New Retail

Raul A. Barreneche

PHAIDON

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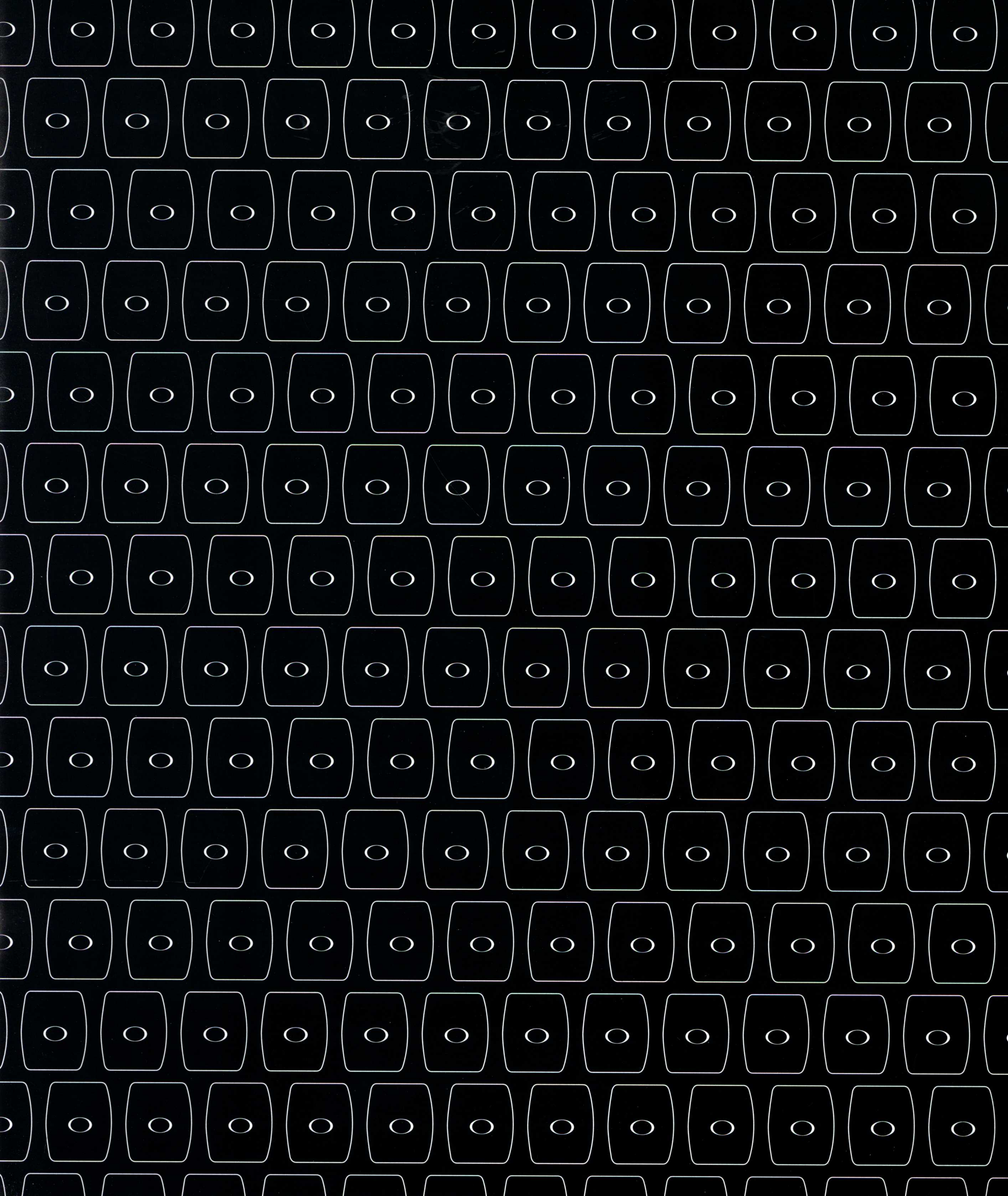


Introduction:

