be as a competitive tool?

2. What values are customers seeking in different common buying and consuming situations? What atmospheric solutions are called for?

3. How do different atmospheric elements work? What messages are communicated in this society by particular colors, sounds, odors, and textures?

4. What are the social and ethical implications of man's growing power to create atmospheres to motivate purchase? What objections or defenses does the buyer have against "subliminal" persuasion?

Atmospheres are a factor present in every buying situation. Until recently, atmospheres developed casually or organically. Atmospheric, however, is the conscious planning of atmospheres to contribute to the buyer's purchasing propensity. As other marketing tools become neutralized in the competitive battle, atmospheric is likely to play a growing role in the unending search of firms for *differential advantage*.