



Washrooms in Malls

Functionality more important than aesthetics

In the planning, designing and construction of a mall, the washrooms unfortunately do not feature very high on the list of priorities on the drawing board. Very often, the approachability, functionality, usability and cleanliness are ignored while planning.

Just like airports, malls too witness thousands of footfalls every day. This number goes up during weekends. Studies indicate that, on an average, shoppers spend close to four to five hours in a mall on any given day. While, the shopping, entertainment and food requirements of people of all ages and socio-economic & financial groups are taken care of within the mall, the washroom is an area of contention for most, especially women shoppers.

Washrooms are usually tucked away into the corners and are much disproportionate compared to the area of the mall and the number of shoppers visiting the premises each day. In large public places like malls the design of the washroom has to be in keeping with the footfall, the functionality, convenience and finally the cleanliness & hygiene aspects. "The aesthetic aspect of the design should be



secondary, even though it is as important as the functionality of the washroom," opines Susil Dugarwal, Chief Mall Mechanic, Beyond Sq Ft.

"The layout and accessibility within the washroom should be such that all areas of the washroom can be easily reached and cleaned every few hours. A well laid out washroom with proper placement of fittings, fixtures and accessories enables convenient housekeeping. Closing down the washroom for cleaning is impossible in malls, hence the importance of having multiple WCs, urinals, washbasins and having separate areas for changing and applying makeup, etc.," said Susil Dugarwal.

Fittings like waterless urinals, auto flush, touchless water faucets, soap dispensers, hand driers, hand towel dispensers, diaper-changing

stations and touchless bins are essential requirements in washrooms which has steady stream of users who are always in a hurry. These not only ensure a level of cleanliness but also reduce contamination caused by multiple users. Bacteria resistant WC covers, anti-skid tiles, auto room fresheners also add to the hygiene aspects of the washrooms. It is also important to provide a clean space for the shopper to safely keep their purchases when they are using the facility. Space could be in terms of a shelf or overhang above the flush, pegs on the doors/walls or a bench within the cubicle. Reports indicate that thefts are common in mall washrooms, as the shoppers have to leave their purchase outside next to the washbasins when they are using the WCs.

Women's washroom designs would be different, in the sense it would have only WCs and no urinals, more space within the cubicles, accessories to hang handbags, scarves, etc., larger mirrors/full length mirrors, diaper-changing stations for babies, feminine hygiene disposal units, waste bins and if possible, an extension with sofa or chairs to feed the baby or to wait for a friend while she is using the washroom. Women more often than men visit washrooms in groups. Women's washrooms need to have proper air circulation, brighter lighting and dry spaces. Men's washrooms, on the other hand, require more urinals than WCs, hand sanitizers, anti-bacterial door handles and multiple mirrors as an average man spends lesser time at the urinal and more on resetting his hair and viewing himself in the mirror.

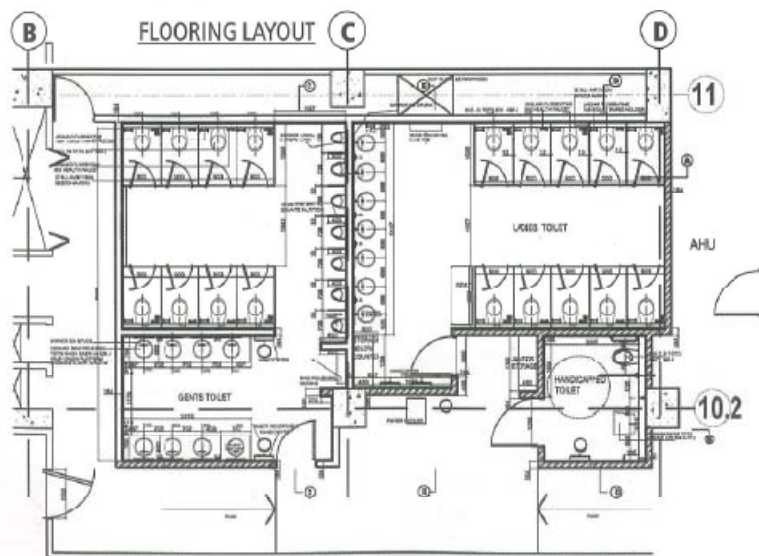
"Washrooms need to be well lit from outside as well as from the inside," added Dugarwal. "Proper signage needs to be put up within the mall leading the shopper to the washrooms. Washrooms should also have facilities for the physically challenged. These washrooms should have proper signage, larger space for

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the wheelchair or attendant to manoeuvre, hand railings for better grip while getting off the wheelchair or the WC, washbasins, water faucets, soap dispensers and hand driers should be placed at the appropriate height and most importantly the doors should have proper and functional door handles and locks. Washrooms in the West have the provision of audio directions for the blind."

The number of washrooms in a mall and on each floor is equally important. Proper calculation while deciding the number of washrooms or WCs is important. "A detailed study is essential at the designing stage itself to get the numbers right. An error in judgment can be witnessed in most malls, where serpentine queues can be seen at the ground floor washrooms (where the exits are situated) and the top most floor washrooms (where the entertainment areas are placed).

"The backend areas of washrooms should be designed first and then the aesthetic aspects should be looked into. The backend areas would include the drainage, pipes and ducts which forming the service areas while the front-end would include fittings, tiles, commodes, paint, basins and other utilities. Ideally, each washroom should have a parallel service area to ensure that leakages are fixed up and emergencies attended to at the earliest. The service area could be a 2/2sft area; big enough for the plumber or service staff to enter and check the pipes and small enough for the user to miss!"



(BCD Column Grid) - Gr. 1st, 2nd and 3rd Floors

Dungarwal suggests that if possible it would also be ideal to provide the mall staff with separate washrooms. This is to ensure that the staff gets their privacy and that shoppers do not get to overhear the small time talks that staff enter into, especially in secluded places like washrooms. This also ensures decorum and gives the staff some free time away from the prying eyes of the shop owners. Staff washrooms could have changing room with lockers for the convenience of the staff who need to change into uniforms.

In the case of the Magnet Mall, Susil Dungarwal's company Beyond Squarefeet Advisory Pvt Ltd pushed back the walls of the existing structure to a certain extent and brought in lot of efficiency into the space without compromising on the basic comfort. Every floor in the Magnet Mall has approximately about 82 or 85 toilets (including men's, women's and the physically challenged). The toilets were placed in two different corners of every floor ensuring that they were accessible from either end of the mall. Proper signage indicating the direction of the washroom is in place.

Susil Dungarwal has also worked on the lighting and ensured that the outer area of the washroom is brighter than the other areas of the mall. This gives the washroom the visibility and also ensures that it is safe at anytime. All the washrooms open directly into the mall aisle thus eliminating the need for the shopper to walk great distances to find a washroom. They have been designed such that with proper maintenance no foul odour would come from the washrooms irrespective of the number of users. In the Magnet Mall, functionality of the washroom received more emphasis than the look. High quality faucets, dual flush tanks with signage explaining how to use, bright energy efficient lighting, space for shoppers to rest baggage and a robust backend drainage system where each pipe is accessible through the service area are the key ingredients.

"All said and done India needs to learn a lot from the West on hygiene standards." He believes that it is important to set standards that will ensure certain norms are adhered to. "It is a pleasant surprise for most of us if we find a good clean toilet in a mall. Hope that in the near future the pleasant surprise would become the norm."

Vandana Joshi