Shopping by Design

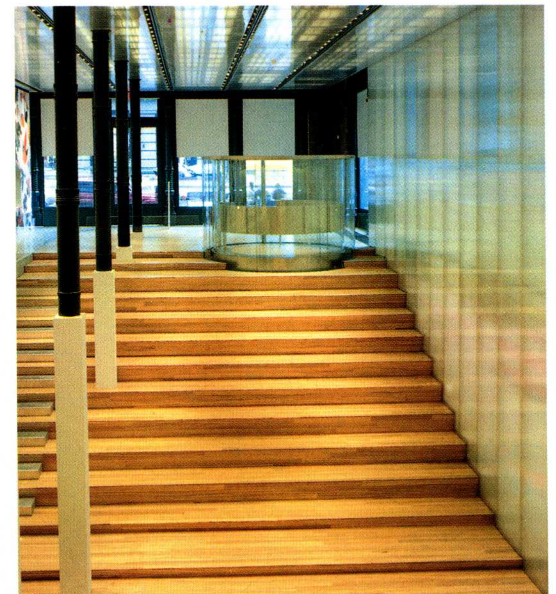
In his *Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping*, compiled as part of an ongoing research project with several of his students, Rem Koolhaas posits that retail is the single most influential force on the shape of the modern city. The *New Yorker* architecture critic Paul Goldberger noted in his critique of Koolhaas's trendsetting SoHo Prada store (below and following page) that Koolhaas's "screed" goes so far as to suggest that "shopping is arguably the last remaining form of public activity. Through a battery of increasingly predatory forms, shopping has infiltrated, colonized, and even replaced, almost every aspect of urban life." Sze Tsung Leong, one of the *Guide to Shopping*'s collaborating editors, notes that: "Not only is shopping melting into everything, but everything is melting into shopping."

For Koolhaas and his colleagues, retail spaces—even more than the office, the gym, the urban park, the theater, the airport, the train station, the stadium, and other places of public interaction—define the atmosphere of a city. And in many suburban contexts, the local shopping mall represents the only significant public space. There is no main street, no Central Park, no agora. The community comes together around shoe stores, jewelry kiosks, and food courts. In the world's livelier urban centers, however, retail stores constitute just one of a great number of settings for civic interaction.

Surely, however, retailers' newfound interest in commissioning major architects to design their stores has little to do with the academic studies of Koolhaas and his students. Rather, it is part of a growing awareness of good design's power to boost the prestige, marketability, and sales of products—whether clothes, teapots and toasters,

Prada Epicenter, Rem Koolhaas / OMA, New York, 2001
Koolhaas mixed commerce and culture with a performance stage that folds down from a curving wood ramp in the center of the store.

Prada Epicenter, Rem Koolhaas / OMA, New York, 2001
Stepped wooden platforms opposite the Prada SoHo stage do double-duty as bleacher seating and display areas for shoes.



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or apartments. It is a trend that began when museums around the globe, inspired by the success of the Frank Gehry–designed Guggenheim Bilbao, began hiring famous architects to design expansions and new buildings. Once they noticed how an architectural landmark could propel an institution and revitalize a city (the "Bilbao effect"), trustees realized the increased marketability to donors and visitors of a building designed by a name-brand architect.

At the same time, mass-market retailers like Target and IKEA realized good design was one of their biggest assets. The global giant IKEA had always valued affordable design, while the American chain Target decided to boost its brand by hiring Michael Graves and Philippe Starck, known for their architecture and interiors, and fashion designers Todd Oldham and Cynthia Rowley to design housewares and clothing. Combined with trendy advertising campaigns, Target's design-intensive strategy was a success. Now the real estate industry is following the trend. Starck has a global chain of residences called Yoo under construction in major cities around the world. In New York, Richard Meier and Charles Gwathmey are the latest architectural luminaries to become central to the marketing strategies of the apartment towers they are designing.

