

# JUNGLE FEVER

*Robert A. M. Stern Architects crafts a new Banana Republic in Chicago*

*Text by Nayana Currimbhoy • Photography by Timothy Hursley*

Moving beyond the elephants, Range Rovers, and army surplus fatigues of the first Banana Republic store in California, Robert A. M. Stern Architects presents a subtle and more sophisticated version of the exotic travel scenario in the retail chain's new store in Chicago.

Initially started by two Berkeley journalists to sell surplus army clothing, the chain was later purchased by The Gap. Recently, the parent company has decided to upgrade the clothes, and along with it, the architecture. The 14,360-square-foot Chicago store, according to partner-in-charge, Graham Wyatt, is to serve as a prototype for future stores.

Conceived as a contemporary version of a tropical plantation villa, the free-standing, 2-story structure holds its own among the eccentric mix of expensive boutiques and skyscrapers on Chicago's famous North Michigan Avenue. Its barrel-vaulted facade of lead-coated copper is reminiscent of the prefabricated metal structures exported to hot-weather colonies from Europe in the late nineteenth century. The cues for the interior's theme are revealed by the exterior. Pairs of lead-coated pilasters are cross-bound together with solid bronze strapping, a fanciful allusion to the lashed bamboo homes of tribal cultures, and their pattern is repeated again in leather inside the store. Basket-weave patterns in the plantings outside the shop, again, prepare the visitor for the basket-weave leather and wood patterned interior. "We have used serious, modern materials to comment on the travel theme," explains Wyatt.

A spectacular suspended steel staircase dominates the interior, and the plantation villa theme is suggested again in the plan of room-like alcoves surrounding the two-story courtyard created by this central staircase.



**Above: A concrete structure along N. Michigan Avenue was turned into this barrel-vaulted facade of lead-coated copper reminiscent of the prefabricated metal structures exported to jungle colonies.**

This is a very highly crafted store. Working with a broad range of materials—including white oak, granite, slate, sea grass, leather and steel—Stern's design team has created a repertoire of ingenious details with abstract references to the tropical travel theme. Lacquered particle board tents lashed with steel cable are the most direct allusion to safari travel. Other

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"The work was done all over the country," says Wyatt. Glass treads, for example, were fabricated in Pennsylvania, the wood walls in Salt Lake City, and the leather in Chicago. "It was quite an experience. A lot of our time went into finding and coordinating the artisans," says Wyatt, of the store which took 13 months to complete. Time well spent, indeed.



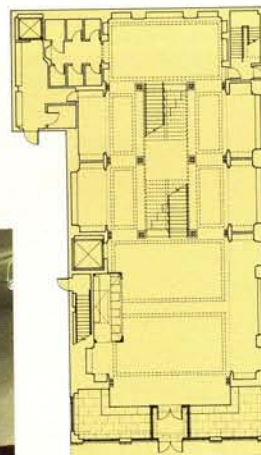
**Above: Bathed in natural light from a large skylight, the spectacular suspended steel staircase dominates the interior.**

*Tables, accessories* David Drummond, Dewey Galleries, Foreign Traders, Galisteo, Joe Carr, Niedermaier, Pierre Mahaim Antiques, Royal Knightsbridge, Silkroute, Simply Santa Fe *Floorcovering* Frazee/Gold (sisal), Daniel C. Duross (leather), Uba Tuba Granite by Hakon *Lighting* Louis Poulsen, Modular, Halo, Edison Price, Louis Baldinger & Sons (custom), Leathersmiths (shades); *Hardware* Vervloet-Faes *Skylight* Super Sky *Windows/glass* Duratherm Window Corp.

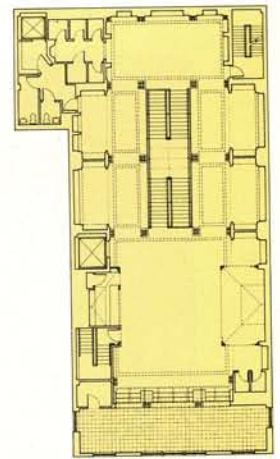


**Above:** Beside the staircase, steel columns wrapped in leather repeat the cross-lashed theme from the lead-coated pilasters that define the exterior.

**Right:** Based on a plantation villa, the floor plan has a central courtyard—created by the staircase—surrounded by roomlike alcoves where the clothing is displayed.



LOWER LEVEL PLAN



UPPER LEVEL PLAN

**Left:** Antique props, such as rugs, tables, chairs, and urns were selected by Steven Brady, Banana Republic's vice president of visual design, to complement the Stern team's design. Many of the store's merchandizing materials, such as racks, pegs, and trolleys, were custom designed, with a durable military chrome finish applied in many layers.

