

Time Out New York

May 6-13, 1999

Must sell TV

Promotion is on the air at NBC's new interactive retail experience

Let's face it. The recently opened NBC Experience is a marketing play—a three-floor, 20,000-square-foot, interactive marketing play. But it's still a lot of fun. Located across 49th Street from the *Today* show's Window on the World, the store feels like a TV lover's playground, with 250 television monitors, a 40-seat HDTV theater and several interactive activities, including the comical Al Roker's Weather Challenge. But this creative retail venture doesn't sell just T-shirts and mugs—it sells television, and it sells the network.

"It's a place to get to know NBC, to get to touch us," says Barry Leffler, NBC's vice president of retail operations and consumer marketing. And touch you can: Surf NBC's websites on three touch-screen computers, pour out a customized mix of M&M's in the Sweet Shop (strategically situated where the NBC tour ends) or pound out the NBC jingle on oversize chimes embedded in the floor. Nearly every attraction—from a Statue of Liberty made of jelly beans to a sports-trivia game featuring a virtual Bob Costas—is meant to engage the visitor.

In order to create an eye-catching and entertaining environment, NBC opted to collaborate with a television

set-design firm instead of with retail designers. Guy Pepper, senior director of NBC News, worked with Production Design Group, a crew that has created backgrounds for MSNBC, *Dateline* and *NBC Nightly News*. "The NBC Experience is a natural offshoot of what we do," says Pepper. "Everybody has a TV—they have an emotional attachment to the network. Now they can come see how it works."

For rare behind-the-scenes glimpses, technophiles can drool outside the glass-enclosed tech room that houses all of the store's digital controls, and aspiring actors can head to the store's blue-screen TV "studios." When plunked down in front of a blue wall at the "Conan O'Brien's Wild Desk Ride," the visitor appears to be sitting next to Conan and conversing with (or yelling at) him as he recklessly drives his desk through the city—mauling a few Rockettes along the



TV LAND Sit down with a virtual Jay Leno, above, or ogle *Star Trek* memorabilia, below, at Experience.

way. There's no charge to participate, but if you want to take your tape home, it'll cost you \$15.

Not into live acting? Shuffle over to the NBC Photo Shoot Digital Photo Booth for a picture of you on the *SNL* set, at Jay Leno's desk or in front of a generic NBC background. Again, the thrill is free, but printouts of the photo cost \$12.95 for a five-by-seven-inch and \$17.95 for an eight-by-ten-inch. And as you wait in line to pay, compare your own snapshot with the pictures of other NBC stars worked into the floor tiles.

Even if you don't fork over any money, the NBC Experience is entertaining simply because it has you enjoying television someplace other than your couch. Through imaginative design, the usually passive idiot box is transformed into a Willy Wonka-esque playground with all the kaleidoscopic trimmings a TV junkie could want—and all the NBC-stamped paraphernalia a TV-junk collector could need.—*Billie Cohen*

The NBC Experience is located at Rockefeller Center Drive and 49th Street, and is open Mon-Sat 7am-9pm and Sun 9am-6pm. For more information, call 664-3700.

