



# TOYS R US

Rendering Magic at the Center  
Of the Toy Universe

Times Square 2002 - 2015

John W. Ebbert



The act of rendering spaces for displays derives from a sense of balance. One must always remember that what he/she creates is merely the representation of what might become. The rendering itself is a place to start. Changes are inevitable and are often for the best. The goal is to present what might be possible; the ultimate satisfaction is realizing what comes into being as a result of a collaborative effort to bring a project to its completion.

John Ebbert, June 2016

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# Times Square, The Center of the Toy Universe

Over the last nearly decade and a half, I've had the opportunity to assist in the creation of many fabulous projects, displays and environments for Toys"R"Us in Times Square, New York. For most of that time I had the pleasure to work closely with Suzanne Sallata, the Toys"R"Us Visual Director for Flagship stores. My relationship with Toys"R"Us didn't start with her, however, it started in 2002, with Tom Crossman, whom I had assisted at FAO Schwarz until 2001. In 2002, Tom was working in Marketing at Toys"R"Us, Inc., and was preparing a program to promote vendor-licensed shops and displays.

The ability to have changeable building-sized promotions in Times Square was something unique to Toys"R"Us. To be able to create, quickly, a home base store for a particular product was a distinct opportunity.



*Finding Nemo, Times Square Building Wrap Presentation, (2002).* Finding Nemo was the first project I worked on at Toys"R"Us. Because this was a presentation about making presentations, we were able to take some liberties with the artwork, including incorporating Geoffrey into the scene, transitioning the giraffe pattern from reflection to underwater shimmer as it made its way around the building and adding the water drop distortion to call attention to the building itself.



The Nemo presentation went on to discuss in-store vendor shops, including: graphics for signs and wall wraps, sculptural elements, fixtures and video.



*Finding Nemo, Vendor Shop Elements Presentation, (2002).*

In 2003, Mindy Gurwicz, the Director of Visual Marketing for Toys "R" Us, asked me to help render a Customer Service/Souvenir Center for Times Square called *Geoffrey's World*. The elements for this shop were designed to showcase Toys "R" Us's location at the heart of the hustle and bustle of New York City.



*Geoffrey's World, renderings, (2003).*



It was at about this time that I started working with Suzanne Sallata, Director of Visual Merchandising—a relationship that would continue over the next 12 years. In that time, I had the privilege of working with her and her team to see many of the fantastic displays, shops and environments in Times Square, as well as at FAO Schwarz, and Babies"R"Us in Union Square, come to fruition.



*Hot Wheels, renderings, (2003).* This shop existed on the Lower Level at Times Square for many years.



Another shop on the Lower Level was proposed that year, *Geoffrey's Box Office*. This one was done as a drawing instead of as a 3D rendering. I think that because it was a Toys"R"Us enterprise, not a vendor shop, it was thought that it didn't need all of the bells and whistles of a slick rendering. In any case, the shop itself was constructed in 2004.



*Geoffrey's Box Office, drawing, (2003). Geoffrey's Box Office, actual, (2004).*



Now that the store had existed in Times Square for a few years, the first floor began to take shape as well. *Filled with Love* was a create your own plush store that occupied the back corner of the first floor starting in 2004. The enormous print files for the column trees for this shop pushed the limits for Macintosh computing at that time.



