

USCG PROJECT HIGHLIGHT | FEBRUARY 2023

HOUSTON, TEXAS

BALLARD DESIGNS



KEVIN MILLER
SUPERINTENDENT

PROJECT SUPERINTENDENT

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As a US Construction Group Superintendent, Kevin Miller is used to traveling across the country to build retail stores. Being on the road has taught him the value of building relationships. No matter where his job takes him, he always makes it a point to become friends with key individuals who can help make the job easier. On every job, you can bet he knows the security guards, cleaners, mall managers and the maintenance personnel.

Kevin explains, "In the end, it's their sandbox. We're just there playing in it". He also understands that each project is unique and presents its own set of obstacles, requiring the utilization of quick thinking, problem-solving skills, and innovative tactics.

PROJECT CHALLENGES

The Ballard Designs Project in Houston Texas challenged Kevin and his team with three major issues:

- 1) The existing building structure was a historical property.
- 2) The Covid pandemic.
- 3) A week-long power outage in Houston



OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

The Houston Ballard Design Store project presented unique challenges related to the historic nature of the structure. The space, which had previously been an old Gap store, was a 75 year old building. One issue was that no alterations were permitted to be done to the existing historic store front, which was a curved wall covered in a brick façade. The bricks were covered with a black glaze, reminiscent of the era in which it was built, and it was virtually impossible to find the exact matching bricks to fill the spaces that had been created from the deterioration, which had taken place over time. Kevin found himself in problem-solving mode, scavenging bricks from other nearby old buildings and befriending the maintenance manager to access storage for more bricks. Once the bricks were obtained, they had to be placed according to specs, on a curved wall.

The design-build process means that each store is different, and changes occur often. There were many sets of plans for this project, and with each new set of plans, changes were made. Kevin and his team's creative problem-solving skills continued to be put to the test when they did the demolition and found walls that were not represented on the plans! In addition to that, a waterline which no one knew existed, was hit! At that point, the mall owners and city water and sewer representatives came out to shut off the water but could not locate the source! Carbon dioxide was used to freeze the pipes on each side of the waterline break which enabled them to cut out the broken section of the pipe and replace it with an undamaged portion of pipe. Water flow was restored, and the construction process continued.

While Kevin's team was gutting the interior of the building, brick columns, which were supporting the second floor, were revealed. These columns were also not represented on the plans, so the team was presented with yet another surprise. Kevin had to bring welders in and put a structural plan in place in order not to destroy supporting structures before this phase of construction could continue. Another discovery was made in the back of the store during the demo process. A 4-foot section of the old wall was exposed. The previous builders apparently left it there and just built around it! Kevin's response was to "shore" it up. For non-construction professionals, this means to create reinforcement around the supporting structure. To do this, he went out and bought 6 x 6 lumber posts which he used to framed up the wall.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

The wall on the interior curved portion (the same wall that called for the black glazed bricks on the outside) required curved drywall. To make the material more pliable, Kevin selected thinner sheets of drywall and wet them to bend into a curved shape. Making the curved wood trim required another level of innovation. Kevin came up with the idea to create a wooden box wrapped with plastic and duct tape, then bought a wallpaper-removing steamer, to which he hooked a hose that led to the inside of the box, where he had placed the wood trim. For 3-4 hours, steam filled the box which produced flexible wood trim that then could be shaped to the curved drywall!

The Covid pandemic added an extra level of complexity to the work. Throughout the entire project he and his team wore masks, and everyone was required to sign in and sign out. Oftentimes, they could not come home for the weekend as they would have done prior to pandemic. Traveling back and forth from Texas and the east coast meant they had to follow quarantine protocols, so Kevin stayed in Houston for the better part of 3 months.

To make matters more interesting, a snowstorm made its way to Houston that February, which caused a week-long power outage! This was the same week the store was due to be “turned over” to the Ballard executives! People in Houston were not used to snow or a power-outage like this one and no one left their homes. “It was a six-lane highway, and I was the only truck on the road going into Houston”. Kevin and one laborer were the only two to stick around, working with no power and no heat. The sprinklers were still “live” because in Houston it’s unheard of to prepare your pipes for winter temperatures. Kevin had to drain the sprinklers and water line and shut them down so they wouldn’t freeze. Kevin and 3 other people were the only ones in the entire hotel who chose to stay through the power outage. The power outage meant no heat, no running water, and no restaurants or open stores. Kevin again employed his creative problem-solving skills by cooking his food on a propane grill with a headlamp and flushing the toilet with buckets of water he retrieved from the hotel’s pool!

Kevin and the team truly went above and beyond to ensure the success of this project. Despite the unusual challenges, the finished project exceeded our already high expectations. USCG is proud to have such impressive team members working with us. Thank you to Kevin, Christa, and George for another job well done.

TEAM MEMBERS



CHRISTA BISHOP
PROJECT COORDINATOR



KEVIN MILLER
SUPERINTENDENT



GEORGE TIMCHAL
PROJECT MANAGER

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HARD WORK

**PROJECTS LIKE THESE ARE ONLY POSSIBLE THROUGH
MOTIVATED TEAM MEMBERS WHO COLLABORATE AND
PROBLEM SOLVE!**