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The Architecture of Fashion Retailing: Michael Gabellini and the Creation of Brand Environments

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Introduction

- Background to the research
  ...aim and objectives.
- Literature outline
  ...methodology.
- Findings.
- Conclusion.
Great stores leave a mark, and if shopping indeed is an experience – as so many sociologists, architects and retailers claim – some experiences just cannot be forgotten. (Ngo 2008)

- Implies store design plays a major role in delivering a brand experience...

...the store is not merely the location of a transaction.
Background
Background

• Little attention been paid to the selection of architects/store designers.
• Little understanding of how the designer interprets, integrates and presents the brand.

Aim:

Investigate the processes involved in the selection of a retail architect and their role in creating a branded environment.
Literature

Martineau (1958)
• Store can have personality.

Liljander et al (2009)
• Store image affects purchase behaviour and brand quality/value perceptions.

Kent (2003):
• Store image composed of functional qualities and psychological interpretations.

Moore et al (2010):
• Flagship stores represent the ultimate interpretation of the brand.
Methodology

• Qualitative approach aims to understand the processes and motives behind a phenomenon.
• In-depth interview with an influential retail architect.

• Vera Wang, New York.
• Nicole Farhi, New York.
• Jil Sander worldwide.
• Salvatore Ferragamo, Venice & NYC.
• Gianfranco Ferre, Milan & Paris.
• Giorgio Armani, Milan.
Findings

Function of the store:
• “Enhance the viability of the products”
• “Achieve the transporting of desire through the transporting of goods”

The retail environment becomes a vehicle for the brand to unveil itself, to consolidate brand awareness and burnish brand loyalty – by creating experience or experiential value
Selecting & recruiting a designer

• Brands often work with ‘favourite’ designers.
• Tenders are offered occasionally.
• Approaches are usually private.
• Contact developed often informally.

Jil Sander was first drawn to our work when she say the Park Avenue boutique we designed for Linda Dresner, who carried Jil’s fashion collections.
Findings

• Complications of working with a fashion designer / brand director:

  *If the client is a fashion company, someone famous for style and design in their own field, we sometimes find ourselves... editing the company’s conflicting dreams and aspirations.*

• Practical and creative issues:
  – Architecture is as much science as art.
  – Difficult to transpose a vision to a different medium.
Brand interpretation phase:

- Understanding the nature of the brand
- Act as “spatial advisors”.
- Interpret and apply product design and marketing imagery to the retail space.
- Different brands have different demands and level of detail in the brief.

We become familiar with the essence of the brand and advise what will work spatially and scenographically with the brand’s DNA to craft a series of brand and spatial narratives.
Findings

Location and Architectural phase:

- Brands usually have a location in place.
- Major features are often fixed.
- Overall design has to be in keeping with environment...
  - Tokyo – high tech, glitzy.
  - Europe – conservative, traditional.
  - New York – confident, contemporary.

- Reflect brand identity so far as possible.
  - Vera Wang collections are very layered, with an emphasis on material and draping... she is also know for juxtaposing materials and fabrics in an interesting way.
Findings

Design conceptualisation phase:
• Distill & apply brand DNA

Jil Sander, Paris
• Landmark façade.
• Reflect modernism of brand.
• Create sense of mystery.

Ferragamo, Venice
• Reflect more traditional values.
• Consider products & customers.
• Emphasise material interplay.
Findings

Store application phase:

• Consider the customer.
  - Who are they? What do they want?

Findings

We strive to create a spatial narrative, a seductive
Ironically, the consumer becomes consumed by the
brand through sleight of hand that transcends the
boundaries of space or the store.

We strive to create a spatial narrative, a seductive
fiction that subverts the overt commerciality of the
space — it's about the shrewd manipulation of desire
and harnessing the emotional pull.
Conclusion

• Architects role is to interpret and apply brand vision to the retail environment.
• Balance requirements of brand with reality of architecture.
• Brand identity and expression is key but two inputs to design are underestimated:
  – Locational context.
  – Product and customer issues.
• Model for store design: