

CASE STUDY



SEGA — TAILS'S POWER SHOP

PROBLEM

BEGINNINGS

What's the old joke? There's always a store at the end? That no theme park ride can end if it doesn't finish with a store for all the kids to scream and cry over while their parents beg for mercy? The Simpsons made that joke in their own theme park ride at Universal Studios, right?

During my time at SEGA of America, I learned that they had been looking for new opportunities to expand the Sonic brand into the theme park realm (as any good brand managers would do, the Blue Blur is a natural fit for a theme park). Some of the executives showed me the concept proposals they'd had done knowing my interest in theme park design and my own background in architecture and graphic arts. But there was one main question nagging me after perusing all of the concepts:

Where was the store?

In the concepts, they had rides left and right: a coaster dedicated to Sonic that would be the pinnacle ride of the area, a climbing wall for Knuckles mimicking his own in-game antics scaling mountains and sheer cliff faces. Even a flying ride where you could catch rings with Sonic. But still: where was the store?

In any well-built theme park there are of course gobs of rides, attractions, shows and immersive experiences that take a visitor and show them the world that their favorite characters exist in. And yes, there are tons and tons of stores. You might say it is gross consumerism and just a way to further line the pockets of the theme park overlords. To an extent, you're right. But I would also ask what happened to your childlike wonder and then hand you a sprinkle-covered doughnut so you can feel like you're 5 again. Because a great store, one that represents the world of the characters and sells more than just basic off the shelves products can be a completely different experience.



GET YOUR WINGS

Now there was no way when I set out to design a store for SEGA to use as a concept that I could create any simple old theme park store. It had to be well-themed to the environment and representative of the world SEGA had built over the years. And it had to do more than just sell items. Would I come up with cool purchaseables for it? Of course! But I knew it could be more. Maybe an event space for happenings at a park. Maybe a character meet and greet area. Maybe it could have iconic props from the games the fans would flock to.

Maybe it was all of the above.

I settled on using Sonic's best friend Tails as the lead role for it. He hadn't been represented in any of the company's existing concepts and would be a requirement in any Sonic park; Tails is Sonic's best friend after all! So I'd theme the store around him and where he might exist in the Sonic world.

Miles "Tails" Prower (Miles Per Hour, hahah) is a two-tailed fox well know for being an ace mechanic and pilot. His plane, the Tornado is a game mainstay. From there, I had my bearings.



The eponymous Tornado.



RESEARCH



A collection of airplane hangars and event spaces, the main look I would develop my store from.