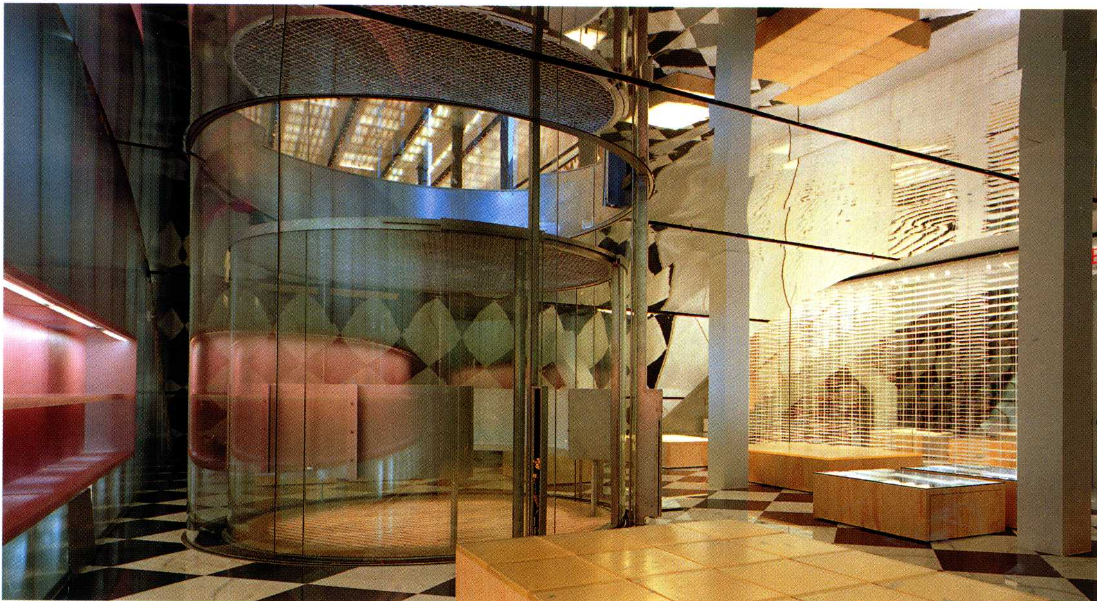
It is no surprise, then, that the image-conscious fashion industry would appropriate the strategy. By nature, the business has always been about design—what's changed is architecture's role in reflecting and helping build the identity of a label. It makes sense from a business standpoint as well as from a cultural one. Unprecedented media coverage of architectural projects, especially the well-documented rebuilding of the World Trade Center site in New York, and a widespread obsession with design and home improvement television, reveal how popularized design has become. To tap into this new interest, retailers know they must work architecture into the mix.

Fashionable Collaborations

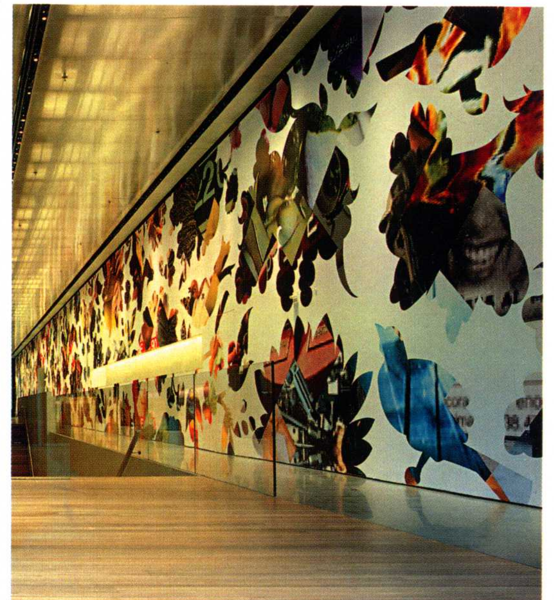
The collaborations springing up between fashion designers and architects often bring together two interesting artistic visions such as Frank Gehry and Issey Miyake joining forces to design the avant-garde Japanese designer's New York flagship (page 36) or the irreverent Miuccia Prada calling on Koolhaas to develop a series of Prada flagships across the world. It wasn't so long ago that stores were the province of specialized retail designers under the watch of an owner or in-house designer. Most stores were treated as stage sets purposely cut off from the outside world to focus shoppers' attentions on the merchandise. Architecture, at least the kind practiced by Gehry, Norman Foster, and Herzog & de Meuron, had no place in the building of a fashion boutique, much less that of a supermarket.

That's not to say the retail world was devoid of memorable contributions by architects. In the 1970s, the avant-garde architects James Wines and Allison Sky of SITE and Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown created unforgettable showrooms for the BEST Products Company that bordered on giant sculptural installations. SITE's iconoclastic designs included "indeterminate" walls and facades that looked ripped and pulled apart (opposite). Venturi and Scott Brown's BEST Catalog Showroom was wallpapered in supergraphic floral patterns (opposite), while its Basco store featured thirty-four-foot-tall (10-meter-tall) letters that spelled out the company's name logo in front of a boxy, windowless building (following pages). In the 1980s, Michael

Prada Epicenter, Rem Koolhaas / OMA, New York, 2001
A cylindrical glass elevator links the street-level entry with the basement-level women's department.



Prada Epicenter, Rem Koolhaas / OMA, New York, 2001
A wall with changing custom wallpaper designs, conceived of as an art installation, runs along the center of Prada SoHo.



