

## Lifestyles as Destination: Retail Design Today

Given the increasing competition of today's fashion market, the luxury fashion store has become as important an identity statement for the fashion designer as the collection itself.



by Kenne Shepherd

Leading fashion houses today are racing to create spectacular new stores that offer their customers a 'total lifestyle' experience. Stores that not only showcase the designers' collection, but are an architectural expression of that collection. Given the increasing competition of today's fashion market, the luxury fashion store has become as important an identity statement for the fashion designer as the collection itself. It is an extension of a unified worldwide fashion image, in a world where image is the lifeblood of the industry.

Today's new retail environments are the most powerful display of identity that the fashion retailer has at its disposal. Through the experience it offers its customer, the fashion store breathes life into the designer's work and the lifestyle it defines. It is the retail environment that provides a three-dimensional backdrop and enclosure for the merchandise while creating opportunities for exciting visuals and dramatic vistas that draw the customer through the store arousing curiosity, interest and excitement with the ultimate goal that the customer "buys in" to the designer's lifestyle.



Fashion is about change, yet staying true to the brand image. The genius of designers like Calvin Klein, Prada, and Gucci is their ability to remain true to their vision while interpreting it in new and modern ways that define not just today's lifestyle, but tomorrow's lifestyle as well. Established fashion houses

know the value of creating a seamless image as a means of distinguishing themselves in a fiercely competitive and overpopulated market. A fashion retailer must integrate every aspect of their business -- including their use of graphics, advertising, visual merchandising and store design -- as a direct expression of their unique design aesthetic.



The challenge of today's retail architect is to create a 'total lifestyle' store for his or her client that is an extension of their image. A retail environment that must seamlessly integrate the aesthetic of the fashion house within the three-dimensional experience of the store, yet remain flexible enough to respond to the changing styles, trends, display and selling strategies that emerge on almost a daily basis.

As with the cathedrals of old, an experienced retail architect uses concepts of spatial flow, color, materials, lighting and design to create a singular environment that speaks to one image and one ideal. Successful retail design results in an environment in which every element of the store reflects, reinforces and expands the fashion designer's aesthetic and is a statement about whom he or she is in relationship to the public. Staying contemporary in today's rapidly changing popular retail culture, means constantly reinventing oneself to be relevant and desirable to the newest target consumer. Change is about the shock of the new -- the bold move -- yet staying close to your roots, on the runway and in the store. In addition to responding to shifts in style, retail destinations must respond to shifts in selling strategies and demographics.

As the boundaries between today's fashion statements and popular culture become increasingly blurred, a symbiotic relationship between the two in which fashion informs culture and culture informs fashion will continue to spiral to new heights. The phenomenon of stores as 'lifestyle' destinations will only become more widespread as designers strive to continuously stay ahead of the curve and define the future for all of us to experience.

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INTERIOR DESIGN	ARCHITECTURE

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