

# ACID FLASHBACK

Reebok's recent pop-up store on the Bowery paid homage to the 1980s, and the vivid oversaturation and coked-up clash of its halcyon decade.

Words [Shonquis Moreno](#)  
Photos [Jordan Kleinman](#)

**01** A large neon Union Jack refers to Reebok's British origins and to its traditional brand image.

**02** Some of the graphics wrapping the interior were suggested by the soles and exteriors of these shoes, including honeycombs and chevrons.

**03** Purple rain meets Miami Vice in the colour palette of vivid shades of yellow, green, pink and blue, glaringly contrasted with black and white.

It was on the threshold that sportswear giant Reebok's recent pop-up shop confounded the visitor's sense of depth and perspective. Shoppers walked out of three dimensions on the Manhattan kerb and stepped into two. Sort of. A thrilling distortion of surface and space took its cues from a camouflaging technique used on First World War 'dazzle' ships and both clarified and confused every line in the brand's first pop-up for four weeks last winter. Reebok Flash, as it was aptly dubbed, opened in a 280 m<sup>2</sup> former gallery on the Bowery, amid the city's wholesale lighting and restaurant supply district, and the channels and saucers with which any other shop would have found it difficult to compete.

Although Formavision designed the concept store via an amalgam of three visual concepts, the interior actually seemed a fitting partner to, albeit less overdesigned than, the footwear. Flash featured flashy limited-edition sneakers and clothing designed in collaboration with artists Rolland Berry and John Maeda, trainers sporting swatches 'sampled' from Jean-Michel Basquiat paintings and relaunches of several of Reebok's top-selling sneaker lines from the 1980s, including Pump and the legendary Freestyle series. Some of the graphics wrapping the interior were suggested by the soles and exteriors of these shoes, including honeycombs and chevrons. They were also influenced by the vivid over-

from the enemy. 'The prints from that period were absolutely amazing,' says Formavision founder and creative director Sebastien Agneessens, 'in particular the work of Edward Wadsworth. Hence the idea to pay tribute to his work by transforming our space into something between a living print and a store.' The result is exuberantly coherent while also being deliciously disjunctive.

This project marks the studio's shift from curation to creation by firmly declaring itself as an original design. Since 2003, Agneessens' New York-based Formavision has created and curated branded environments to inject culture into labels like Diesel, Lexus, Sharp Aquos and Marithé et François Girbaud. 'Creative collaboration with artists and designers is the essence of my practice,' explains Agneessens who has a marketing degree in fashion/design and once served as a store planning director for Chanel cosmetics. He recruited Jonas Hjertberg to generate Flash's graphics and Jeroen de Schrijver to create the fixtures. De Schrijver's furniture included white garment racks, low display tables flanked with a lonely mirrored panel or a cushion embedded flush in the tabletop, and a full-length looking glass that folded along a hinged seam, recalling (while thoroughly updating) the old chevalier mirror from the traditional tailor's toolkit. It's rare to see these sharp angles in shops today (especially in the

riff on bluntness versus dimension that gave the space its riveting athleticism.

For Agneessens, Reebok is very much a symbol of the 1980s. 'I still remember buying my bright yellow and blue Pump sneakers after Michael Chang beat Ivan Lendl at the French Open in the late '80s,' he says. 'I can also still picture the T-shirts; the brighter the colours, the better! If you look at the posters of Miami Vice and Purple Rain, you'll see vivid yellows with purple, or fluorescent pink with lime green. This is the essence of the pop 1980s' culture.' A culture that was created at a time when Reebok helped define style, particularly in women's fitness apparel. It was this period that guided the team's selection of colour scheme, including the brand's signature blue and silver.

Formavision received the space with black floor and white walls. In order to visually extend parts of the walls onto the floor and vice versa, they painted sections of each the same colour, interrupting the ordinary visual cues that separate floor from wall. In spots, they repeated this vertically by extending a pattern over the corner where two walls meet and placing it beside a neutral colour. The effect was to flatten the corner slightly. In places, they juxtaposed two shades of the same colour in order to create the illusion of a shadow. A dark blue corner at the back provided a vanishing point for the interior as a whole, while graphical patterns were applied, like stickers, directly to walls, floor and fixtures with directionality, as if they had been projected from a single source.

