

# POINT BLANK

Architect Junya Ishigami cut and carved rectangular and circular fittings and a triangular New York boutique for fashion's master of disguise, Yohji Yamamoto.

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Photos Adrian Gaut

LET THE DISPLAY DO THE TALKING

## Display = Ghost



Ishigami tucked wires and cables beneath the floor and into the brickwork, while eliminating window frames altogether. All that remain are fashions by Yamamoto, surrounded by the city.

For a vessel that contains and absorbs so much, the new Manhattan Yohji Yamamoto shop feels irreducible. Like the writer of a haiku, fashion designer Yohji Yamamoto is a master of disguising complexity as something exceedingly simple through ingenious cutting and construction. Designed by Tokyo-based architect Junya Ishigami, the shop, which opened in February and contains a highly edited and oft-rotated selection of men's and women's lines, is just as deceptively simple. Looking from Ninth Avenue down Gansevoort Street, one sees a building that appears whole and inconspicuous. Only metres away, however, it becomes apparent that the building is bisected by an intimate alleyway, creating two triangles of differing size – a 50-m<sup>2</sup> stockroom with large windows through which overstuffed garment racks are visible and a 120-m<sup>2</sup> retail space. At one end of the shop, two unframed, 2.4-m-high windows meet in a transparent point, while at the other end the brick building, flatly rectilinear on one side, narrows to another sharp point before arcing away like a jib sheet filling in a breath of wind.

'You can feel the atmosphere of Yohji's clothing from outside of the building, from all sides, and you can feel the atmosphere of the city inside the building,' says Ishigami (1974), a former architect with SANAA. The shop's large windows, some curved, have an extreme clarity, without the glare of normal glazing, generating a transparency that, indeed, renders the clothing – each piece hung parallel to the rack at a generous distance from its neighbour – conspicuous from the street. Inside, visitors feel the embrace of the low buildings and the two streets containing the boutique, and sky is visible from all sides. The shop feels like a tiny ship tossed on an urban ocean. In a city where freestanding and single-level buildings, not to mention freestanding buildings with only a ground floor, are scarce, Yamamoto's new store is a unique experience.

**'You can feel the atmosphere of Yohji's clothing from outside of the building, and you can feel the atmosphere of the city inside the building'** Junya Ishigami

Demolition removed approximately 25 per cent of the building to create a narrow wedge-shaped alley or courtyard, according to local associate architect Ralph Sobel. Nonetheless, Ishigami worked to excavate vestiges of the original 1940s commercial building from beneath what had been a green-painted Boss modelling agency, the windows of which had been blacked out with Mylar. Outside the building, Ishigami outlined the footprint of the original building with a line of bricks embedded in the pavement, showing where he sharpened the snub nose into a



Purpose-designed by Junya Ishigami, slender steel tables and display fixtures adorn the interior.

vertex and where he arched the walls. Inside, he preserved a floor made of barely finished concrete and the brick interior wall, under and into which are tucked all electrical and phone wires, IT cables, and anti-theft sensors. Ishigami says he 'cut' the original building, but only minimally, to shape the space. 'Instead of decorating the existing building, I used a simple process of "cutting" to generate new walls and a small, carved, private street,' he explains of an approach that 'led to a simple shape with a highly complex and varied effect'.

Ishigami followed the shape of the existing windows but eliminated all frames, making it look as if the glass had been snapped into the walls. In fact, the 1.9-cm low-iron panes were connected with transparent structural silicone and dropped into 6.3-cm-deep stainless-steel pockets in the remarkably slender 20-cm- (or two-brick-) wide exterior wall.

All interior elements altered from the original building were rendered in white, apart from the grey concrete floor. These surfaces, along with Ishigami's display fixtures – the merest outline of tall rectangles – are anchored to the floor and make the surrounding red brick look as lush as fertile soil (in the city!). Unanchored elements include the slender, custom-made, powder-coated steel tables. Ranged like rows of trees planted in the centre of the store, garment racks invite shoppers to walk through them and to brush past Yamamoto's highly tactile clothes. It's almost like entering a forest at the heart of a clearing.

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Windows 2.4 m high render Yohji Yamamoto's clothing conspicuous from the street.



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A narrow alleyway slices the shop into two parts: a stockroom and a larger retail space.