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RETAIL EDITION

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CONTENTS

ROB WAGEMANS, CONCRETE:

‘IT’S JUST THAT A YELLOW LEMON TASTES MORE LEMONY THAN A PURPLE ONE.’

Photo: Krijn van Noordwijk

The designs by the studio Concrete, based in Amsterdam, are minimalist but at the same time narrative. "We try to resolve everything for our clients so that the shop needs no additional explanation."

Mendo bookstore, Amsterdam (2007)
Photo: Ewout Huibers

A good example is Mendo, an Amsterdam bookstore specializing in books on art, architecture and design. It's obvious as soon as you enter that it's about books and nothing but books. This is not only because it is easy for customers to open and leaf through the books (a quality that has become rare in today's bookshops) but also because the specially designed "Mendo Book" is used as a module. The tables are made up of Mendo Books and so are the bookcases. This approach to the interior typifies the work of Concrete, an Amsterdam studio that spurns the conventional boundaries between architecture, interior design and graphic design and takes practically everything under its wing.

"We think about things in our own peculiar way. At first it's a logic that many people don't see as being particularly logical", Rob Wagemans who heads the collective explained. "Our interiors have to be more than just good-looking. The same applies to our buildings. We aim to create spaces that are functional. They are transparent, iconic and in many cases conceived as a mix of high and low culture, because we live in a new society where those qualities go hand in hand."

- The majority of architects aver to function over form. What makes you different?

"We are much less inclined to rely on tradition in our designs, I think. We don't start by looking how other people have done things. If we have to design a cinema, for example, we don't go round the world looking at famous cinemas and then pick out the best features to use in our own design. That's not our way of doing things. We start with the consumer, and think things out from the viewpoint of the consumer's experience. We study what an audience member expects from a cinema nowadays and how we can give shape to that. That can mean throwing architectural dogmas overboard. Another example is our CitizenM hotel concept. Our research showed us that people use a hotel bed for much more than sleeping; they eat in bed, check their email and so on. That kind of information gives us our starting point. We made the sleeping function affordable, and treated the optional extras you can get in a hotel as luxury items. This is an unorthodox approach.

- What do you consider as luxury?

Luxury in the hotel context usually means a "wow" factor that hits you when you enter. But we try to help people, to make their lives easier. In our view, luxury is above all time-saving and being free choose things according to your preferences. In the past people were always trying to be something, often something out of their reach, and that was the basis on which they chose brands or hotels. Nowadays the focus is more on discovering who you really

CitizenM Hotel, Amsterdam City Centre (2009)
Photos: Ewout Huibers

Australian Homemade
Photo: Concrete architectural associates

are and trying to realize that as well as possible. When I go to New York, I want a hotel that fits in with my expectations for a trip to New York. To reach that insight, we can't use conventional research results – unlike many of the big brands we work for. But we shoot holes in those conventions based on our own experience and intuitions. That's necessary, because if hotel chains don't adapt they miss a whole target group."

- **Are similar developments evident in retail?**

"Yes, significant changes are going on in the retail sector too. You can see that with Zara. There they understand that the surroundings determine how customers perceive the prices. Stores like Zara now look just as high-budget as Dolce Gabana outlets, so the prices of the clothes seem more attractive in comparison. It's no longer an established dogma that you have to sell cheap products in cheap surroundings. That's no longer necessary. People nowadays combine low priced with high priced clothes. Often that gives the best results."

- **What do you aim to add to the products through your shop interiors?**

The design has to convey what the product is about. Efficient buying is something you can do on the Internet, but the real-life shopping experience is different. People go to the shops in search of stimulation. We want people to remember the places we have designed, and hence also the products that our clients sell there. It helps here if the retail design communicates what the product stands for. If you were to take all the products out of the shops in a typical shopping street, only a row of empty boxes would be left – generic retail systems that say absolutely nothing about what is sold there. In our shops, on the other hand, you would still be able to recognize the idea behind the products, the atmosphere or the concept. Our world has become a generic one, but people are beginning to realize that it's the exceptions that lend colour to life."

