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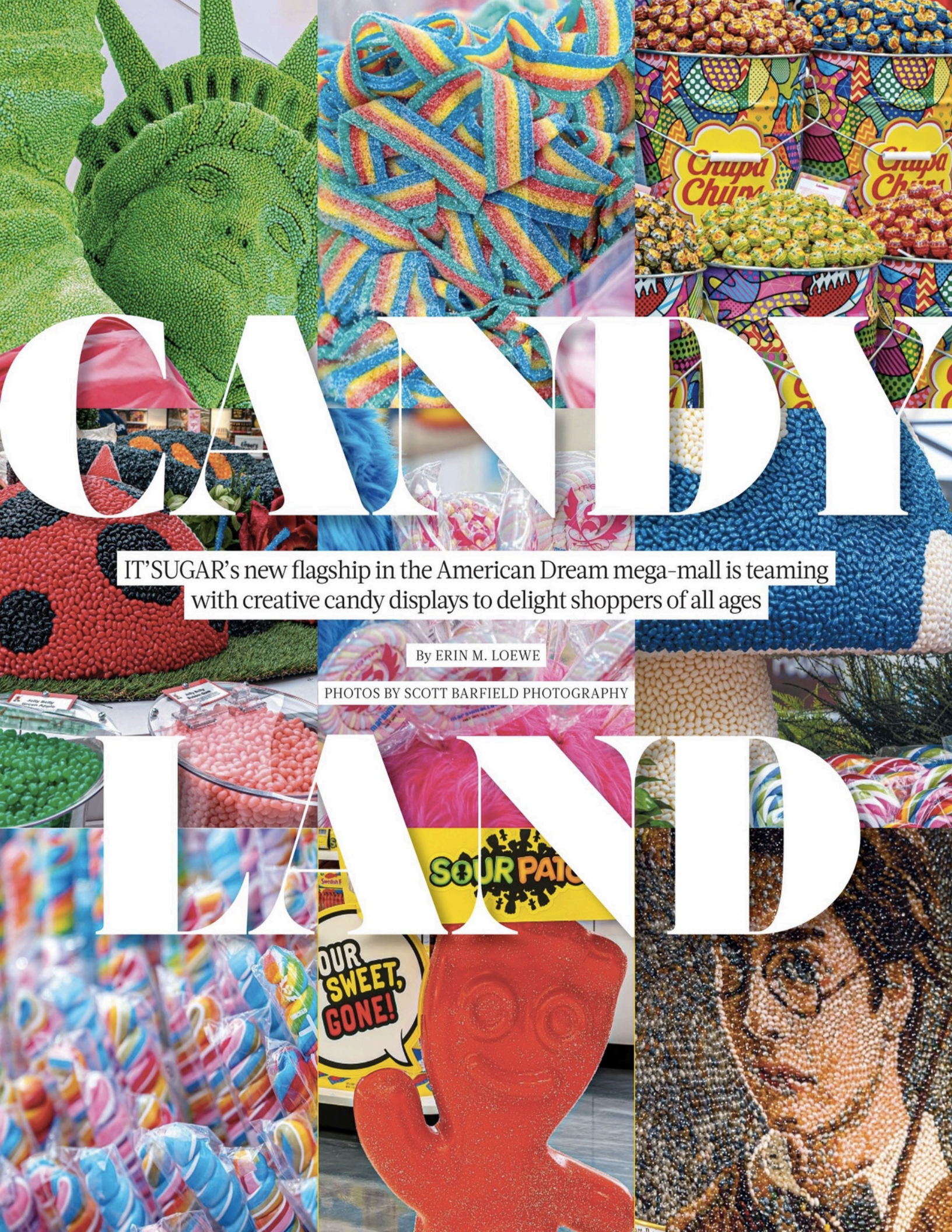


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CANDY

IT'SUGAR's new flagship in the American Dream mega-mall is teaming with creative candy displays to delight shoppers of all ages

By ERIN M. LOEWE

PHOTOS BY SCOTT BARFIELD PHOTOGRAPHY

LAND





Candy stores inherently have the advantage of a colorful and playful medium for those who design them. While it would be easier to just throw together a bunch of bins and let the candy speak for itself, Deerfield Beach, Fla.-based IT'SUGAR chose to turn the dial up at its new flagship at the American Dream mega-mall, which opened in East Rutherford, N.J., in fall 2019.

