



Out of the Box!

Brand Experiences
between
Pop-Up and Flagship

gestalten

This is not a store; it's a story.

Once upon a time, there was a retail landscape. It was a flatland of logos and print ads, a two-dimensional terrain that one day began to morph into a three-dimensional brandscape and this is where the new commerce began.

With the ascendancy of shopping apps, checking in and group buying, crowd sourcing and augmented reality, online shopping (e-commerce) and shopping from mobile devices (m-commerce), consumers can now research products, find the deepest discounts, get fashion advice from friends who are far from the fitting room, and have a say in how a manufacturer's next sofa will look or if it will even be produced. We can accomplish all of this at our keyboards, moreover, whether we're in our three-piece suits or our birthday suits. On the one hand, then, it has become increasingly difficult to peel us out of our pajamas and get us into the store. On the other hand, the internet cannot provide us with the kind of experience that moves us.

Walking into a shop today, we know the product specs by heart, but we don't know how its upholstery feels, how the shape conforms to our form, or if it will remind us of building forts with our grandmother's couch cushions in days long past.

A tectonic shift in technology and values is forcing brands to retrofit their approach to retail, event, and exhibition design.

More than a conventional showroom, today's increasingly apathetic customers need do-tiques, "fitting rooms" in which to try on both product and brand, places where the experience is as limited edition as the merchandise, and where brand, buyer, and goods are bound together in a catalytic chain—whether a financial transaction takes place immediately or later on.



Welcome to experience design. We solved the problem of displaying clothes on racks long ago, but learning how to seduce sensory-deprived and information-overloaded shoppers with a compelling

spatial story is, well, a different story. Selling is about branding is about experience is about emotion. And emotion sells. The finest retail interiors, exhibition concepts, flagship stores and themed stores, temporary pop-up shops, gallery /boutique hybrids, and event spaces, mobile or sedentary, are becoming

a form of media. Which objects, stores, and brands we choose will depend on which "channels" move us most. The shopper is a complex creature, with a fraught relationship to things, self, and style, with diverse interests, secret disappointments, and guarded aspirations.

Brands are learning that they must tap the visceral, intuitive, and imaginative core of the customer and engage in a dialog

with their "guests," who will spend time (or elect not to) in the universe created by the company. With galloping advances in technology, every shopping trip is poised to become a resented physical commute if the destination is workaday. Experience and the degrees of emotion that it engenders will turn a passerby into a customer, a customer into a repeat customer and a repeat customer into a Tweeting, Facebooking, checked-in advocate of the brand.

To make his week-long pop-up shop in Manhattan, fashion designer Richard Chai—who believes that the attention span of today's consumer lasts about two seconds—collaborated with Brooklyn studio Snarkitecture to transform the inside of a disused shipping container. The designers carved into blocks of EPS foam with custom-built wire cutters until a glacial brandscape filled the box, a monolithic white field, excavated, striated, with no truly vertical walls and no really right angles. Chai wanted to tap the senses, from the look of the interior to its sound and smell, to provide, as he phrased it, "an experience of exploration, an emotional experience."

As the demand for evocative, interactive, curated, and unrepeatable branding space continues to grow, temporary commercial interiors have anticipated experience design and brandscaping, and so deserve particular attention.

The pop-up shop began as a frills-free environment intended to relieve the high costs of brick-and-mortar retail—from long-term leases to interior design and architecture fees. It used to be that the only way to distinguish a pop-up shop from a back-room sample sale was the price on the hangtags, but in order to increase traffic and give pop-ups the aura of limited-edition destinations, the form grew increasingly baroque.

When British sports retailer Reebok, a pop paladin of the 1980s, opened a quickie sneaker store amidst the visual din of Manhattan's wholesale lighting district, local creative agency Formavision



frescoed every surface, including seating and displays, with nacreous honeycombs, chevrons, stripes, and polygons of every description. Borrowing from WWI dazzle warship camouflage and a 20th-century

arts movement called vorticism, the storefront looked as two-dimensional and colorful as a comic book or a Technicolor version of Norwegian band a-ha's rotoscoped 1985 Take "On Me music" video. (Arguably a pop culture watershed that became the impetus behind the retail success of the leather motorcycle jacket following the video's MTV release.)

Artist Tobias Rehberger did a high-profile series of cafés in this vein. The temporary boutiques and brand sanctuaries of architect and former fashion designer Rafael de Cárdenas also share this audacious graphical approach, with robust contrasts of color and developments of form. For de Cárdenas, if these types of spaces are any good, they tell us two things: what is happening now and what will be happening soon, coveted information that the host brand must know and, through



its spaces, broadcast. The projects on the following pages represent only a scant number of retailers and designers, but they exemplify the way in which codified rituals of product display are being superseded by bolder experiments (visually, materially, locationally, scenographically) to stimulate, as de Cárdenas calls it,

"never-been-seen-beforeness". People just can't get enough of the new. And we don't just want to watch it, passively, on a screen; we want to step into it, climb it, row over it, slide down it, wear it, inhale it, get a little lost inside.

