

A Working Relationship

52-1/2"

60-5/8"

96" O.D.

81-5/8" I.D.

~43"

FAO

SCHWARZ · VISUAL

1996-2015

John W. Ebbert

31-1/2"

24-1/4"

67-1/2"

A Working Relationship



John W. Ebbert

Over the last 20 years or so, I've had the singular pleasure of being associated with the design, production and implementation of displays and sculptural environments for arguably the greatest toy stores in the world. For much of this time I worked with the many talented and inventive people that made up the FAO Schwarz visual and creative teams. If truth be known, it was only through working with those fine people that I was able to establish my own business, John Ebbert Creative, and continue to provide my services to the major toy stores in New York City all these years.

With that in mind, I have assembled here a group of projects that I hope reflect a few of the projects I was associated with, working with FAO Schwarz Visual, its creative directors and teams of talented individuals, from the summer of 1996 when I started there as an associate, through the closing of the 5th Avenue store in the summer of 2015. I'm well aware that this history is but a tiny fragment of what went on there during that period and that many, if not most, of the people whose efforts were necessary to the realization of these and the multitude of other projects of that time are not recognized here. This oversight is not due to a lack in appreciation, only to a lack of space and time.

—John W. Ebbert, May 2016



FAO Schwarz 5th Avenue, 58th Street Facade (Day) detail, (2013)