Graves captured the style of the moment in a postmodern showroom for fashion icon Diane von Furstenberg. The store, in the base of New York's historic Sherry-Netherland Hotel on Fifth Avenue, was later taken over by and remodeled by Geoffrey Beene. In an era when stand-alone stores were less common than in-house boutiques in big department stores, these freestanding showpieces stood out from the retail landscape. Unfortunately, neither SITE nor Venturi, Scott Brown's creations stood the test of time, as neither exists today.

In those days, certain architects did not often deign to design fashion boutiques when they could make museums, skyscrapers, or university buildings. It is difficult to imagine I.M. Pei designing a store for Halston or Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers, fresh from unveiling the Pompidou Centre in Paris, creating a showroom for Valentino. The inverse was also true. The mainstream designers did not conceive of asking the architects behind the high-profile buildings of the day to give shape to their stores. (The SITE and Venturi–Scott Brown collaborations for BEST and Basco were anomalies. And while the projects were notable works of architecture in their day, the clients behind them were not the most well-known retailers, and the architects, though influential, were not yet renowned.) The recent pairing of big-name fashion houses and big-name architects reveals how much the cultural climate has changed.

One of the first designers to give momentum to hiring significant architects was Calvin Klein, who tapped the British architect John Pawson to shape his Madison Avenue flagship in the 1990s (following pages). Combining Pawson's minimal sensibility and Klein's pared-down, modern tailoring was an ideal match. The ethereal store, which opened in 1996, was completely white from top to bottom. Pawson went against the age-old retail strategy of putting products front and center in eye-catching racks and display cases. Instead, he tucked clothes off to the sides and made displays as invisible as possible. What stood out was empty space, not merchandise. It was a radical proposition, but as with Klein's provocative strategies of the past—risqué ads for jeans in the 1980s starring Brooke Shields and a later campaign inspired by low-budget "kiddie porn"—it paid off. The Madison Avenue store was a hit with the fashion crowd.

The store started a trend toward striking, minimalist interiors that surrounded clothes with tantalizing emptiness—the architectural equivalent of white space on the printed page. The German designer Jil Sander hired New York architect Michael Gabellini to design her flagship stores in Paris, Milan, and London and her Hamburg headquarters, a luminous renovation of a nineteenth-century villa. Like Klein and Pawson, Sander and Gabellini shared sympathetic artistic sensibilities. The Hamburg-born Sander is known for sumptuous clothes with clean, minimalist lines and classic tailoring, and Gabellini's architecture possesses a similarly understated touch. The fruitful pairing resulted in more than eighty Jil Sander locations designed by Gabellini over a decade.

Meanwhile, the art world was also gravitating toward minimalist galleries, designed by architects such as Richard Gluckman, Frederick Fisher, and Annabelle Selldorf. The links between fashion and art deepened. Gluckman, an artworld favorite who gave shape to several of New York's top contemporary galleries made the leap to fashion. He

Indeterminate Facade Showroom, SITE, Houston, 1975
James Wines' design for a BEST Products Showroom blurred the lines between architecture and landscape art.

BEST Catalog Showroom, VSBA, Langhorne, 1978
Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown dressed up an otherwise banal box with their signature oversized graphics in a design for a BEST Products Catalog Showroom in Pennsylvania.

designed a Helmut Lang store in New York's SoHo and a parfumerie across the street that featured installations by artist Jenny Holzer. Gluckman went on to design another Helmut Lang location, in Tokyo, and, perhaps surprisingly, stores for the neo-baroque designer Gianni Versace in New York and Miami Beach, though none of these were built.

Global Trends, Local Style

Like Helmut Lang and Jil Sander, most successful fashion labels have stores around the world. These global operations raise the question of how stores in radically different contexts should be designed. If the merchandise sold in Milan is the same as it is in Tokyo, should the stores look the same? Would Japanese consumers want their branch of a Parisian couturier to be tailored to the Japanese market or do they insist on a bit of Avenue Montaigne in the middle of Ginza? Retail, in general, and fashion in particular, is an increasingly global operation, but the answer as to whether homogeneity or diversity is the better design strategy depends on the brand and the market. While some companies seek a standardized look to make all their branches easily recognizable as part of the same global brand, others tailor their store designs to the local market. Most companies settle for a mix of the two strategies, something between an off-the-shelf assembly-line output and an idiosyncratic one-off boutique.

