



The BEST showroom in Milwaukee is the eighth in a series of special buildings for the Virginia-based catalogue merchandiser. It is the purpose of these buildings to use architecture as a means of generating psychological reactions and as a way of changing public response to the role of commercial structures in the suburban landscape. The exterior masonry walls of this inside/outside showroom are invaded by gaping incisions that reveal the (usually hidden from view) heating and cooling ducts, structural support systems, and commercial products sold by the store. Whereas the communicative imagery of architecture is traditionally interpreted as surface decoration—for example, the façades of Gothic and Renaissance buildings—in this case the iconography is achieved by cutting through the successive layers of exterior walls.

To emphasize this intervention, the total building is painted a monochrome gray. Many merchandise items, which would normally be contained inside the showroom, have been installed as part of a transitional connection between interior and exterior. For thermal sealing purposes, there is a recessed glass wall separating these products into real and surreal components of the same objects. This effect is accomplished by using the glass as a point of dissection; as a result, every object in the interior remains in natural color, while its extension on the outside appears in monochrome—suggesting interplay between the actual and the metaphysical.