- **That sounds logical. But you said that your logic is not always immediately understood. How is that possible?**

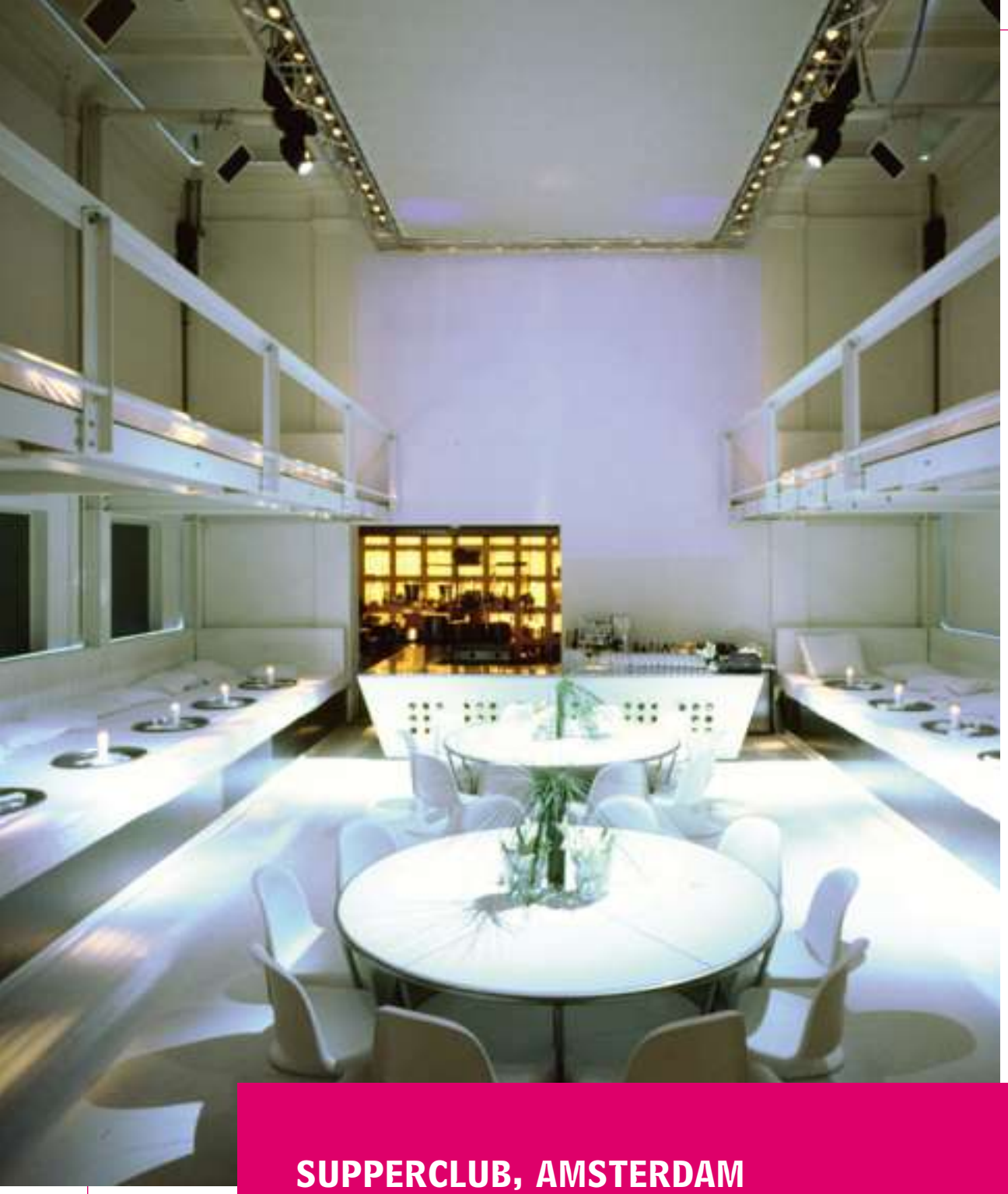
"I was talking to a client this morning who sells döner kebabs. I tried to explain to him that the whole business ought to communicate the nature of döner cuisine. At first he didn't see the need for that so we were miles apart. But he came to us in the first place because he had been impressed by our designs for Australian and for Coffee Company, both chain outlets where every detail proclaims the product they sell. We have to remind our client exactly who he is, and explain how the retail design can boost that character. It's just that a yellow lemon tastes more lemony than a purple one. The same is true for a shop; a retail design that doesn't go with the product is like a purple lemon. But a store that's like a yellow lemon doesn't need any clarification."