"Creating a candy department store has been a long-time dream of mine," said Jeff Rubin, founder and CEO of IT'SUGAR, in a statement. "I've been thinking about this concept for over 25 years, and our IT'SUGAR team is thrilled to partner with American Dream to make it a reality."

With the average IT'SUGAR hovering around 1,600 sq. ft., the American Dream store—spanning 22,000 sq. ft. over three floors—is second in size only to the brand's store in Myrtle Beach, S.C.

Obviously, candy is everywhere (there are more than 7,000 sq. ft. of candy bins!), but how it is incorporated into the design

will leave even the most hard-hearted sugar abstainer in awe. Jason Bowser, IT'SUGAR's director of visual merchandising and store design, is a major contributor to the company's creative displays. To transform his whimsical, over-the-top vision into reality, Bowser's team partnered with Los Angeles-based Set + Stage Creative to design some of the most interesting elements of the store.

Before entering, visitors are greeted with a towering, three-story Statue of Liberty hand-covered with more than 1.5 million jelly beans. Inside, one thing that really stands out is the first-floor Lollipop Garden, an experience where customers can meander through thousands of lollipops sprouting from the floor like flowers that can be picked. There also is a rotating seasonal prop as a focal point, like the Christmas tree that was on display during the holidays.

"We kind of used a little inspiration from Willy Wonka and Dr. Seuss," says David McBride, managing director of Set + Stage Creative. "We wanted to create something beautiful and wanted it to be durable to last."

“It took a lot of work displaying the horse and applying jelly beans—probably a good 100 hours just on that one piece.”

— DAVID MCBRIDE, SET + STAGE CREATIVE



Beyond the pick-able lollipops, the garden is home to several candy-covered sculptures, like large mushrooms; a ladybug; candy necklace willow trees; 6-ft.-tall flowers; and a life-sized carousel horse, which is encased in nearly 10,000 jelly beans.

“I was walking through Set + Stage Creative’s warehouse in L.A. at the beginning of 2019 and saw (the carousel horse) up in the rafters,” Bowser recalls. “I knew I needed to have it for one of our stores, and it eventually found a perfect home in American Dream’s Lollipop Garden.”

The carousel horse fits in with the imaginative park-like display. “It took a lot of work displaying the horse and applying jelly beans—probably a good 100 hours just on that one piece,” McBride says. “But when people come in, they instantly start taking pictures and posting to social media. So it was totally worth the work.”

Bowser said that each of the candy-encrusted props were handmade in Los Angeles before

being transported to the store. “In addition to being an immersive, Instagram-ready work of art, the garden also had to work as a fixture that could hold more than 5,000 hand-made lollipops from Romania,” he explains. “It had to be both shoppable and easy to replenish. Set + Stage Creative and I did a lot of trial and error to figure out how exactly it would work and ended up using a combination of drilled holes and clay pots.”

On the second floor, there are branded shops for more than a dozen candy partnerships, including Sour Patch Kids, Nerds, Reese’s and more. “I love



[Top left] Inspired by Willy Wonka and Dr. Seuss, the first floor's Lollipop Garden serves as a main attraction where patrons can meander and choose from more than 5,000 lollipops.

[Top right & middle] The Lollipop Garden is also home to a candy-encrusted carousel horse, which is covered with around 10,000 jellybeans.

[Bottom] There are more than 7,000 sq. ft. of candy bins throughout the IT'SUGAR American Dream flagship.





[Left] The PEZ shop features a giant dispenser that serves as a "PEZ Yourself" photo op.

[Bottom left] More than a dozen branded shops dot the second-floor landscape, like this one from M&M'S.

[Bottom right] Dr. Seuss-like pompoms are nestled among the flowerpots in the Lollipop Garden.



all of our branded partnerships, but one of my favorites is our PEZ shop," Bowser says. "I worked with artist Miriam Brewer out of Chicago to create a one-of-a-kind PEZ-themed mural spanning 18 ft. The section also has a 'PEZ Yourself' photo op, and a PEZ collector's cabinet filled with rare dispensers that, together, are valued at \$50,000!"

The third floor opens Feb. 20, when IT'SUGAR debuts the world's first TWISTid Oreo Café, a themed concept restaurant overlooking the mall atrium with views of the Nickelodeon Universe theme park and eventually a DreamWorks Water Park. d:r