For the sake of expediency, the projects are divided according to their creative approach: graphic, material, straight, public/outdoor, and scenographic. As is shown in the first chapter, **Surface Tension**, spaces can be flattened or given dimension, become quiet or loquacious through the use (or avoidance) of color, pattern, typography,

illustration, texture, or all of the above. They are caffeine or codeine, a graffiti-ed street and a gallery, articulations of progressive brands that want to be associated with art, culture, and innovation. In the following chapter, **All That Matters**, it is the material that says something about the label and, occasionally, delivers a message. **Straightforward** spaces give customers the relief of an unembellished, what-you-see-is-what-you-get experience and are commissioned by companies that value authenticity, candor, and a no-nonsense ethos while still putting a premium on good looks. The



installations in **Going Public** locate the brandscape in a landscape, bringing the shop into the countryside or the countryside into the shop. Highbrow or low, high-tech or low-tech, material-driven projects are constructed from, for example, women's hosiery, industrial rolls of aluminium sheet, blue polyurethane foam, or rip-ties. Finally, **Glamor & Drama** presents brand stages in the form of novelty boutiques and scenographic interiors that appeal to our emotions in an effort to transcend the transaction. In the very best cases, customers buy into the business with more than just their money and consume, not just things, but culture, not just artifice but a sense of self. The purchase (if one is even made right away) becomes a souvenir of the customer's affinity with, not just loyalty to, the brand. So, as shopping pervades every arena of our public—once noncommercial—lives and wriggles into the machinery with which we fabricate our own identities, the most deeply experiential spaces could just become the poetics of the 21st century.

SURFACE TENSION



Graphics can both define and exquisitely confuse space. The mechanism behind graphical interiors is sometimes simple: Hundreds of stickers in the shape of black chevrons suggested abstracted flocks of blackbirds on the wing, making **ZMIK**'s boutique at the Basel art fair feel dynamic. Letters, in various point sizes and typefaces, gave texture to the **E-Types**' font shop in Copenhagen. Repetition, exaggeration, or layering can lend surfaces dimension, personality, mood, or depth. Taken to an extreme, this means that graphical interiors may feel deliciously disorienting: bigger or smaller inside than they appeared from without, or a profusion of contrasting color, geometry, or form. **Denis Košutič** slathered one of his Italian Amicis stores with such a variety of floral wallcoverings that the space could trigger a bout of hayfever.

At the pinnacle of the graphic aesthetic are several interiors, including the **Reebok Flash** pop-up shop in New York and a series of cafés by artist **Tobias Rehberger** that sprang from the trompe-l'oeil dazzle painting that once camouflaged World War I British Royal

Navy battle ships. In a departure from his older dazzle projects, Rehberger didn't add any color to the bold line drawings with which he filigreed tables, chairs, and even window panes in the **Logomo Café** in Turku, Finland, but the illustration felt just as engrossing. In Flash, **Formavision** tattooed every surface with flashy geometries, garment racks appeared two-dimensional from certain angles, and furnishings—graphical devices just as much as the graphics—tapered to a needle point.

Somewhere between the bare and the baroque, however, there is a middle ground. **Tomás Alonso**'s trio of **Camper** shoe shops, for instance, feature a minimalist graphic look: Careful compositions of ceramic tiles make it appear as if some of them protrude from the wall when they are actually flush.

At their best, graphical interiors wake us up. They can connect viewers to something (the brand) far bigger than they are, or make a space feel intimate and the company that commissioned it, sheltering.

All That Matters

Linoleum, cardboard tubes, shipping pallets, thousands of white pencils, and plain white shopping bags: High-brow or low, material can convey mood and personality and sometimes it shapes the space instead of the space shaping it.

Materials may simply determine the look-and-feel of an interior and brand, but at other times, the material is the message. In Tel Aviv's **Delicatessen** boutiques, linoleum and pegboard invert the expensive and lengthy architectural process, instead mimicking the much less costly, ephemerally quick process of fashion design. Through the most minimal of materials, **Zucker** is suggesting that, to thrive, architecture needs to honor the manipulation of the material over the material itself, design over its rote execution, the idea over the object.

