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Shiny New Malls Go Retro

| By Shankar P.

Shopping spas
take their cue from
neighborhood
village centers

Shoppers who find trekking through megamalls a daunting experience may be happy to know that more village-like retail centers are coming back. Architects are borrowing ideas from established downtowns in communities such as Red Bank, Princeton, Ridgewood and Summit. Their designs are popping up in upscale neighborhoods in Wayne, West Windsor, Manalapan and Shrewsbury.

"The concept is to bring intimate shopping centers with specialty stores to the neighborhood, rather than to have people travel to the mall," says Chuck Lanyard, director of brokerage services and a principal at The Goldstein Group in Glen Rock, one of the state's biggest retail-space brokers.

Charles Dietz, a principal at the East



Hanover design firm of Dietz & Associates, is among those who have embraced this approach. "Over the last five years or so, probably 90% of our retail projects have leaned towards a village, town-center concept that goes back to the styles of the '50s, '60s or the '70s," says Dietz. His firm has some 35 projects totaling nearly 3 million sq. ft. of retail space underway in the state. To recreate an old-time feel, Dietz includes earth-tone colors, brick-veneer columns and large stucco cornices.

"We are using a range of materials and styles to give you the feel that each store was built at a different time in history," he says. "We change the front eleva-

This Lowe's, part of West Windsor's town center, was designed by Dietz & Associates.

tions, for example, with different window styles and heights."

Two recent projects are WayneChester Plaza, a 56,000-sq.-ft. retail center in Wayne, and The Square at West Windsor. That 215,000-sq.-ft. complex houses a Lowe's home improvement store and other large tenants. In 2003 it won the International Masonry Institute's award for retail space design.

Dietz is currently designing The Village at Manalapan, a \$100 million retail, residential and office complex with 1 mil-

FOCUS Architecture and Engineering



The Village at Manalapan, another Dietz design, should be completed by 2006.



WayneChester Plaza is anchored by Michael's.

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Director of brokerage services,
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lion sq. ft. It will have 500,000 sq. ft. of retail and restaurant space in its first phase and a performing arts center, medical office buildings and recreation areas in the second. Manalapan Retail Realty Partners, the project's promoter, has acquired the

land and gotten it rezoned from farmland.

Other village-like centers include The Shoppes at Old Bridge with 101,000 sq. ft. of retail space. Owner Stanbery Development of Columbus, Ohio, recently built The Shoppes at Union Hill in Denville.

Such facilities feature "brick pavers instead of concrete sidewalks, street lights that look like gas lights, benches and a lot of public seating and upscale food spaces," says the Goldstein Group's Lanyard. Retailers who lease such locations include Starbucks, Talbots, Pier One, The Gap, Ann Taylor and The Children's Place. "You won't see a discount store and you probably won't find a McDonald's, says Lanyard. That's because rents can be as high as \$35 a sq. ft., compared with \$20 or \$25 in less upscale venues. ■

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