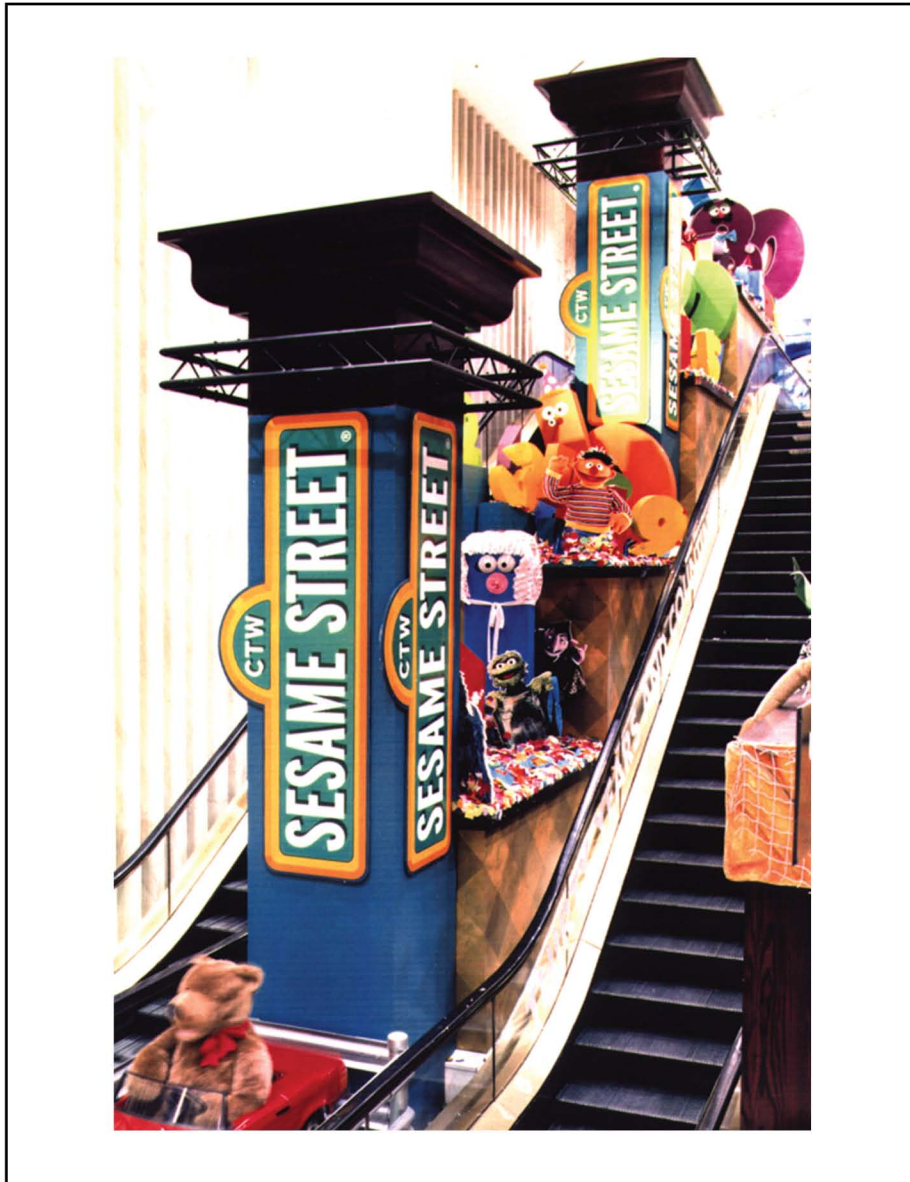
Foamcore, Hot Glue and Plaster

My relationship with FAO Schwarz Visual began in 1996 when I was working on my MFA in Painting at Pratt Institute, in Brooklyn. At that time, FAO Schwarz made most of its displays in a cramped space underneath the plaza at 5th Avenue and 59th Street, next to the Houlihan's Restaurant that existed there then. Martina Hooker was the Visual Manager at that time, and with a motley crew comprised of members of the rock band Mini King, a few of us grad students from Pratt and a collection of transplanted mid-westerners, we huddled together there and cobbled together many fantastic displays out of hand-cut foamcore, hot glue and plaster.



The New York Shop, (1996) shown here, had a foam rubber, left-handed, Statue of Liberty, a life size plaster taxi front, and a belt driven, foamcore train that, over its two years of running, traveled enough miles to have gone to France and back.

In 1997 the Visual Studio moved to a new space of 14th Street. Randy Buck took over as Visual Manager during our time there. Suddenly there was much more room to make displays. Having completed my MFA, I joined FAO Schwarz as an Associate and work weeks often consisted of a combination of days in the studio constructing displays and nights in the store installing them.



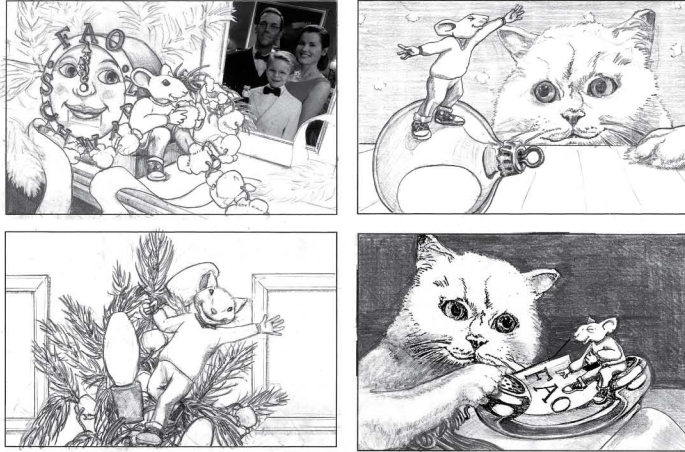
Sesame Street 30th Anniversary, (1997). With more room, more ambitious constructions, like the column wraps and the stepped stages shown here, were now possible.

In 1998 I moved up to the FAO Schwarz offices on the 4th floor, in General Motors building, to work with Tom Crossman, the Corporate Visual Director. With more ambitious displays now possible, we began concentrating on designing vendor shops. Presentations often consisted of layouts for multiple locations within the store including storefront graphics, 59th Street window displays, and vendor shops. The better computer software that was just coming out at that time made making concept presentations much easier than had been possible.

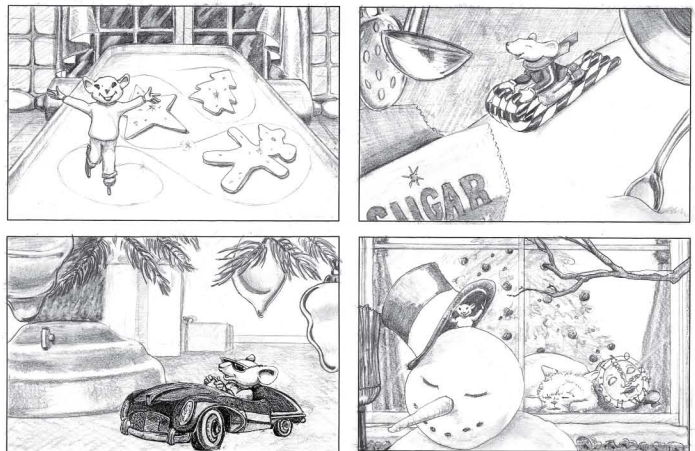


Little Bear, (1998). Of this presentation, the Little Bear Shop shown at bottom was eventually constructed and installed.

