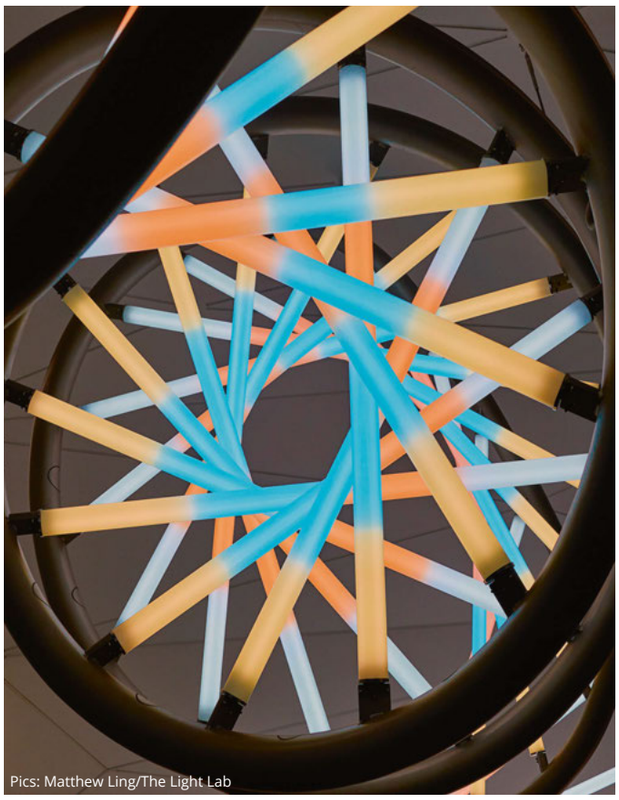

Pics: Matthew Ling/The Light Lab

It's In Our DNA

At Birmingham's Grand Central, The Light Lab has created a vibrant, dynamic lighting installation to create an engaging, welcoming feel for shoppers.

Birmingham's Grand Central; the retail and F&B destination, integrated with the largest transport hub in the UK outside of London, has recently completed a £2m upgrade to the New Street Mall by Hammerson. The refresh works include the creation of an engaging, vibrant and bespoke lighting scheme by HFM Architects & The Light Lab.

With a brief to enliven the mall experience, HFM's approach was driven through the necessity to reconnect the prominent strand between the High Street and the New Street Mall, within the centre. Working with the specialist team at The Light Lab, HFM introduced a sinuous, dynamic and programmable lighting scheme, to better the placemaking identity of the space.

A part of Birmingham's important scientific history can be attributed back to the discovery of the three-dimensional helical nature of DNA by Maurice Wilkins. It was these natural waveforms that HFM used as design precedent granting the space a new, and more defined character. The scheme is split into two phases: the first provides an installation piece to signify a grand arrival from the high street; and the second comprises a weaving skyscape that forms the genetic fabric of the mall.

In the double-height atrium entrance, the installation of a striking bespoke feature by The Light Lab, entitled 'The Helix', resembles an unravelling strand of DNA. The 'base-pairs' are integrated with the latest SPI LED technology that allows for infinite possibilities of colour, movement and interactivity to welcome visitors to the destination.

For the initial phase of the project, The Light Lab's team fabricated bespoke Spectraglass fins, as pioneered at Penn Station, New York, to create a 40-metre long undulating, digitally animated canvas that is easily programmable with intelligent lighting control by Pharos Architectural Controls Ltd, supplied, installed and programmed by Architainment. Artistic content was provided by light artists Miriam Sleeman and Tom Sloane of Tiller Studio.

Phil Riley, Director at The Light Lab, said: "We relished the chance to bring our experience in large scale architectural lighting features to enhance the retail experience at Grand Central; working to realise the innovative concepts of HFM Architects to create something unique and enhance the public experience on entering the destination. The complex structure and size of the piece brought its own challenges in both manufacture and installation, which made the project particularly interesting and enjoyable, and we hope that it gives pleasure to the people of Birmingham for many years to come."

These lighting installations have refreshed the visibility of the destination from the High Street and along New Street, creating a dynamic, expressive and social mall.

Dhruv Gulabchande, Associate Director, Architect and Research Lead at HFM Architects, added: "It is not often you have the opportunity to work with a client who is open to discuss the extended brief of a project beyond the immediate business case. At HFM we take the stance that all spatial form should inherently be sustainable and composed of structured storytelling elements. We are extremely grateful to have had the support from Hammerson to be able to introduce the DNA-based lighting scheme supporting the narrative of Maurice Wilkins into the mall refresh. It has been a pleasure working with the talented client team, The Light Lab and the extended design team that brought the project to reality." ■

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