*Filled with Love, rendering, (2003).*  
*Filled with Love, actual, (2004).*

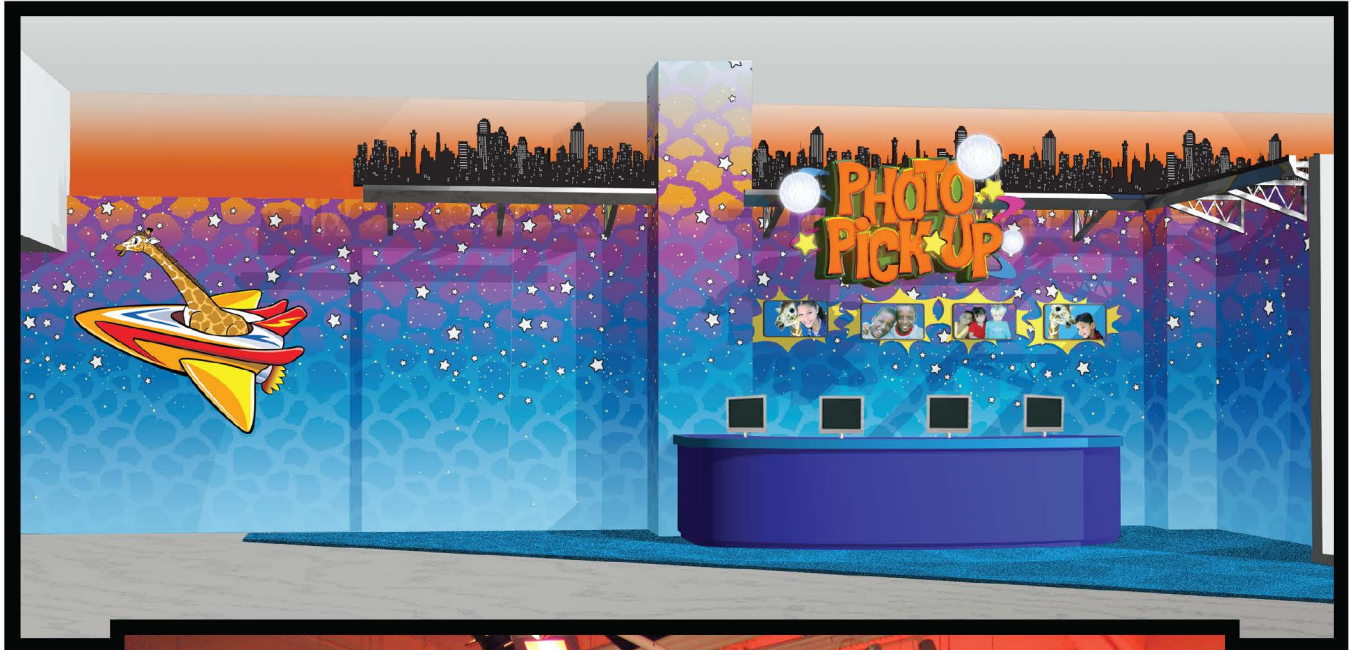
Before there was an M&Ms Store in Times Square, there was a thought to putting one in on the first floor at Toys"R"Us. Even though this shop was never realized, I included it here because I like the rendering—lots of fun elements, patterns and colors. Eventually Wonka did put a candy/souvenirs shop into this very location on the first floor.



*M&Ms Shop, rendering, (2005).*



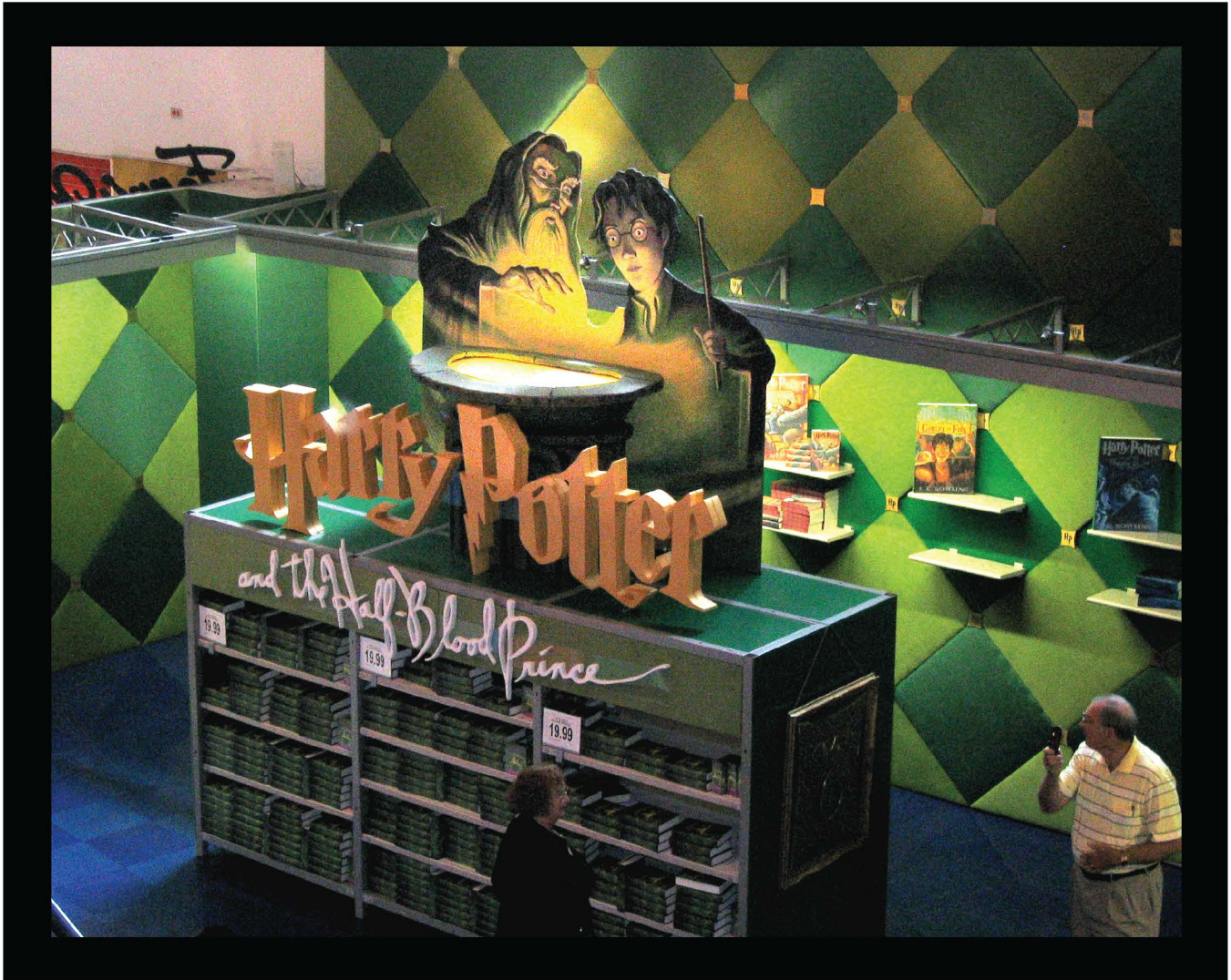
While the M&Ms Shop might not have gone in, a good bit of the first floor did get a revamping beginning in 2005. A lot of it started with *Photo Pick-Up* and kind of poured around the walls in clock-wise direction from there. For me, one of the more challenging aspects of this project was taking the Toys"R"Us giraffe print and making a continuous pattern that ran hundreds of feet along the walls there.