- **Are there design projects that you reject?**

"We don't do generic formulas. We will work for chain outlets but we give something specific to each location. We materialize whatever it is that makes the retailer special. We have just been asked to admit a kind of conservatism into a hotel, but I have my doubts about going along with that. It's against my feelings, my intuition. I'm even capable of quibbling about a menu design. If our interior holds out the pretension of anything more than the customer gets on his plate, I feel there's something wrong with it."

- **And you don't have any doubts about the shopping phenomenon as a whole?**

"None at all. We see shopping as an interesting leisure activity. It can be more rewarding than watching TV. You get outdoors and zap from one world to the next as you shop. You are designing yourself, so to speak. Watching television is shutting yourself off, but when on a shopping



La Salle Neige
Photo: Concrete architectural associates

La Chambre Obscure
Photo: Kim van der Leden

Les Toilettes Noir
Photo: Concrete architectural associates

SUPPERCLUB, AMSTERDAM

The Supperclub concept is a good example of the multi-disciplinary approach taken by Concrete and of the radical negation of boundaries in their work. Concrete worked in partnership with Supperclub to develop their strategy and spinoffs. The starting point was the idea of dining while reclined on cushions, and the concept included the choice of music and Supperclub's own-brand condoms, vodka and chocolate. It has proved a successful formula. Concrete built the first Supperclub in Amsterdam in 1999, and this was followed by further Supperclubs in Rome, San Francisco, Istanbul, Bodrum and Los Angeles, as well one on an ocean liner.

The food, drink, light and sound are all in harmony in a Supperclub They merge into an atmosphere that offers an escape from the everyday world. A visit to one of their establishments is an experience that washes over you, a sanctuary for the senses. The Supperclub formula plays on the ritualism of dining and clubbing, while providing a theatrical setting that focuses attention on the rite itself.

An evening as a Supperclub guest begins in a neutral, white foyer, place to rinse oneself of the turmoil of daily life. After this immersive overture, you enter the main interior, with a choice of bar, restaurant, theatre and club ambiances, in separate, visually distinct spaces. The Amsterdam Supperclub has four such rooms: La Salle Neige, le Bar Rouge, la Chambre Obscure and Les Toilettes Noir. La Salle Neige is the dining space, where changing coloured spotlights and video projections play over the pure white walls, continually modulating the interior mood. Here guests eat from silver metal trays while recumbent on immense white couches, like endless mattresses, which line the walls. The centre of the room provides the optkon of a more conventional dining area with tables. Le Bar Rouge has a touch of the Sixties, with red curtains and a big neon "bar" sign. In the rest rooms, Les Toilettes Noir, the WCs are labelled Hetero and Homo instead of the customary Men and Women. Besides the sanitary facilities, Les Toilettes offer a place to meet and are furnished with large foam-rubber seating cubes in the middle of the space. La Chambre Obscure is the place for dancing, and is sensually furnished with shiny black cushions covered with a shiny, leather-like, fabric.

trip you are open to outside influences and for spontaneity. People's passion for brands and shopping is a bit like religion. You get the feeling of being a bit closer to a good life when you buy something."

- **The modular "books" for Mendo, slices of orange as a mural decoration in a juice bar, a floor covering with a cloverleaf pattern in a homeopathic/natural medicine pharmacy: many of these designs have elements that are literally magnified references to the nature of the product. Why?**

"There are several reasons for that, including practical ones," Wagemans replied. "We want to discourage our client from hanging up posters, so we build the advertisement into the design. In fact we try to resolve all the client's needs so that there is no need to explain anything in words. Brightly coloured orange slices leave no doubt in the customer's mind that it's a place where you can get fruit juices. Giving the kitchen a strongly contrasting green colour, almost medicinal green, shows that it's hygienic and the juice is freshly pressed. We like making things exaggerated and specific, to a nearly ridiculous extent. We go for simplicity, clarity and concreteness – for hyper-concreteness. We don't kid ourselves we are great artists. The client invests a lot of money and has a right to know what we intend to do. We try to demonstrate that step for step as in a strip cartoon."

- **Is clarity the only thing that matters in the designs?**

"No. We aim to make it immediately clear what the store is about, but there is a second layer in the design. When you come back a second time you see details that you didn't notice before – the Aboriginal motifs in the floor in Australian, logos in the bonbons and details like that. Similarly, the ice-cream is different from what you get in the familiar Italian ice-cream salons; it's kept in closed containers to preserve the flavour better. At Australian, it's the taste that matters not the colour. It goes along with the image of an honest, freshly-made product. Colour alone can be deceitful."