But why doesn't this brazen display environment distract from the products? Some of the shoes already resemble dazzle ships, themselves—in this sense merchandise and display fit hand-in-glove (or foot-in-shoe?). Agneessens admits that, had it been a permanent store, the team would have approached it differently, using more benign colours and shapes, finer finishes and lighting. But, instead, this was a temporary installation intended to serve, precisely, as an extension of both shoes and brand. The purpose was to generate traffic, to garner attention and to reposition Reebok on the creative scene, as much as to showcase its new collections. 'When we chose the location on the Bowery, bordering Chinatown, we realized that the store would be located in the middle of the kitchen supply and wholesale light district,' explains Agneessens. 'We chose to be pop and loud and this is why we called it Flash. To make it work, the space had to make a statement with no compromises.' /

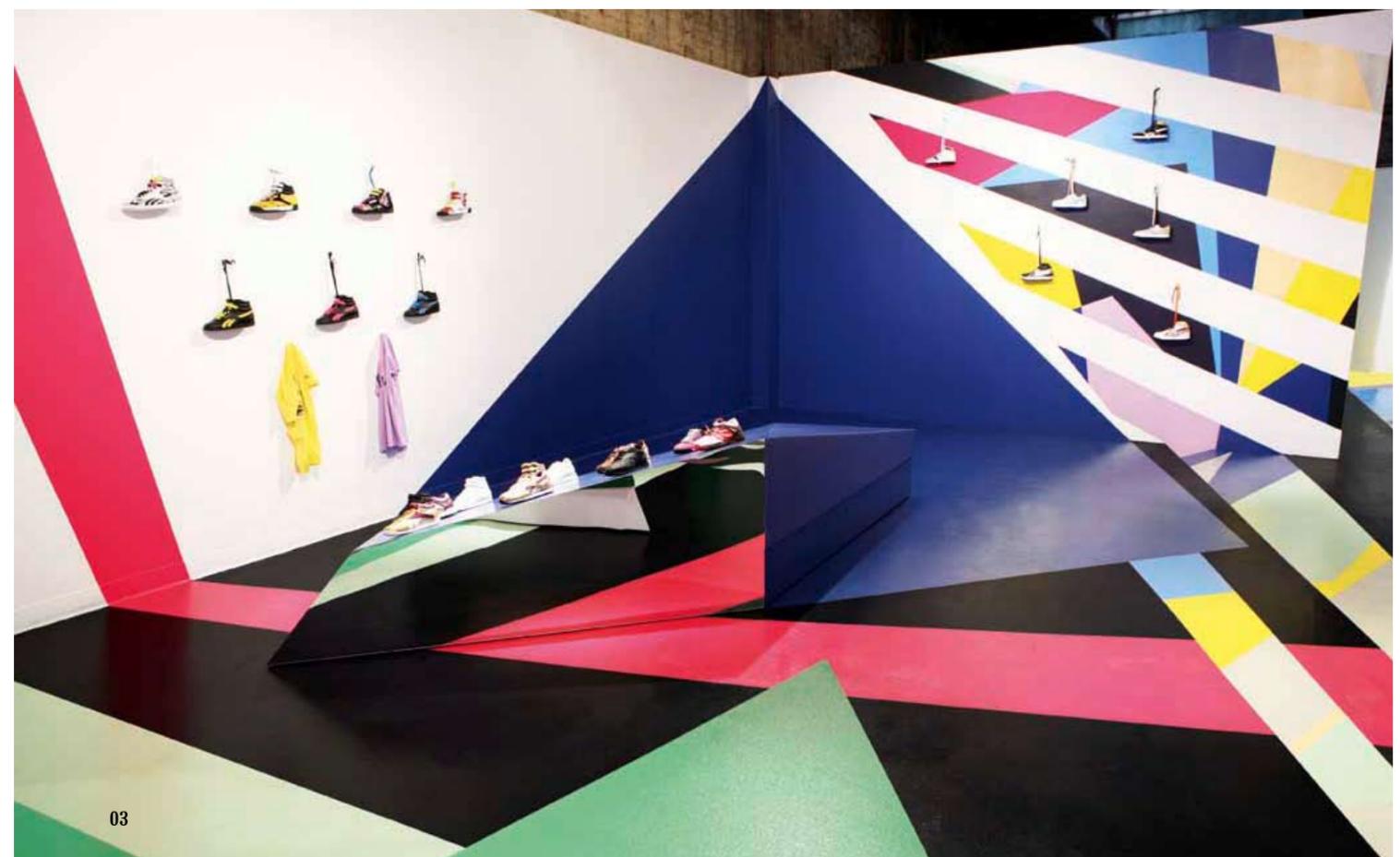
## MERCHANDISE AND DISPLAY FIT HAND-IN-GLOVE (OR FOOT-IN-SHOE)