*Photo Pick-Up, rendering and actual, (2005).*



Harry Potter was all the rage. The shop shown here is a bit of an anomaly. When Harry Potter books were released everything was a closely-guarded secret. The only things anyone knew about the new book was its title, and what the cover art image would be. Unfortunately, there was no actual artwork to work with. Fortunately for me though, my company, John Ebbert Creative, also counted Scholastic Books, Harry Potter's publisher, among its clients. We had done two large-scale hand-painted displays for *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* already, so it was not such a stretch for us to paint another one for Toys"R"Us in Times Square.



*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince, hand-painted display, (2005).*



In almost opposite fashion from the Harry Potter display, when we did the Thomas & Friends shop on the second floor, we were able to use the same art source files for creating the layout rendering as well as for printing the final display elements. This project showed the value in doing accurate preparatory renderings.



*Thomas & Friends, rendering and actual, (2005).*



The *Freewheelin'*, Ferris wheel ticket area combined the use of source files as print files with the new technology of computer-cut routing to create three dimensional elements. Large elements, like Ferris wheel on the back wall and details, such as the finials topping the bin fixtures could now be created this way.



*Freewheelin'*, renderings and actual, (2006).



More ambitious projects, like the Lower-Level Sony shop shown here, were in the works, too. Suzanne was interested in using some of the new technology that was available—including animated lighting that could wrap right into the architecture of the store. The Sony shop would literally change colors while you shopped there.



*Sony, rendering and actual, (2006).*



2007 was the year of the great transformation on the 1st floor in Times Square. Animal Alley gave way to Geoffrey's Universe and visitors were welcomed into an immersive space-themed environment that swirled shooting stars across a night sky—leaving the Times Square day behind, outside and on the sidewalk.



*Geoffrey's Universe and Space Ship Element, renderings, (2007).*



Lit elements and high-keyed colors kept the store bright and energetic.



*Geoffrey's Universe and Space Ship Element, actual, (2007).*



The holidays that year were all about *Child's Play*. The theme presented different scenes from a make-believe holiday pageant, starring Geoffrey and his friends. It used a lot of the bright lights and colors from Geoffrey's Universe inside and brought them to the windows on Broadway. We were able to capture and hold a fanciful sort of energy by creating original graphics that swirled and pulsed.



*Child's Play, Holiday Windows on Broadway, renderings, (2007). Scrim art, at top, not realized.*



Large-scale light boxes, cut to the organic shapes of the *Child's Play* prosceniums, framed views that invited passersby to look into the store and see all that waited for them inside.