The Dior store in Tokyo's Omotesando (opposite) combines elements of Dior's history and French style with a nod to the boutique's immediate surroundings, as well as the aesthetic sensibility of the label's current head designer, Hedi Slimane. The design is the work of several talents: The glowing glass exterior, reminiscent of layers of pleated translucent fabric, is the work of architects Kazuyo Sejima and Ruye Nishizawa of SANAA; most of the interiors are by Architecture & Associés and Dior's Paris-based in-house designers; and the Dior Homme area was conceived by Slimane himself. In general, the store combines high-tech Tokyo flash with soigné elements of Parisian classicism. In one telling moment that captures this cultural cross-pollination, pale gray walls with classical moldings that look ripped from a Parisian *hôtel particulier* surround mirrored display cases with the bright, flashy feeling of modern-day Tokyo. The rest of the interiors speak to Dior's fashion sense and Slimane's aesthetic inclinations: bold black acrylic and backlit translucent shelving and pivoting screen walls with video projections.

The stores designed by the modernist Isay Weinfeld in São Paulo (page 92) are a compelling mix of global fashion and design trends with Brazilian sensibilities of craft, materials, and lifestyle. Weinfeld's Forum store, commissioned by the fashion designer Tufi Duek, takes as its aesthetic mandate an interpretation of some of the inherently Brazilian themes that inspire Duek's clothing: the beaches of Rio de Janeiro, bossa nova, tropical fruit, and Cinema Novo. Neither Duek's clothes nor Weinfeld's interiors make a Carmen Miranda mockery of these ideas. On the contrary, Weinfeld's architecture is a neutral but rich backdrop to Duek's fashionable creations. The clothes do not play a secondary role, but Weinfeld keeps them off to the sides in display racks built into the walls, allowing empty white space to flow uninterrupted throughout the interior. Instead of clothing displays, seating areas with handwoven rag rugs from northern Brazil and classic midcentury modernist chairs by Brazilian designers dominate the sales areas. At the center of the store is a surprisingly tall atrium with a

Basco Showroom, VSBA, Philadelphia, 1976
Venturi and Scott Brown animated the 1,100-foot-long (335-meter-long) blank box of a Basco Showroom in Philadelphia with 34-foot-tall (10-meter-tall) letters spelling out the company's name.

Basco Showroom, VSBA, Philadelphia, 1976
Venturi and Scott Brown's Basco Showroom functions just as much if not more as a large-scale sculptural installation than a work of architecture.

Calvin Klein Flagship, John Pawson, New York, 1996
Pawson's striking white interiors and subtle displays made architectural minimalism in vogue for well-known fashion labels.

dramatic staircase covered in red glass tiles and a richly textured wall of *taipa*, the same indigenous material used to craft homes in the northeastern part of the country. Weinfeld's is a strikingly different kind of modernism compared with, say, John Pawson's utterly neutral, monastic style. Even if shoppers do not understand the architectural references to Brazilian building traditions, they can appreciate the breaks of color and texture that keep Duek's store from feeling like just another whitewashed shop interior. Forum makes for a globally fashionable and locally resonant shopping experience.

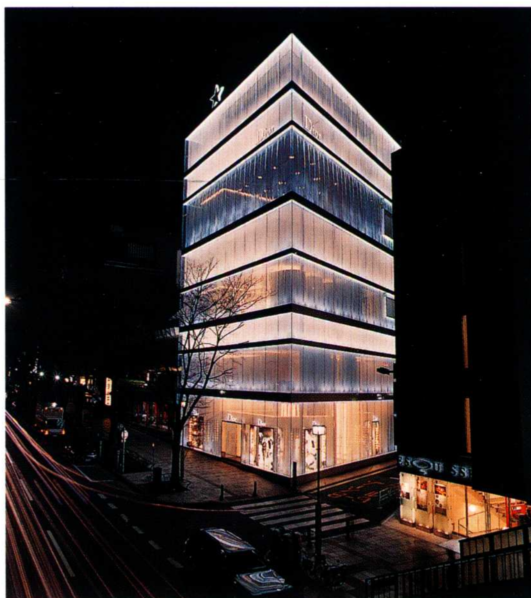
Weinfeld's design for Clube Chocolate, a "lifestyle boutique" just down the street from Forum, takes a more literal approach to bringing a bit of Rio de Janeiro to the crowded streets of São Paulo. The architect inserted an actual beach into a soaring skylit atrium that extends the full height of the store, with towering palm trees set into a sandy base at the lowest level. It's an obvious solution, to be sure, but it works. The beach is a central part of the cultural and day-to-day life of Rio, where Clube Chocolate originated. The palm trees and sand aren't empty signifiers of the Carioca lifestyle; the interior beach creates a focus for the café Weinfeld included on the ground floor of the shop and gives shoppers a break from the relentless urban congestion of São Paulo.