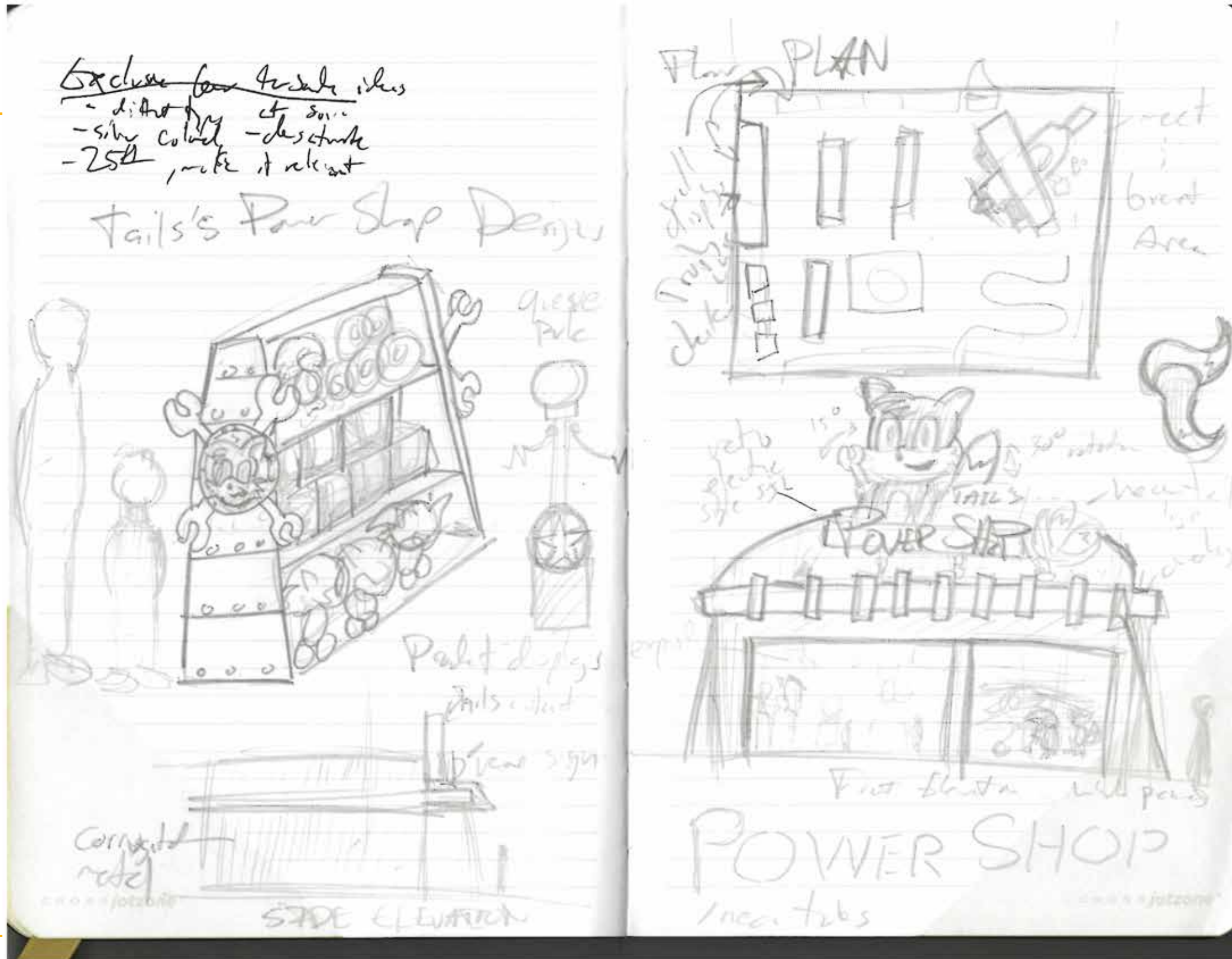
CONCEPTING

TO THE SKETCHBOOK!

So it would be a store designed to look like an airplane hangar that could represent the workshop Tails might work in. But there had to be more to it. A simple airplane hangar wouldn't suffice. Adding in details and further building it out was my next plan. Laying out a floor plan and elevation would help me grasp the flow of the space and designing shelving units would present opportunities for more themeing.

My main idea had centered around placing a full-sized replica of the Tornado in the store. I knew that would echo Tails and his world well. I also concocted the idea you could have Sonic and Tails characters show up and would include a queue space for people to line up to meet them. Suddenly the store was becoming more than just a place for purchases.

The initial concept sketches.



CONCEPTING

[REFINING] THE PLAN

From the initial ideas I had made a solid plan. To go into visualization and mock up some renderings though, I needed to develop it further. What else might Tails have in his shop? Tools? Oh yeah. Trophies from competing in science exhibitions and place races? Without question. How about a big statue to welcome people in for an open house? Why not?

How about for the exterior? A giant Tails cutout that waved to the guests would be fun and signage popped into my mind. Creating a logo reminiscent of neon signage would build into the look I was beginning to establish. I could add painted details on the exterior referencing Tails' birth year and include some of the symbols from the Sonic games as well.

POWER SHOP

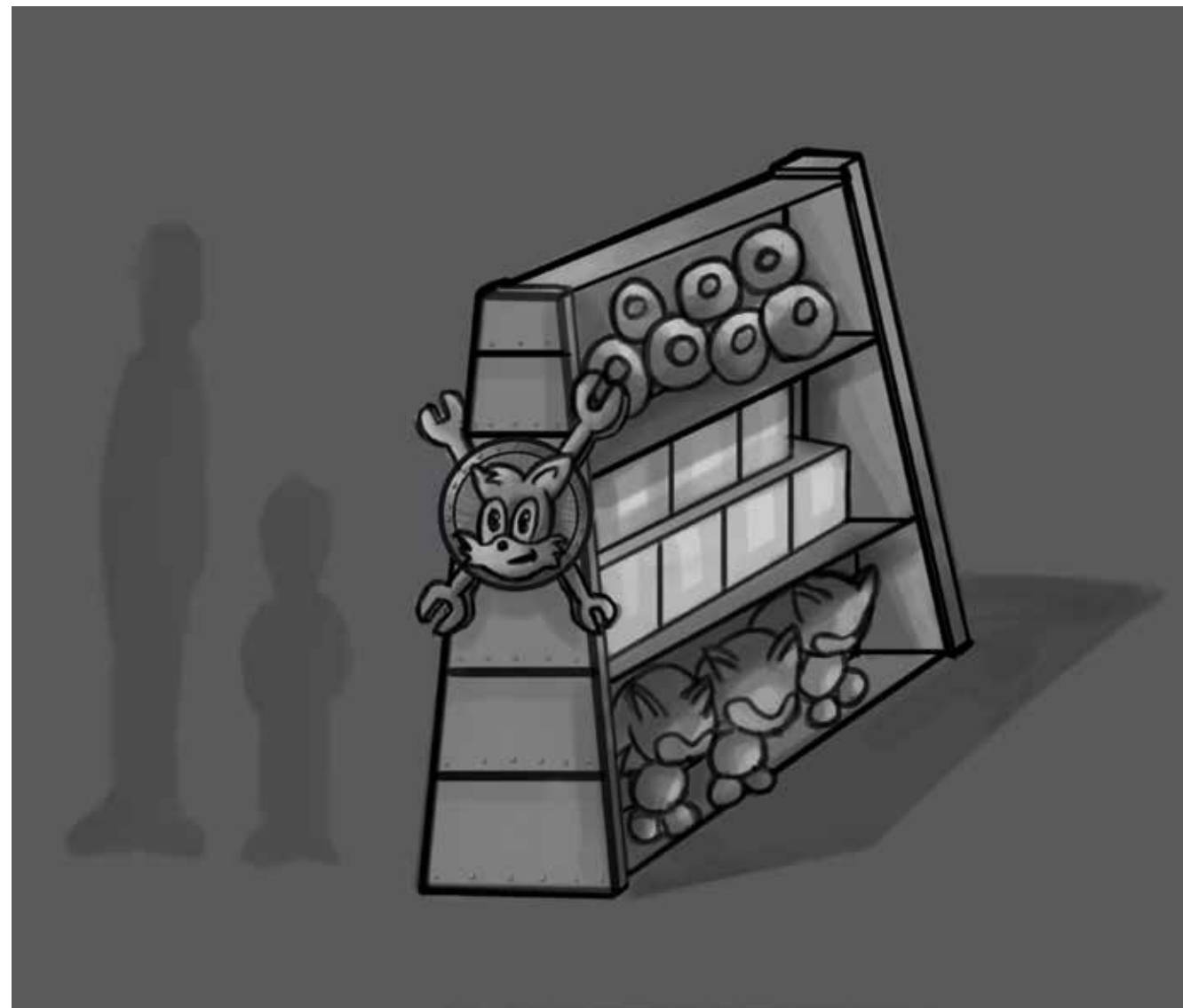
Above: A quick study for the shop's signage.

A DRAWING WE WILL GO

Taking design cues from the Sonic The Hedgehog games, I developed the queue poles to be similar to the midlevel gate poles in the games and the shelf units to be dual-sided with riveted ends to add to the sheet metal vibe of Tails' shop. And what would line the shelves? Rows of Sonic plushes, life-sized rings directly from the games and models of Tails' own Tornado of course!



Above: The gate sign queue pole.
Right: Shelf units lined with goods.