It wasn't all computer work. Holiday windows took on a larger role at that time, too. Natalie Fuechsel, Asst. Corporate Visual Director, would come down from Boston, Randy Buck would come up from 14th Street and work with Tom Crossman and me to work up concepts.



First sketches led to more finished drawings.



Quick sketch models were made to see how things might work in the shallow space of the window boxes.

Stuart Little Holiday Windows, (1999), sketches and sketch models.

The final animated display boxes were constructed on 14th Street—with some outside sculpting help from friends at Boerum Studios, in Brooklyn—delivered to the store on 59th street, and lowered into the narrow window spaces behind the product walls there by crane.



Stuart Little Animated Holiday Windows, (1999)

The scope and slickness of the displays we designed at FAO Schwarz expanded even more as the 90s gave way to the 2K. Outside studios that could deal with the larger scale, more durable (and kid friendly), fiberglass constructions were sometimes used to accomplish fabrication.



Harry Potter Sketch Model and Vendor Shop, (2000) Fabrication by Creative Arts Unlimited, FL.

No matter how whimsical things got, some things got made, some things were not.



The Grinch Holiday Shop, Concept Drawing, Unrealized Escalator Maquette (detail), (2000)

Computer programs advanced greatly at that time. The newest version of Adobe Illustrator made it possible to create scalable graphics with controlled fades and shadows. These illustrations, for Lionel Trains, were as much about using and learning the new technology as they were about creating fresh, branded graphics for a vendor shop. It was nice that Lionel allowed us the freedom to create original art for their shop.



Lionel Trains Vendor Shop, (2000)

Another advancement was in 3D graphics. Presentations could now be made mathematically accurate. Fabrication specs, including very specific dimensions, textures and finishes could now be worked out in advance of production without resorting to sketch models.



Sony Aibo Fixture Renderings and Actual, (2001)



SEPTEMBER 2001

September 2001 was a time of great upheaval in the world, maybe especially in New York. Of course, that would be the time I decided to take things on my own; and so, I established John Ebbert Creative which I ran out of my live/work space, near the Navy Yard, in Brooklyn. Many of my clients came by way of the fantastic people I'd met at FAO Schwarz.



The Scholastic Book Store: through Eddie Clarke who had been the daytime, in-store visual guy—the person who kept everything running—at FAO Schwarz. To this day, when a work night runs toward dawn, I think to myself, “we’re going to be seeing Eddie”—a throw back to nights at FAO Schwarz when extremely involved installations pushed up against the opening of the store in the morning.

Tiffany & Co., Macy’s and Nickelodeon: through Lorelei Guttman who had worked at FAO Schwarz assisting Tom Crossman before I started working there.

Toys"R"Us: through Tom Crossman who moved over to Toys"R"Us in the years following my departure from FAO Schwarz.

A Return to the Scene

In October of 2006 I got a call from Natalie Fuechsel. She had somehow managed to make her way through the tumultuous years at FAO Schwarz, working at the store in Boston. She asked me if I'd be interested in helping create a Charlotte's Web escalator display in the New York store. It seemed as if things had come full circle. We rebuilt the stepped platforms and column wraps based on what we had done nine years earlier for the Sesame Street display in 1997. The web itself was hand made—almost entirely out of painted copper—with dimensional letters to match the logo from the movie.



Charlotte's Web Escalator Display, (2006)

Things had changed at FAO Schwarz. Gone were the massive built-in displays. In fact, it was no longer permitted to anchor things into the new ceiling or anything else for that matter. David Niggli, the CEO at that time asked if we could create an Aquatic Shop for the main floor. We managed to do this by creating dioramas on vinyl-wrapped cubes and floating over-sized plush on airline cables without resorting to any permanent anchoring whatsoever.