- **You often use geometrical and repetitive elements in your interior designs. Can I describe that as a kind of minimalism?**

They add to the clarity and unity. Symmetry is something you don't have to justify; it's the asymmetrical that you have to explain. Repetition is restful and it works as a backdrop for interesting deviations. A grid or a system of dimensions leaves the designer free to deviate where appropriate. It's a theatrical trick, a way of drawing attention to something. We are fond of picking out some aspect with the lighting, in a dramatic way. That's much more exciting than those generically lit interiors."

- **Compared to other shops, Concrete's retail interiors make you feel like you are an actor and a spectator at the same time. Is that a deliberate design decision?**

"Yes, we like confronting customers with their role. Sometimes it's allowed to make people hurt a bit. On Valentine's Day at the Supperclub, for example, we handcuffed couples together. That was fun, although a bit awkward when they wanted to use the toilet. Partnering with someone is great but it can be restrictive – that was the message. We did something similar for the wine merchant's Gall & Gall, although it was much more subtle. The chain sells both low-priced and expensive wines, so it is trying to address two different market segments at the same time. It's hard to pull that off because both categories of customer must feel at home in the store. So we introduced an element that seems to sum up the business as a whole. A strip runs through the store at eye height and displays offers that are discounted or are quality special offers. We admit the schizophrenia of the concept, and tell people what Gall & Gall is about. That way customers understand the store and know why they are there.

Forbo Expo

MASSIMILIANO FUKSAS:

‘WE WANT OUR BUILDINGS TO HAVE EMOTION, INSPIRATION AND A FREE SPIRIT’

Photo: Moreno Maggi

"If people remember my shops, they will come back there and buy more clothing." The Italian architect Massimiliano Fuksas was one of the very first to take shopping malls seriously as an architectural challenge. "It is the complexity of the old city that I strive for."

Europark 2, Salzburg, Austria (2003-2005)
Photo: C. Lackner

There was a long period when architects took little interest in retail design. They saw it as being too commercial and not the kind of things architects concerned themselves with. The architect Massimiliano Fuksas, director of Studio Fuksas and based in Rome and Paris, was one of the first architects to take retail seriously, as long ago as the nineteen nineties. Why did he decide to design retail outlets and centres in a decade when most architects spurned this work?

"I did not decide to do shopping centres, it just happened that way," he recalled. "Like many architects, I initially felt disdainful about designing for retail. But the sector presents architectural challenges which are just as interesting as those of museums, airports, schools and houses. I have lived in Paris, New York and Rome, cities where I have always had boutiques and little stores just around the corner. When you live in heart of the city you can go out and buy things and at the same time you absorb all kinds of impressions and events. But that simply doesn't happen in a large store or shopping centre. They tend to be too mechanical, and don't provide that kind of random stimulus. In order to design a shopping centre or mall I had to define for myself what shopping was about."

- You mean it is not just about selling and buying?

"No, not at all. We are not chickens responding to grains of corn. People need a richer experience, an urban experience. So I decided to give people who use suburban malls an experience as rich as they would have when shopping in an old city, where you have hidden squares and narrow, winding streets – where you suddenly see an unexpected church, garden or bridge. The views and the natural light are constantly changing. Shopping is about strolling around, drinking coffee, reading a newspaper, eating a sandwich and taking in the scene around you. Its not necessarily about buying, if you don't feel like buying something, but a whole range of human sensations, the beauty of life itself. That was the concept behind Europark in Salzburg, the first shopping mall I designed. I am not fond of parking lots. I prefer to put cars on top of or under the building. A mall is a building for people not for cars. In Salzburg I put the cars on the top storey with an undulating roof over them, which is like a landscape in its own right."

- What is the main difference between designing a school or a museum, and designing a mall?

"The challenge is exactly same in each case. Only talentless architects stick to typologies. For a good architect it is the same whether he is designing a chair, a museum, a railway station or a shopping mall: what matters is creating a rich and beautiful experience. If you succeed the building will function well and people will find it attractive. My malls are always successful. My clients don't know

Europark 2, Salzburg, Austria (2003-2005)
Photos: Studio Fuksas, Angelo Kaunat, C. Lackner

Armani Fifth Avenue, NYC, USA (2007-2009)
Photo: Ramon Prat
Designed by: Doriana and Massimiliano Fuksas

Armani Ginza Tower, Tokyo, Japan (2005-2007)
Photo: Ramon Prat
Designed by: Doriana and Massimiliano Fuksas

Armani Chater House, Hong Kong, China (2001-2002)
Photo: Ramon Prat
Designed by: Doriana and Massimiliano Fuksas

Designed by: Doriana and Massimiliano Fuksas Designed by: Doriana and Massimiliano Fuksas Designed by: Doriana and Massimiliano Fuksas

why, but they are. Salzburg was so successful that they asked me to design a huge extension a few years later. And recently they asked me to do yet another extension."