*Child's Play, Holiday Windows on Broadway, actual, (2007).*



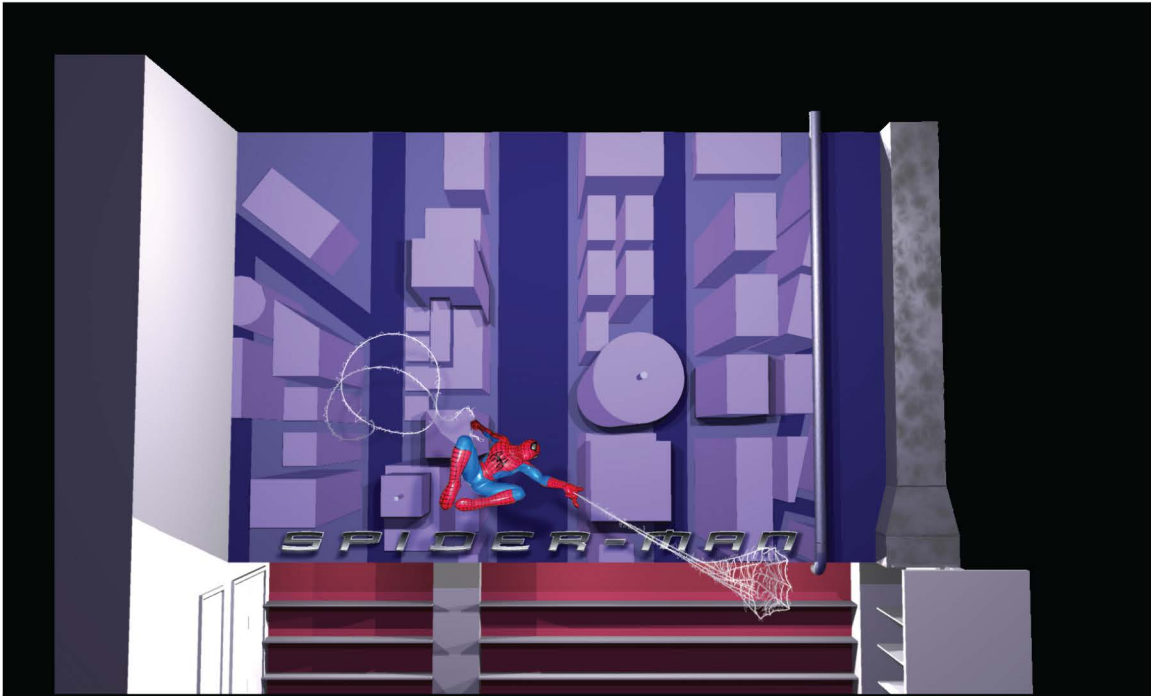
How can you be sure Superman can safely drop a trailer truck through your ceiling? Odd visual problem solving was one of the more interesting aspects of what we did in Times Square.



*Superman Installation Studies, renderings & actual, (2007-2008).*



Spider-man's web was made of steel and copper, spun and painted to match the web style of the current movie series.



*Spider-man, renderings & actual, (2007-2008).*

2008 brought on a major re-haul of the juvenile and apparel areas on the 2nd floor. New lighting, fixtures and a brighter fresher look combined to give Babies"R"Us a footprint in Times Square.



*Juvenile Apparel Infant Boys, rendering, (2008) actual, (2009).*

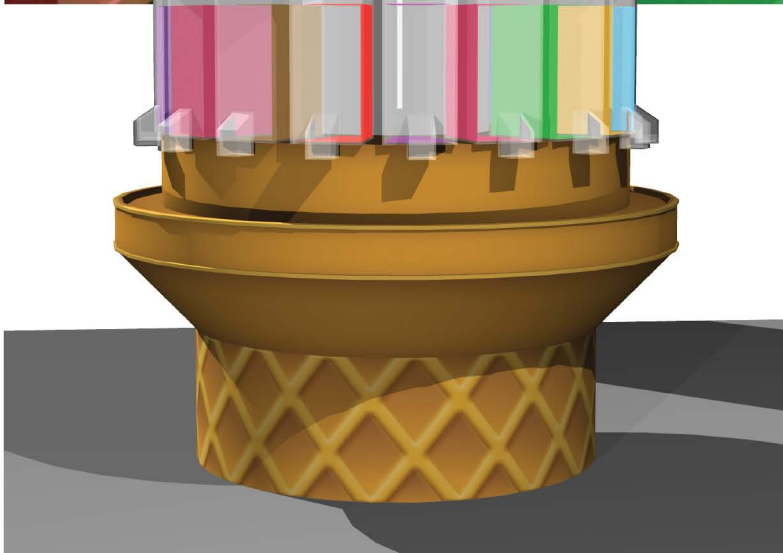


The Juvenile Department took up about a quarter of the square footage of the 2nd floor.



*Juvenile Products, Apparel Infant Girls, actual , Modular Cube Fixture, rendering, (2008-2009).*

Like the Juvenile Department, other shops within the store were refurbished with new fixtures.