saturation and coked-up clash of Reebok's halcyon decade, the 1980s (looking to icons ranging from Purple Rain and Miami Vice to Flash Dance and Michael Jackson's Thriller video, a mix of primary colours with brash geometric tattoos, simple checkers and Op Art combos), as well as Vorticism, an English arts movement from the early 20th century noted for its kinetic associations with Cubism and Futurism and the source for dazzle warship graphics. These patterns, developed during the First World War by the British Royal Navy as the world's first effort at military camouflage, were applied to the exterior of each ship in order to obscure its size, shape and direction

USA where, one assumes, this has everything to do with litigation) but Agneessens wanted every fixture to become a sculpture, to be able to stand alone—and stand out—in the space. Each piece messed with perspective: when viewed head-on the garment racks, for instance, appeared flat, but were actually complex, crimped three-dimensional structures. In fact, every (2D or 3D) form was faceted or slivered in order to befuddle the gaze: the cash counter disappeared into needle-sharp points at either end, shallow display tables featured two layers that were slightly offset, allowing a top edge to hang slightly over the sharp lip below. These elements supported the insistent



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**04** Angles are sharp and defined, making an invigorating change from the usual safely rounded edges used in retail space and exteriors of these shoes, including honey-combs and chevrons.

**05** The design plays with perspective, flattening every 3-D form, and so achieves an effect 'somewhere between a living print and a store'.

**06** Jeroen de Schrijver's white garment racks appeared flat, but were actually complex, crimped three-dimensional structures.

**07-09** Orthographic views of the floor (08) and walls (07, 09).

**10** Rendering showing how the stairs were incorporated into the design.



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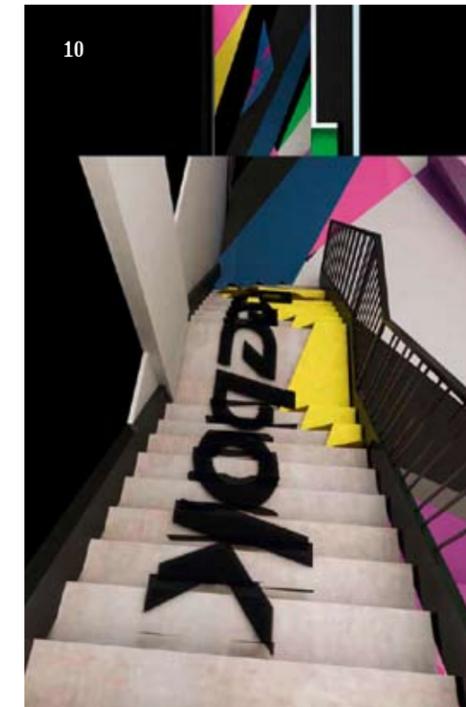
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**Reebok Flash**

- Designer Sebastian Agneessens, Formavision
- Location 169 Bowery, New York NY
- Project team Fixtures and speakers by Jeroen de Schrijver and Ellen Depoorter. Graphics by Jonas Hjertberg and Mai Kato—Production. Chris Hoover and Justine Clay
- Client Reebok
- Floor area 280 m<sup>2</sup>
- Lighting Existing
- Walls and floor Paint by Shinya Nakamura, Mai Kato, Junko Shimizu, Akane Kodani, Kim Swift, Ryan Dixon and Tomoko Okamoto
- Materials Painted laminated MDF on all fixtures (CNC-milled MDF), acrylic-paint dipped foam for all seating areas, glass and Plexiglas mirror, semi-gloss Benjamin Moore paint, neon sign