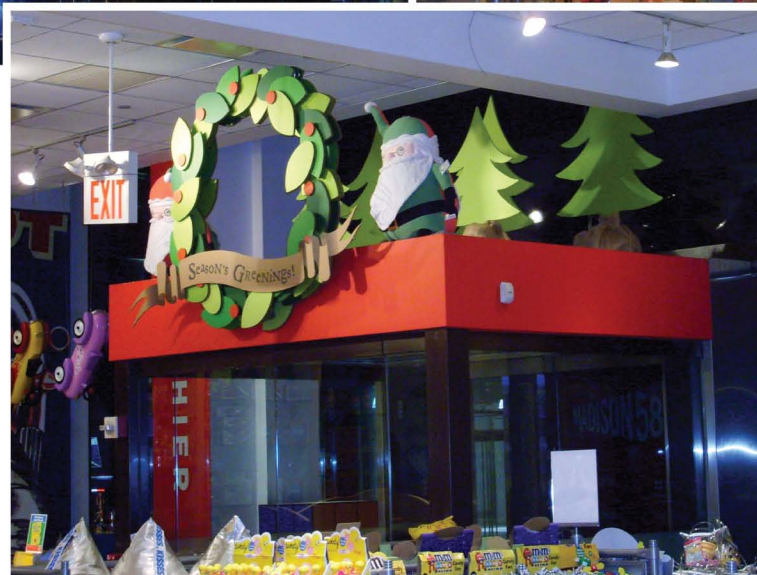
FAO Aquatic, (2007)

Working again with Natalie Fuechsel, the Holiday display at FAO Schwarz in 2008 was a challenge of using all recycled and recyclable materials. Hand-cut cardboard, burlap and fiberboard made up for a whole-store makeover that ran with the theme of *When Santa Turned Green*.



When Santa Turned Green, (2008)

The hand-made green theme carried on throughout the whole store.



When Santa Turned Green, (2008)

Toys"R"Us Takes Over

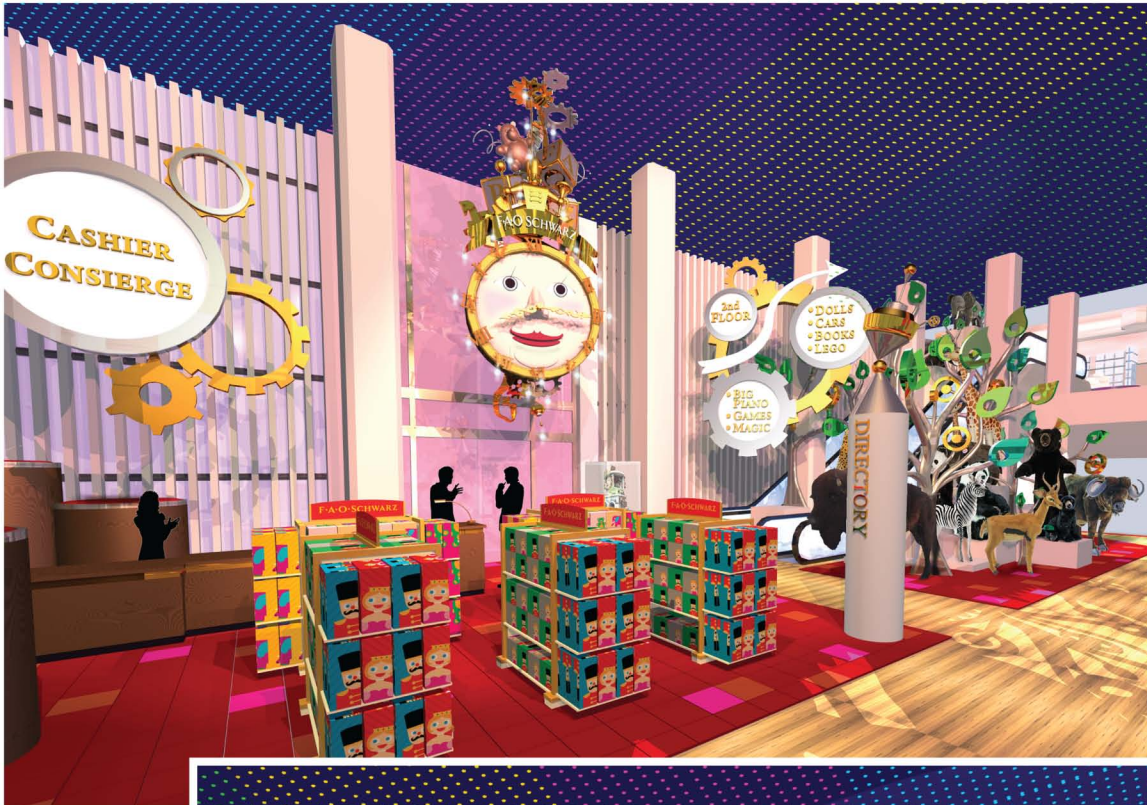
In 2009, I was back to conceptualizing. When Toys"R"Us acquired FAO Schwarz, for me, it was one of my clients acquiring another one of my clients. There was new construction at FAO Schwarz and new possibilities. Since I had already been working with Suzanne Sallata on renderings for Toys"R"Us Times Square, it was fitting that we would continue to work together on projects at FAO Schwarz.