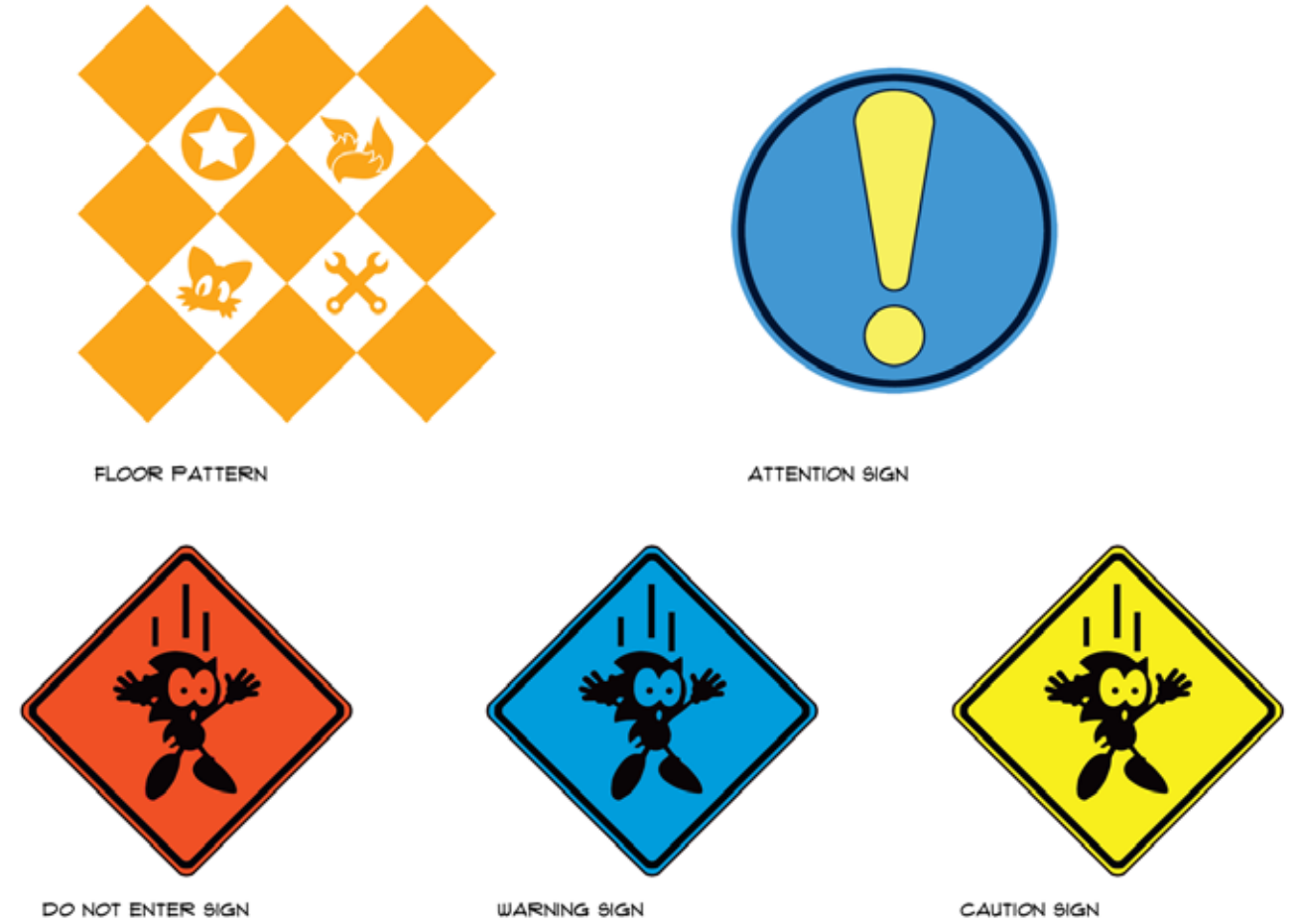


Above: The front elevation of the store.