Clube Chocolate makes for an interesting comparison with Brazilian designer Carlos Miele's New York store, designed by the technologically minded architecture firm Asymptote (page 128). Asymptote partners Hani Rashid and Lise-Anne Couture went for whitewashed geometric abstraction of the things that inspire Miele, including the sensuous curves of the human body and the Brazilian landscape. The fact that the lustrous, curving display units that give the store its look were designed and fabricated with the computer relates to Miele's use of computer-aided cutting machines to create some of his complex clothing designs. However, this reference may be lost on shoppers who likely see it as another white-on-white boutique in a city full of such interiors. If revealing something of his Brazilian roots was really Miele's intent, then a design like Weinfeld's Forum would have made for a more legible abstraction of Brazilian influences. While Asymptote's subtle nod to Miele's influences creates an elegant background for his colorful creations, it falls short of providing instant brand-name recognition.

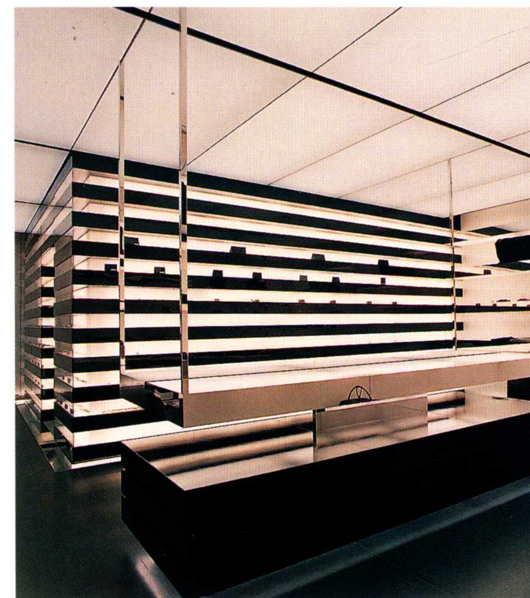
Prada's strategy of the "epicenter" goes against existing trends and sets a new standard for what makes recognizable flagships. Before Miuccia Prada and her husband and company CEO Patrizio Bertelli undertook the epicenter project, the look of Prada stores worldwide was defined by a single color: a minty green that covered the walls of shops from Milan to Miami, including boutiques within big department stores. There was no architecture to speak of in these stores, just painted surfaces in the peculiar shade that became recognizable to fashion insiders as "Prada green." In a sense, the strategy was an efficient one, with minimal investment in the build-out of stores but a high international recognition factor.

Prada and Bertelli's commissioning of Rem Koolhaas's Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) to develop signature flagships in select cities was a radical departure from Prada's previous, almost nonexistent, architectural

Dior, SANAA (exterior) / Architecture & Associés with Hedi Slimane (interiors), Tokyo, 2004
Kazuyo Sejima and Ruye Nishizawa of SANAA designed the glass exterior of the Dior store in Tokyo's Omotesando to simulate layers of translucent fabric.



Dior, SANAA (exterior) / Architecture & Associés with Hedi Slimane (interiors), Tokyo, 2004
Dior's head designer, Hedi Slimane, created black acrylic and backlit translucent shelving in the Dior Homme section.



Dior, SANAA (exterior) / Architecture & Associés with Hedi Slimane (interiors), Tokyo, 2004
The store's interiors combine high-tech Tokyo flash with elements of Parisian classicism.

direction. The company decided that difference among the epicenters would be their defining characteristic; innovations in building materials, technology, and display techniques would be their stock-in-trade. OMA developed general ideas about the role of these flagships and designed three locations: one in New York, which opened in 2001 (pages 7–8); one in Beverly Hills, which was unveiled in 2004 (page 156); and one in San Francisco, which at the time of this writing is on hold. Herzog & de Meuron received the commission for the Tokyo epicenter (page 16).

Since the distinguishing point of the flagships was not architecture per se but, rather, innovation and experimentation, OMA and Herzog & de Meuron reconsidered every element of the shopping experience. Some of the experiments were simply formal variations on standard store elements. Koolhaas offered hanging cages of clothes, racks that could be rolled along on tracks like the movable shelves of libraries, and glass dressing-room doors that turned from transparent to opaque with the flip of a switch. Herzog & de Meuron created cast-fiberglass counters and fur-covered hanging racks. Other elements were more innovative, including the snorkel-shaped "sound showers" of the Tokyo store and a digital information system that let shoppers call up product information and images from a database while browsing through merchandise.