Suzanne was always on the lookout to make things spectacular and so it was a pleasure to have a blank slate on which to work.



FAO Schwarz Holiday Entrance, (2009) unrealized

Many of the icons from FAO Schwarz’s past—the soldier, rocking horse, letter blocks, bear, top—were used, to bring some of the store’s history back into play. The old clock face from the FAO Schwarz clock tower was considered for a possible hanging element. (The clock face was eventually used in an FAO Schwarz 150th Anniversary display near the Madison Avenue entrance to the store in 2012.) And, there were now new towers to play with.



FAO Schwarz 1st Floor Renderings, (2009)

The Holiday display that first year was a trip down Memory Lane. Holiday catalogues from the past were framed and embellished to reclaim some of that history that was such a big part of the FAO Schwarz experience.



FAO Schwarz Holiday Renderings, (2009)

The trick to this project was digitally repairing and preparing sometimes damaged artwork to be printed large scale and back lit–some up to 120” across.



FAO Schwarz Holiday, (2009)

In 2010, Toys "R" Us created new branding for FAO Schwarz and we began rendering its uses—putting together an exciting packing for the entire store.



FAO Schwarz Branded Shop Renderings, FAO Baby, The Big Piano, FAO Cafe (2010)

In 2011, many of the designs were realized.



FAO Schwarz Branded Shops, FAO Baby, The Big Piano, FAO Cafe (2011)

Next came a major redesign of FAO Schweetz, the candy department. Fixtures, floors, sculptures, walls, everything got a brand new look.



FAO Schweetz and Wonka Shop renderings, (2011)

The new FAO Schweetz space, when constructed, came alive with brilliant colors, dazzling surfaces and welcoming forms.



FAO Schweetz actual (with sculpture rendering), (2012)

FAO Schwarz celebrated its 150th year in 2012. This anniversary was commemorated store wide with all the bells and whistles.