Today, salvaging, recycling, or re-contextualizing materials is the planet-friendly thing to do and it is being done better. Using waste panels from which they cut their CNC-milled ply sheet furniture to create partitions and stair railings in the **Droog** New York store, **Studio Makkink & Bey** demonstrated that sustainability can also be aesthetically sustainable. But it is not done in blind service to the green trend; instead designers, consumers, and companies are recognizing the beauty and utility

of objects that carry histories and individual memories through time.

March Studio's shops for Australian cosmetics brand **Aesop** are built from a sustainable but banal material—the company's own packaging—and made extraordinary through its repetition. March netted, sliced, stacked, and staggered thousands of bare brown cardboard boxes to create sculptural walls, ceilings, display surfaces, and even a chandelier.

The exaggerated application of a single material can design an emotional experience. **Snarkitecture** whittled through an entire freight container stuffed with Styrofoam to create a cave-like temporary fashion boutique, making the monolithic ubiquity of the material the source of shoppers' experience of the brand as a sanctuary for creativity. **Tokujiin Yoshioka** built a frozen ice storm around his transparent **Kartell** furniture collection, made from floating drifts of sheer, white-tinged plastic prism sticks to evoke natural phenomena, impalpable or invisible to the human eye. This is a brand, the installation implied, that is engaging in culture, not just commerce. Materials are not just the clay that gives form to our ideas; sometimes they, themselves, contain the ideas that give form to our experience.



Straightforward



Nothing more, nothing less. Interiors designed in a straightforward manner celebrate space itself, making it easier to understand and easier to use. When it comes to retail and branded space, a forthright design presents product with clarity, candor, and a less strident sales pitch. Via lightly finished or even naked materials, clear forms, fewer (though still eloquent) color schemes, frankness makes the customer feel like an adult.

For those who appreciate unvarnished environments, gimmicks and clichés are just distracting, they are obstacles instead of enticements. These brand spaces are not pretending to be something they are not. In Italy, the **Goods** store embraces its nature as a place of commerce where shoppers have choices and deserve to understand what they are at a glance. To this end, the entire store is a vast, sophisticated display system that folds into its own shell, and nothing else. It leaves the rest of shopping to the shopper.

Sao Paulo's **Zeferino** boutique didn't have much to work with so it used what it had to its advantage. With only a 2.5-meter-wide site, the architect let the lot determine its look, turning a handicap into its asset. **Pascal Grasso** contended with constraints, as well. He had to turn two hallways into a Parisian fashion boutique. Using MDF blocks, he gave the corridors a sculpted look, but without ever trying to pretend they weren't interstitial space. Instead, he made a virtue of the fact that the store is a passage instead of a destination in order to draw shoppers into its depths.

Straight-up spaces appeal to those who do not necessarily want to star in their own feature film or run away to join the circus; those who long for an unmediated moment—no filters and no fantasies, just a one-to-one relationship between what they see and what they get.

Glamor & Drama



Scenographic spaces choreograph experiences that are out of the ordinary. They replicate places we've never been or can never be, historical settings lost to time, gentlemen's clubs sacrificed to changing mores, and fairytale castles that few people believe in anymore.

They ask us to leave our mundane lives on the kerb for a few minutes and become either spectators or actors on a stage where the script of commerce is being played.

H&M's Home Reflections showroom took on a through-the-looking-glass quality. Surreal scenes in which clusters of cushions and chaises longues were suspended in columns between ceiling and floor mirrors lent secret life to seemingly unremarkable home furnishings.

Denis Košutič's series of Amicis boutiques lets shoppers escape into posh and lofty worlds. In one, an eclectic smattering of patrician objects, old and new, bestows highly stylized rooms with detailed character. In another, a baroque confusion of floral patterns and color invites shoppers into a lifesize dollhouse. A much larger dollhouse was built to broadcast the **Barbie** brand, whose Shanghai emporium embodies a powerful powder puff pink version of Glamor.

There are more fantastical experiences, as well: The abstracted underwater world of **Monki Sea of Scallops** by **Electric Dreams** includes jellyfish and wheeled seahorse displays. The submarine theme plucks shoppers out of their daily rounds and submerges them in a realm where shopping is a game, the interior is full of toys, and they have escaped time altogether.

The traveling **Lunar Pop-Up** by **///byn** went even further, helping visitors to escape gravity itself. The exhibition space and shop mimicked the meager volume of a lunar capsule. As visitors pass through geometric interior modules, Cartesian coordinates fall away, the orthogonal world bursts into shards, and an alien landscape sharpens into crystalline focus.

By allowing customers to escape outward, these spaces suggest that the brand and its products can help us to do the same inwardly if we take them home. The purchase is only a souvenir of the experience, the fragment of an emotion manifest. They offer a little commerce and a little catharsis.