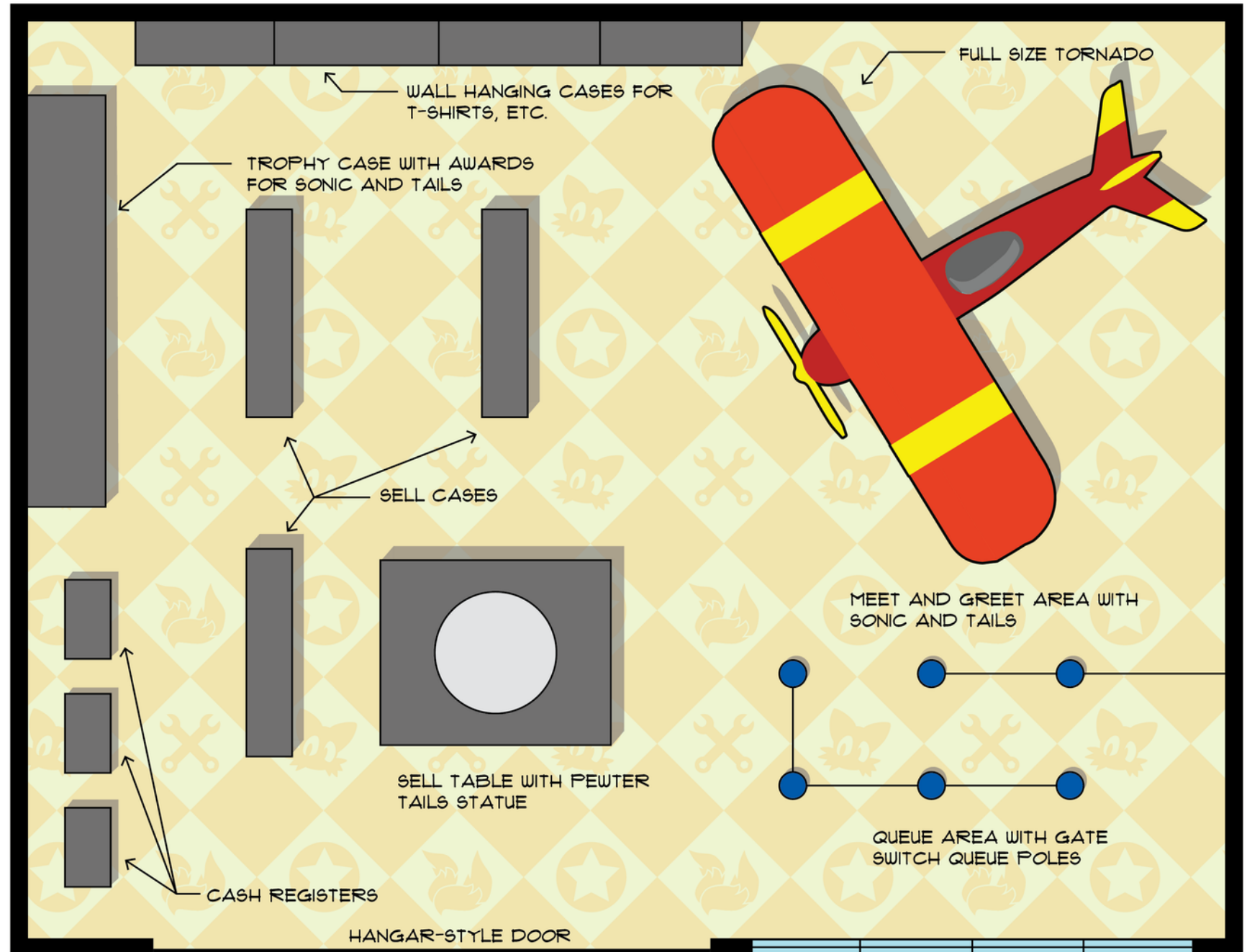
MAKE IT REAL

Adding in some of the icons from the Sonic games was my next thought. A flooring evoking Tails would give visual interest and give me opportunities to work in the classic symbology and create some cool patterning.

Another fun addition would be signage for the shop. Creating Do Not Enter signs for employee areas and caution signs for spills would make for fun usage but also keep it in world for Sonic. An attention sign with the classic Sonic exclamation point would help direct people (to be paired with any needed word signs to describe where the attention should be directed).



Above: A selection of signage details.
Opposite: The floor plan of Tails' Power Shop.



INTO THE REAL WORLD?

So did it get built?

In a word, no. But considering it was a proof of concept and to give SEGA more leverage in their theme park endeavors, it succeeded. Speaking with SEGA's Senior VP and several of the team members, Tails' Power Shop was well-received and used later on as a method to showcase their vision for a theme park when speaking with prospective investors (notice I added the grammatically improper second "s" on the sign, this was on purpose for the casual guest, not everyone is a grammar nerd like me. Forgive me, my English teachers, I promise I know better.)

But was the effort worth it?

On the off chance I might one day see a Sonic theme park get built and have the chance to walk into a Tails themed store? Yeah. For sure. Sometimes your projects are long shots from the get go and the important thing to take away is that your R&D process gets refined and your critical thinking improves. And hey, my coworkers liked it and thought the idea was great.

That's a win in my book. Any day.



Left: The interior mockup.



LET'S FLY THE FRIENDLY SKIES (THANKS FOR READING!)