Commerce and Culture

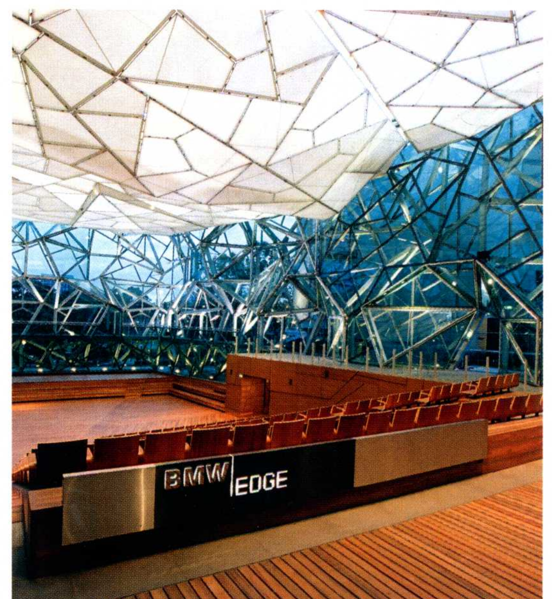
One of the more provocative propositions of the first Prada epicenter, in New York, was not about materials or technology but about Koolhaas's introduction of cultural programming into a commercial setting. The concept is visible as soon as you enter the store: Koolhaas carved out a giant swath of prime real estate to create a curving, wavelike wooden grandstand and a foldout stage where intimate concerts and lectures could be held. The merchandise became secondary to this huge void in the center of the store. So far, the move remains more a grand subversive statement by Koolhaas than a functional venue, since regular cultural programming has yet to happen. "Meet me for a show at Prada" hasn't become a rallying cry of New York's stylish set. The retail spaces have been relegated to the back of the store and the basement. In that sense, Koolhaas's statement is a real jab at commerce, even though it is the raison d'être of his commission.

But Koolhaas's observations about the intermingling of commerce and culture have taken root in other projects. Federation Square, an eye-popping (and many claim stomach-turning) development in the center of Melbourne, Australia (below), is truly a mixed-use project. Offices, shops, restaurants, and an outdoor market commingle with a branch of the state museum of Victoria. Renzo Piano's Maison Hermés in Tokyo (page 166) includes a two-level gallery on its top floors where artists such as Hiroshi Sugimoto mount impeccable installations of their work. Herzog & de Meuron's Five Courtyards project (page 136), a shopping center in central Munich, deftly weaves together historic buildings and new architecture and contains a *Kunsthaus* among its clothing stores and cafés. Diener & Diener's Migros supermarket in Lucerne, Switzerland mixes commerce and education by combining a shopping center with an adult school run by the Migros chain in the same building. In fact, students on their way to

Federation Square, Lab architecture studio, Melbourne, 2004
Lab architecture studio's Federation Square project in Australia combines culture and commerce on the banks of the Yarra River.

Federation Square, Lab architecture studio, Melbourne, 2004
Lab's eye-catching design sets the backdrop for a public plaza where concerts and festivals are held.

Federation Square, Lab architecture studio, Melbourne, 2004
In addition to shops, restaurants and a branch of the National Gallery of Victoria, the complex includes an indoor amphitheater for theater productions, musical performances, and lectures.



class can gaze down at the product-packed aisles that help support their education through corridors bound with walls of glass.

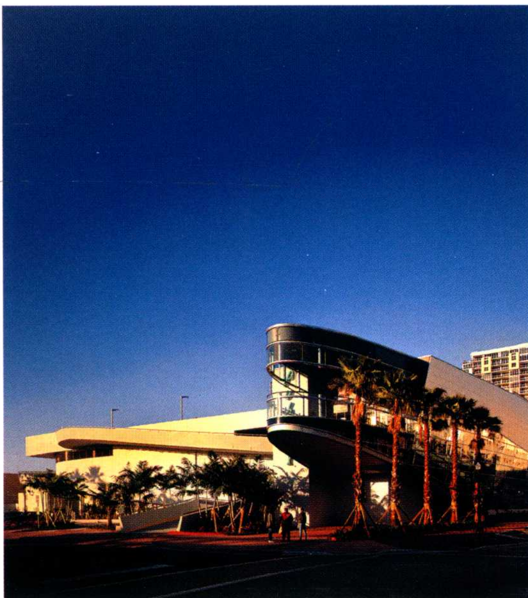
These projects reveal a synergistic relationship between shopping and other cultural activities. At the New York Prada store, Koolhaas attempted to overthrow commerce with culture; whereas these other projects take a complimentary stance which still supports Koolhaas's belief in shopping's cultural importance in the modern city.

