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The unsinkable mall

The media's reporting its demise (again), but the format's here to stay

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Libeskind finds beauty in the mall

By Curt Hazlett

SWITZERLAND'S CAPITAL, BERN, IS A LOVELY CITY whose medieval roots are stunningly well preserved in its crooked, cobbled streets. But its newest mall, a mixed-use center less than 10 minutes by train from the downtown and called Westside Shopping and Leisure Centre, is anything but traditional. Built above the A1 motorway on Bern's western flank, the 1.5 million-square-foot center is modern in the extreme, resembling a wood-paneled crystal jutting out at sharp angles. It contains 55 shops and 10 restaurants, plus a swimming pool, some cinemas and a hotel. Plans call for the construction of 800 apartments by 2018 as well.

Developed by supermarket giant Migros Aare, Westside is the first mall designed by the New York City studio of architect Daniel Libeskind, who rocketed to fame with his jagged design for the Jewish Museum Berlin and who now is the master-plan designer for New York's new World Trade Center site. "Architects for a long time thought malls were below their dignity," Libeskind told the monthly *Architectural Record* just after Westside's opening in October. "But if you bring nature and culture into the building, you can make it a radically different place."

Foot traffic has been strong, and local reviews of the design have generally been supportive. But some retailers complain that Westside's angular shopping areas create limited sightlines and that pillars partially block some storefronts, reports Marc-Christian Riebe, CEO of *Location Retail*, a Swiss retail brokerage based in Zurich. "The design of the center is very nice, but we are always telling investors to never give the architects too much

freedom to decide how to divide the space in a shopping center," Riebe said. "From an architectural point of view, Westside looks very nice, but it is less useful for the retailers."

Libeskind is sure Westside will triumph. "In its new architectural form for leisure and fun, Westside is indeed destined to become not only a local and regional attraction, but a world class destination," he wrote.

Meanwhile, more shopping center commissions have rolled in for Libeskind, who has designed the Crystals Retail and Entertainment District, now under development at CityCenter, in Las Vegas, and the Songdo Shopping Center, in Incheon, South Korea, both of which are Taubman projects.

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LIBESKIND SAYS ARCHITECTS
SHOULD BRING "NATURE AND
CULTURE" TO THEIR MALLS.

