

Mall expansion in home stretch

By Susan DeMaggio
staff writer

Attention Neilman Marcus shoppers: The wait for the post retailer to open its doors at the Somerset Collection is just three months away.

In August, Neilman Marcus will open. In September, the Somerset Collection will debut Tiffany's, Barney's of New York, Crate and Barrel, P.A.O. Schwarz, Joan & David, Circle Gallery, Rand McNally, J. Crew, and a few more surprises, who have yet to sign a lease.

A deal is also in the works to add one new restaurant. Shoppers of the Troy mall, a Frankel/Forbes/Cohen property, have been patient for the past year while browsing amid jackhammer noise, scaffolding and construction dust. Mall employees quietly admit they, too, are ready for the finishing touches.

The Somerset Mall first opened in 1989. The name was changed to The Somerset Collection in 1991 to reflect the mall's new agenda and design.

The renovation project's price tag is not for disclosure, according to Collection general manager Tom Miles.

"Let's just say we are very excited about the grand opening and we are currently formulating events and a campaign to get the word out about the Collection's new spirit."

MILES SAID the various retailers run the gamut from "upscale exclusive to moderate casual" merchandise.

"We've tried to mix the stores," he said. "I think we've bridged the gap between upscale and exclusive. We had 38 stores in the old Collection. When we open the new Collection we will have between 75 and 80 stores."

Miles said Neilman Marcus will employ about 450 new hires. Jobs for an additional 500-600 people will be created by the other new stores.

The Farmington Hills-based architectural firm of James Ryan Associates, is handling the Collection's new design. The firm most recently com-

pleted the redesign of The Gardens, another Forbes-Cohen project in Palm Beach, Fla.

The Gardens is anchored by Macy's, Bloomingdale's, Sak's Fifth Avenue, Burdine's and Sears.

James Ryan, a Birmingham resident, said his firm has handled mall renovations throughout the country. He said he is most proud of the Somerset Collection because it's his first major project in Michigan and "right in my own backyard."

"There will be two places for sculpture within the Collection," he said. "Although as of yet, we have not acquired the pieces. Our theme, so to speak, is contemporary longterm elegance. We used very high level quality marbles, brick, glass, manila stone. We attempted to draw some designs from the Cranbrook Art Academy."

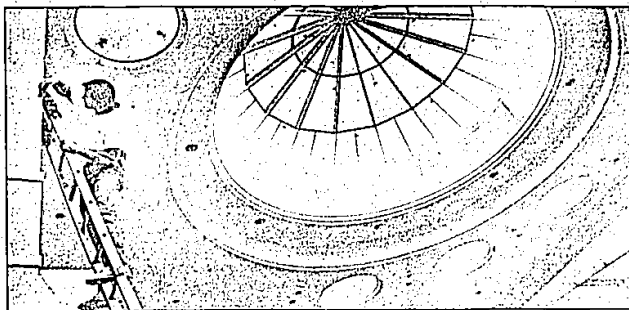
RYAN SAID the newly created Grand Rotunda at the Big Beaver entrance to the Collection was one of his favorite additions. The sky-lit area was needed to hold promotional and seasonal activities because the Cafe Jardin restaurant in the center of the mall, takes up that space.

"The entrances were meant to be transparent," he explained, "so that they can be seen from Big Beaver Road. This will be especially amplified at night when twinkling lights are turned on in the skylights."

The Somerset Collection sports a second level, a three-level parking deck, with walkways protected by a covered bridge, and continuous skylights that offer wonderful views, according to Ryan.

"This is a mall where people like to see and be seen," Ryan observed. "We've tried to maintain the Frankel/Forbes/Cohen ideal of a degree of intimacy. This is not a large regional mall. The distance between Neilman's and Sak's is 600 feet as compared to distances of 1,200 to 1,500 feet between the anchors in malls like Briarwood or Fairlane."

Sam Frankel said he thought the Somerset Collection "has reached the epitome of this merchandizing level."



JIM RIDEVAT/staff photographer

Journeyman caulker Frank Percha, 33, of Wixom, puts the finishing touches on a column at the main entrance to the Somerset Collection in Troy. Skylights highlight the ceiling of the entranceway.

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P115-14R17	\$18.75	\$13.96	P115-16R17	\$19.75	\$13.91
P115-16R17	\$19.50	\$13.96	P115-18R17	\$21.75	\$15.41
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