*Candy Land Cone Fixture, rendering/actual, (2009).*

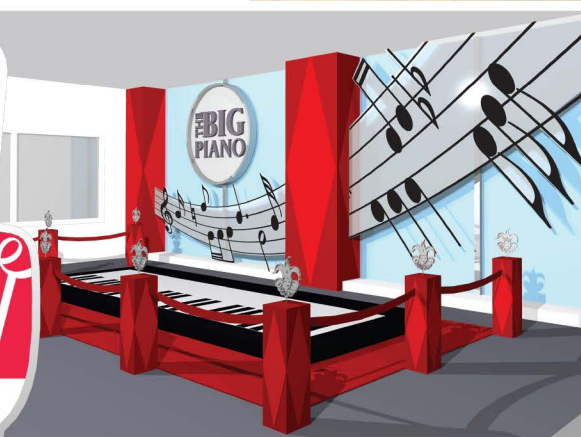
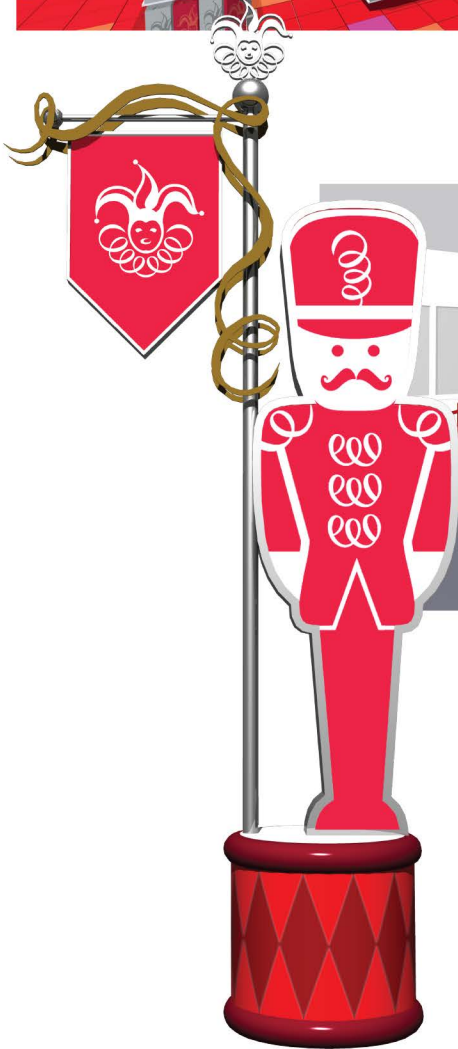


Sometimes the fixtures would become shops unto themselves.



*iPod Kiosk, rendering, (2009).*

Much of our attention was drawn towards FAO Schwarz during 2010 and 2011. Toys"R"Us had acquired that magnificent franchise, and we had the pleasure of preparing the new branding elements to transform the shops of the flagship store on 59th Street, to bring back some of the luster and magic.



*FAO Schwarz Flagship, renderings, (2010-2011).*



FAO Schwarz was a major redesign at that time, too.



*FAO Schwarz Flagship, FAO Schweetz, renderings & actual, (2011).*



Back in Times Square things were evolving as well. The new Imaginarium graphics were given a sculptural life of their own, and the birds were angry.



*Imaginarium, preliminary composition, (2011). Angry Birds, rendering, (2012).*



The Peeps were happy to settled themselves on a bridge.



*Peeps, preliminary composition and actual, (2012-2013).*



In 2014, Skylanders presented a unique opportunity to team up with a vendor to exhibit a particular product throughout the store. From the windows on Broadway, to a large vendor shop below, to oversized wall graphics and a mural above, Skylanders was a transformational experience.



*Skylanders Swap Force, preliminary comps and renderings, (2014).*



The artwork we set up combined with the sculptural elements provided by the vendor to create a thoroughly encompassing experience.



*Skylanders Swap Force, Broadway Windows and Vendor Shop, (2014).*



The Electronics Department on the Lower Level got a new fresh makeover as well, with new graphics, signs and fixtures.



*Electronics, renderings, (2014).*



My experience in Times Square, from beginning to end, was always about the environments and the spectacle of exciting events. Teaming up with the creative individuals there, especially with Suzanne Sallata, made for many exciting collaborations, projects and celebrations. The last of these was the midnight opening for *Star Wars, The Force Awakens*, in November, 2015—a shop that managed to appear in the store as if by magic. So did they all.



*Star Wars, The Force Awakens, rendering and actual, (2015).*

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.

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