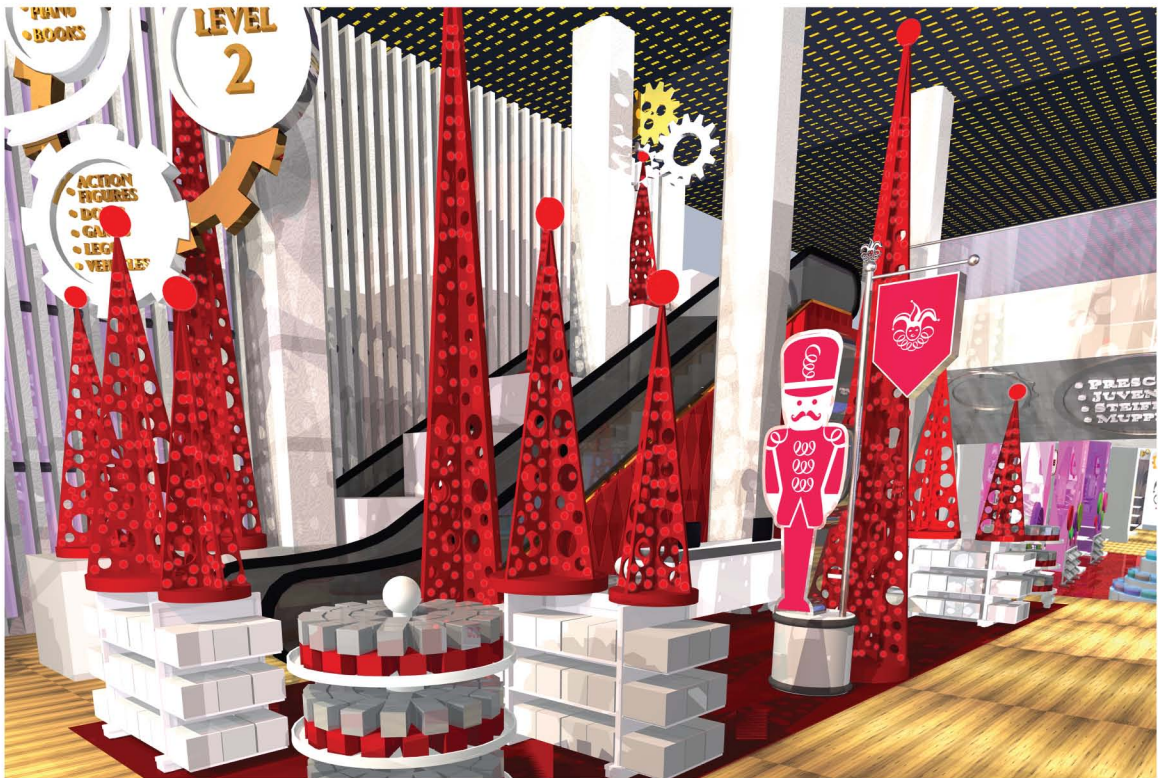
FAO Schwarz 150th Year, Store Facade, Interior and Sculpture Renderings, (2012)

The celebration carried on throughout, and old friends joined the party.



FAO Schwarz 150th Year Cashier Area, and Re-installed Clock Face, (2012)

The Holidays of 2014 provided a final opportunity to dress the store in large scale. The attire for the season was Red...




FAO Schwarz Holiday Renderings, (2014)

...and she wore it well.



FAO Schwarz Holiday, (2014)

Display at FAO Schwarz in 2015 was mostly about revitalizing small vendor shops, and signs—that eventually led up to this one.



**See You Soon
From FAO Schwarz**

Amid the chatter surrounding the upcoming closure of our iconic FAO Schwarz flagship location on July 15, 2015, let us pause to reminisce about the countless, cherished memories created within these walls.

For nearly 30 years, our Fifth Avenue location has welcomed native New Yorkers, as well as families visiting from around the globe, to our one-of-a-kind, legendary toy store.

But, let's not forget that throughout its 153-year history, FAO Schwarz has resided at a number of Manhattan addresses. And, at each new home in the Big Apple, we've thoroughly enjoyed enchanting our customers with quality products and experiential shopping.

As our toy soldiers prepare to close the doors to our Fifth Avenue residence, we look forward to greeting you to the sound of "Chopsticks" on the BIG Piano at our new home.

We'll announce when and where that will be as soon as we can.

We are excited about the opportunity to create a new flagship location in New York City that will no doubt delight kids and kids-at-heart for generations to come.



FAO Schwarz Closing Sign, (2015), FAO Schwarz 58th Street Facade Rendering (night), (2013)

John Ebbert is an exhibiting artist, illustrator and writer.
He holds an MFA in Painting from Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, NY.

Professionally, John has been promoting children's toys and books for over 20 years.

With his company, John Ebbert Creative, he continues to
render, design and implement store environments and displays for clients.
His client list includes companies such as FAO Schwarz, Toys"R"Us Times Square,
Babies"R"Us Union Square and The Scholastic Book Store.

He is a member of The Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators.

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(2016)