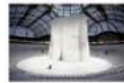


# WWD NEW YORK



**Getting Grander**  
Churchill has agreed to help fund the renovation of the Grand Palais in Paris.



**How to Fix It**  
Analysts and consultants discuss what H&M should do to return to the growth track.



**Last Time**  
Jason Wu is exiting an artistic director of Botol's women's collection after five years.

8

FEBRUARY 12, 2016

WWD

NEW YORK SPECIAL EDITION



A rendering of Area15 in Las Vegas.

BUSINESS

## Area15 Looking to Take Retail Entertainment to Another Level

• A new kind of development – not just another mall – looks to shake things up in Vegas.

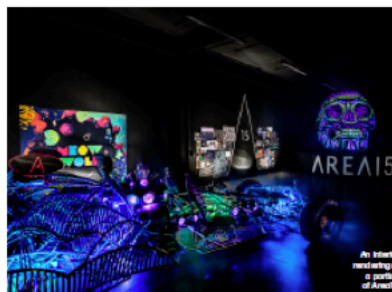
BY JAMES MORGAN

New York developer Fisher Brothers had no interest in plopping just another box on land. Instead, the vision for its Area15 project in Las Vegas calls for something far more ambitious.

The family-run real estate firm is calling Area15 an immersive bazaar that will fuse interactive art installations with food and retail. The anchor remains terra a department store, its 50,000-square-foot dedicated to a New Mexico collective of artists who call themselves Meow Wolf, backed by "Game of Thrones" creator George R.R. Martin.

"Area15 is what we feel is the disruption in retail and where the opportunity is," said Fisher Brothers principal Winston Fisher. "It's no great secret that retail has been disrupted. I'm not particularly smart in saying Amazon has changed the retail experience... I have a belief that when we study the 21st-century business models that are successful, they are not improving on the 20th century. They're reinventing the model for the 21st century and starting from scratch. An old mall is a building for an old future."

Area15, which broke ground in January, is slated for a mid-2018 opening. The company isn't saying how much it's spending on the project. By the numbers, there are 106,000-square feet available for lease, 40,000-square feet of indoor and outdoor event space targeted for anything from music to sports and more than 100 parking spaces. Some 300,000-square feet is to be dedicated to a space dubbed The Spine filled with a variety of art installations, including sculptures utilizing lighting and



An interior rendering of a portion of Area15.

3-D mapping. "The Flat Capacitor" car installation created by Las Vegas sculptor Henry Zhang, and a bamboo art piece designed by architects and design firm Ibuku.

Meow Wolf is known for its "House of Eternal Return" interactive mystery house installation, which was built on a former bowling alley and has seen nearly a million people walk through its doors since opening. The attraction perhaps provides some hint at what's to come at Area15.

The project's name – Area15 – is what Fisher Brothers calls its "hat trick of names." It's a play on Area 51, with its tag line "this does not exist." The project also sits along Interstate 15 and, lastly, Fisher Brothers got its start in 1915.

Experiences like what Meow Wolf intends to do at Area15, or JetSetty29's

29floors, or even a concept like Henshara, Fisher said, are valued experiences. It's not Santitas Workshop or an Easter egg hunt inside of a mall, which the developer called "spoon-feeding the customer a cheap experience."

Instead, what Fisher Brothers, in a joint venture with New York creative firm Henshara Studios, aims to do is curate an experience of music, food and art seamlessly working together.

The pairing of the family-run development firm and a creative agency is an interesting one, but reflective of the times as more retailers claim to want to bring "immersive experiences" into their centers. Companies, in general, more and more want some sort of narrative element in even just the buildings of their corporate headquarters. Giant firms such as Google,

Apple and Facebook create campuses – or firmaments turn themselves – while others such as iHeartMedia Inc., where Beneville Studios serves as chief creative consultant, also want to create environments that incite their employees to come into the office. That idea of storytelling is nothing new, Beneville Studios chief executive officer and Area15 creative partner Michael Beneville said.

"It's an idea that was by and large forgotten for a period of time and replaced with a sense that just materials or just architecture or just technology by themselves are enough of a magnetic pull to keep a person not only in their place, but also inspired," Beneville said.

That hasn't been the case for a while as the world shifted. Workplaces changed and loyalty to an employer, or a mall for that matter, has waned.

"We're a different breed right now," Beneville said. "Any change like that has an architectural impact because a store or an office didn't have to worry about you leaving. They didn't have to worry about the talent being poached in the same way a store or office has now... The way it applies to Area15 is that the mall in America is not dead; the mall in America needs reinvention. The way that mall started in a way in America, Walt Disney created it. Walt Disney was the guy who realized that if you gave people a narrative thread, they would shop as a logical extension in being part of that continuous story."

It's a well-rounded experience that has to be created where it's not just art or it's not just tech that is the solution, Beneville said.

"My caution is that [storytelling or immersive] often gets used to pay lip service and somebody plugs in a couple of VR machines and that's supposed to be your experience. It doesn't really work that way," he said. "We are building a parallel universe to humanity right now, an omnidigital universe in which one day not too many people will spend a great deal of time. The interesting thing, though, is that portal [and] what's the experience of going from one to the other. That transition is everything, so for immersive to be truly immersive it needs to be more than just a little thing that you plug in."

Fisher explained the thinking behind tapping a creative agency in a different way.

"Real estate doesn't think like that. Real estate says, 'I'm building a building and it's permanent,' but the truth is you have to build something that's evolving," Fisher said.

In fact, the original concept for the plot of Vegas land Fisher Brothers acquired before the Great Recession was essentially to build buildings – residential, commercial and retail to be more specific – before Area15 was ever conceived.

"I'd seen a lot of people come with grand visions and a lot of people who failed on their grand visions," Fisher said of the Vegas market.

To that end, the team at Fisher Brothers realized there was opportunity in building an attraction for locals looking for an alternative to the strip, while at the same time being a big enough draw to capitalize on the obvious tourist traffic already flowing into Vegas for the casinos and shopping on Las Vegas Boulevard. The site's proximity to the strip – about seven minutes – also helps.

Ultimately, the project is still in its early days, with lease deals to be struck to fill out the space. The types of tenants the developer would like to see go in can't be described with best-practice language, other than they have to be active participants to the overall environment. If they're just there to take up a box and push product, it's probably not going to work.

"What we're looking for are tenants that provide cool experiences," Fisher said. "We don't have a formula, what we have is a standard."

PHOTO COURTESY OF FISHER BROTHERS; RENDERING BY FISHER BROTHERS