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a Designers improved movement throughout the three-level store by opening up the central staircase with brighter lighting and adding large-scale graphics to indicate each floor's offerings. **b** Levi's specialty RED line was relocated to the mezzanine level, giving the innovative clothing its own boutique setting.

Levi's flagship mixes heritage and trendiness

BY ANNE DINARDO ASSOCIATE EDITOR

WHEN LEVI'S OPENED THE DOORS OF ITS NEW San Francisco flagship store in 1999, it was one of the company's first efforts in updating its store environment in almost a decade.

During the years that followed, Levi's remained committed to evolving its design concept to keep it current with each year's application. After refinements were tested at Levi's London store, it was time to return home and use those lessons to make its 24,000-square-foot West Coast flagship the ultimate expression of the brand.

"Levi's is focusing its store design aesthetic to balance its heritage and modernity," says Jan Croatt, director of store planning and visual merchandising for the Levi's Brand Marketing division of Levi Strauss.

While the original character of the flagship was that of a museum-like experience, the redesigned store would be a

showcase for the product assortment with a better balance between product display and store layout. The renovation also would give the jeans pioneer the chance to resolve some store design issues that had

surfaced over time in the Union Square space. Those included the need for clearer sightlines and a more prominent exterior presence.

Finally, an updated store would also support Levi's efforts to improve its image, especially with younger shoppers, whom the jeans maker has been courting in recent years to help boost its sales. Levi's has experienced six years of steadily declining sales since its peak in 1996. Full-year 2002 sales were down 3.5 percent from the year before and 42 percent below the 1996 high. When sales increased by 3 percent in the third quarter of last year, it was the company's first quarterly sales increase in six years.

Design firm Checkland Kindleysides (Leicester, U.K.), who worked with Levi's on the original San Francisco flagship, returned to help refine it into a space that reflected both the heritage of the brand (which celebrates its 150th anniversary this year) and its modernity.

"The design challenge was to acknowledge Levi's as the creator of the original pair of jeans, but at the same time take that inventive spirit forward to the future," says Jeff Kindleysides, principal at Checkland Kindleysides.

To start, Levi's wanted to redesign its denim wall presentation. Like most jeans displays, Levi's arrangement was based on a cubby system compartmentalized according to

To make its San Francisco flagship the "ultimate expression of the brand," Levi's updated its denim presentation. Fixtures and signage aim to educate shoppers on all styles of jeans, while a new gated wall presentation - where jeans are hanging half-folded on pegs with additional sizes and styles stored on shelves behind the gates - aim to encourage shopper-interactivity.