Beyond Fashion

The involvement of well-known "starchitects" isn't limited to the upper echelons of fashion. Several years ago, the architect Carlos Zapata designed a striking outpost of the Florida supermarket chain Publix, in Miami Beach, with a sweeping metallic-and-glass facade (below). Zapata made shoppers part of the architecture by putting the automated ramps that transported them from the rooftop parking lot to the store, carts in hand, behind glass ribbons cut into the facade. Local residents took to referring to the eye-catching store as their "own little Guggenheim Bilbao." Dominique Perrault, an architect best known for the luminous glass boxes of the Bibliotèque nationale de France in Paris, also took a step back from such *grands projets* to design a series of supermarkets for the Austrian grocery chain MPreis (page 120). Zapata's mini-Guggenheim of a supermarket remains a one-off for Publix, but Perrault's designs are among several that MPreis commissioned from well-known and up-and-coming architects located in the Tirol region. The point of thinking outside the box and letting designers reimagine the standard supermarket as an eye-popping work of architecture is to add cachet and value to the brand by adding a sense of style to its buildings. Given the choice between buying groceries in a windowless box or a sun-filled loft with floor-to-ceiling windows and a view of the Alps, shoppers would head straight for MPreis. Architecture is a draw and a boon to the company's bottom line.

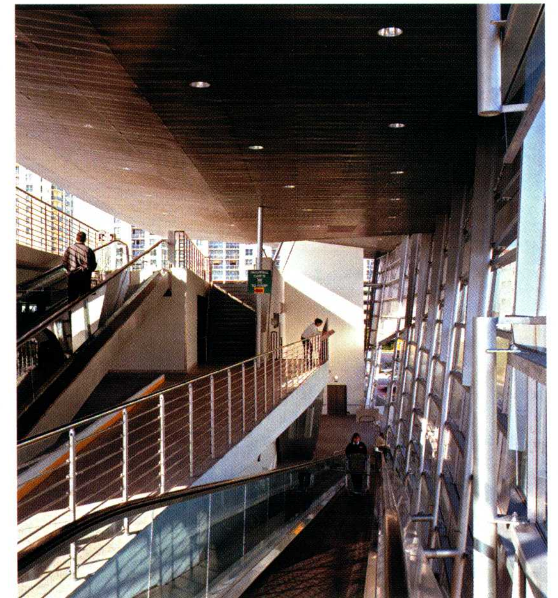
The trend of hiring established architects to reshape overlooked retail environments extends beyond bland, big-box stores. The intention may be to create shops with the right look and level of sophistication for a product that itself embraces design. Such was the case when l.a. Eyeworks, a trendy, fashion-forward eyewear company, wanted an appropriately hip flagship store in Los Angeles for its line of glasses and sunglasses (page 114). They hired Neil Denari, an avant-garde architect and theorist who had recently headed the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-Arc), to turn an old storage building on Beverly Boulevard into a cool composition of folded ceiling planes, angular display cases, and rollaway stainless-steel furniture. It's hard to surmise a default architectural style for a brand whose products are small bits of plastic, glass, and metal and whose ad campaigns feature the faces of pop iconoclasts like RuPaul and Boy George. Denari created an interior that doesn't have a direct correlation to the look of l.a. Eyeworks' products yet vaguely evokes the company's adventurous design sensibility and irreverent personality. Denari's design has muscle, with sweeping surfaces and unorthodox LED signs on its facade that make it clear there's a serious architect involved. For all its bold moves, however, l.a. Eyeworks' merchandise is still the main attraction. Long, mirrored display cases set into pale blue walls show off the eyeglasses in a flattering setting. Denari's architecture is not neutral, but it lets the glasses visually

Publix by the Bay, Wood + Zapata, Miami, 1999
The angular exterior of Carlos Zapata's design for a Publix supermarket in Miami Beach broke all conventions of supermarket design.



Publix by the Bay, Wood + Zapata, Miami, 1999
Zapata's design saved space on the ground by placing the parking area atop the supermarket structure.

Publix by the Bay, Wood + Zapata, Miami, 1999
Shoppers descend from the rooftop parking, carts in hand, along a motorized ramp behind the market's canted glass facade, making their movements part of the architecture.



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