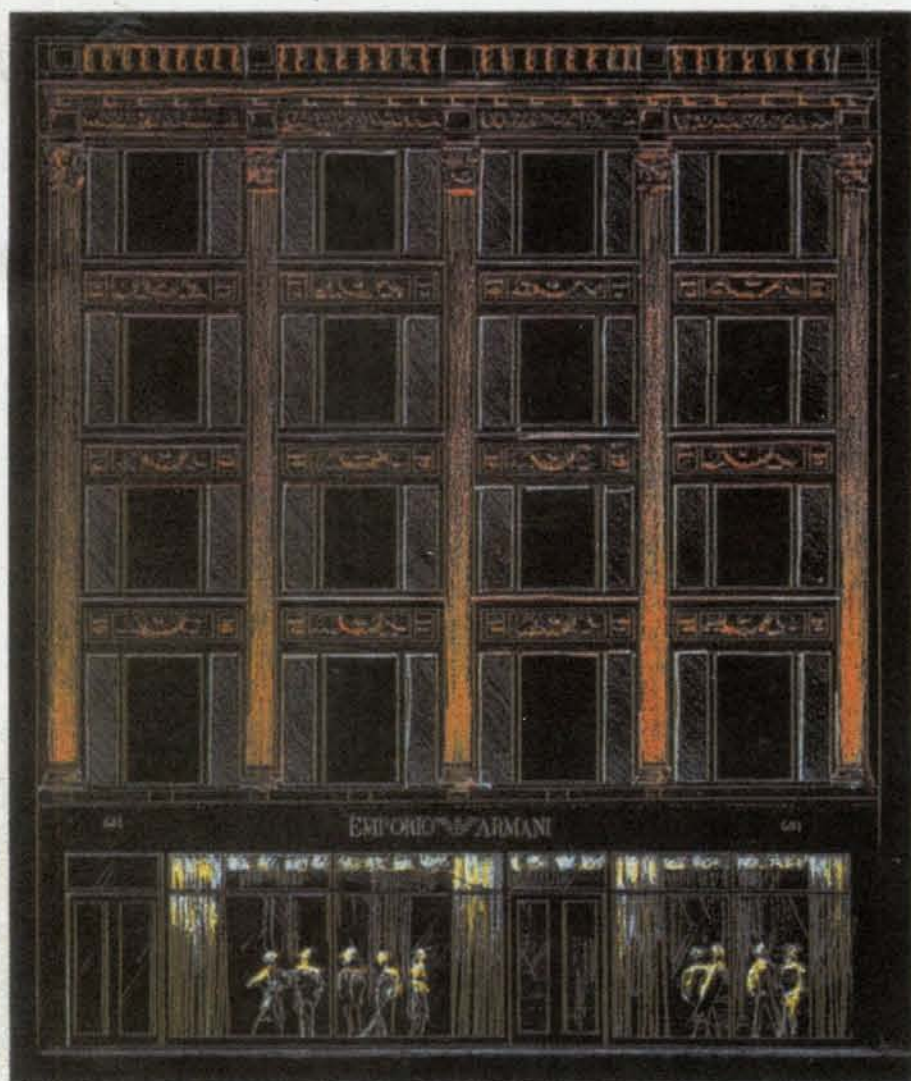


The Very Fine Art of Lighting Basic Black

by Charles Linn, AIA



Pilasters grazed by uplights and backlit balusters are shown in an early concept drawing, left, and in finished form, below.

While the clients wished to avoid overstatement, Emporio Armani is not unlike other stores in that the storefront must be attractive, memorable, and substantial in its visual impact. This was accomplished by installing pods of 70W metal-halide spotlights that graze the pilasters, their capitals, and the soffit above. A balustrade on top of the roof is backlit by a high-output fluorescent sign-lighter with a straw-colored gel.

The front windows on the ground floor are framed by a backlit glass box. This band of brightness draws attention to the clothing, as well as providing ambient light for the mannequins. The glass in the box, held together by a chrome-plated steel frame, is called "seed glass" because of the tiny bubbles that texture its surface. The glass is lightly sandblasted on the reverse side to more evenly diffuse the light that comes from 10W incandescent lamps spaced on 6-in. centers. A similar detail is used to encase the columns at the ceiling. A theatrical projector mounted on a soffit inside the front door projects the Armani logo onto the sidewalk.

Accent lighting for the front window mannequins is accomplished using PAR38 track lighting that is recessed into a pair of troughs parallel to the display windows. The troughs are spaced far enough apart so that the displays can be front- and backlit and are wide enough to allow plenty of room to move the fixtures through their maximum possible range of adjustment. The track heads are made of solid milled aluminum that matches other light fixtures throughout the store, and they are fitted with stainless-steel honeycomb louvers.



Emporio Armani, the Italian design firm's Madison Avenue store in New York City, occupies a magnificent, five-story stone town house. This conservative, elegant setting is filled with sleek showcases and vitrines made of black lacquered wood and glass that display the designer's classic men's and women's clothing. Almost all of the fashions shown here are either black or in neutral tones, and Paul Gregory, principal of Focus Lighting, says that the biggest challenge to lighting the store was "getting in enough light to make the basic black sparkle, to bring out its richness."

Gregory and Carlos Inclan, the project manager, presented their lighting concepts to the client using renderings done in yellow and white colored pencil on black illustration board (above). Inclan, who created the renderings, used white to simulate edges, corners, and surfaces of objects and yellow to indicate the direction and distribution of light rays coming out of fixtures and the way they will strike the objects. According to Gregory, showing the objects in white outlines and allowing the yellow lines to represent the way light will "fill" the lines can give clients a reasonably accurate simulation of the lighting concepts, provided that the distribution of light from lamps and fixtures is accurately represented.

Display cases and vitrines on the first floor of the store are illuminated by the same aluminum PAR38 fixtures used in the display windows. Here the track is also recessed into troughs to keep the ceiling plane clean. The vitrines behind the cash-and-wrap counter are illuminated by T8 fluorescent lamps built into a soffit.

Project: Emporio Armani
New York, New York

Architect: Aero Ltd.—Thomas
O'Brien, project architect

Lighting Designer: Focus Lighting—

Paul Gregory, principal; Carlos
Inclan, project manager

General Contractor: Vista of
New York—Phil Arnold, project
manager