- More and more retail firms are turning to architecture to increase the visibility of their outlets. Is retail architecture the perfect advertisement?

"I am not into the game of designing icons. It's not what I think about in my designs but I don't mind if they become icons. More important is that people will remember my buildings and relate to them. In Tokyo, the streets only have a number and no name. People usually say I live near a such-or-such a building, Sony or Toshiba for example. The buildings help people to identify where they live. That is what I want too. I want my buildings to impart identity to their environment. It is also important for retail – if people remember a store I have designed they will return to the same place in future."

- You designed several Armani shops. Do you adapt your design to each context? Does the New York Armani differ from the Tokyo store?

"They are all very different. They are highly responsive to the context. Armani wants every store to be different. The clothing may be the same, but the shops are not. The Armani shop in Tokyo, for instance, is much more serene and casual than the one in New York, which has a spectacular, dramatic staircase. After all, New York is much more spectacular and dramatic. Every city is different. Some people think that all modern cities are the same because they all have skyscrapers. But despite those identical skyscrapers I would say they differ lot. If you don't see that, you are blind. You cannot say New York, Shanghai, Moscow and Dubai are the same. You have different people, different air, different light, a different sunset and different buildings and streets."

- What happens if a client wants to change the interior, as often happens in retail?

"I have no problem with that: they can change it if they want. There are architects who say no, don't touch it. But I give them a system that allows for change in the interior. A good design can tolerate change. After all, a building has to last for decades and has to absorb changes without losing its quality."

- Where do you start the conversation when a retail client comes to you?

"I try to get the essence of what he wants by talking. I like him to speak with me and to tell me what his ideas are, even if those ideas are not all that good. It is important to know his way of thinking, his dialectics. I am a easygoing architect, you could say. But I'm generally very strict about detailing. The details must be good, I insist on it, even in a shopping mall. You can still have fantastic detailing even when the construction time is very short."

The designs of Studio Fuksas cannot be described as modernist. They are unarguably contemporary, but they do not appeal to the modernist principles of order, clarity and simplicity. Fuksas introduces a deliberate complexity. What is the purpose of this complexity? Surely he can't be trying to confuse the user?

"Of course not, I have no intention of confusing people.

PIAZZA CENTRE, MEDIA MARKT STORE AND BLOB, EINDHOVEN

With its tall, slightly misshapen, rust coloured columns and transparent canopy, the entrance to new Piazza Centre in the city of Eindhoven, The Netherlands, is awe-inspiring. The colonnade marks the start of a public passage between the Bijenkorf department and with the new shopping mall, designed by Massimiliano Fuksas, and projects theatrically out into the forecourt, therby creating an imposing public space in the city's prestige shopping district. Although sculptural and eye-catching, the Piazza Centre respects the monumental volume of the Bijenkorf (designed by Gio Ponti), asserting its monumental presence in the visual field of the 1969 department store, filtered solely by the all-glass facade.

The facade of the rectangular shopping mall is glazed with greenish glass. A luminous screen decorated with large human figures behind the glass outer skin softens the facade by making its depth ambiguous. This is a device typical of the work of architect Massimiliano Fuksas: he designs a strong shape and then subtly blurs it, creating an intriguing and more complex experience. The attention to daylighting, unexpected views and a fluid interpenetration of spaces can also be considered hallmarks of his style. He tries to come as close as possible to the historic city experience while using contemporary means.

The four floors of retail space in the mall are elegantly connected by an elliptical atrium which admits daylight into the interior. It also opens up views of the upper levels and, through an opening in the facade, of the colonnade and the Bijenkorf. The atrium is crucial to the design. To grasp the entire building and the colonnade at one glance, and then move on, is a stunning experience.

To complete this upgrade of Eindhoven's central commercial area, Fuksas designed the MediaMarkt store adjacent to the Piazza Centre, and, opposite it, a capricious glass blob. The MediaMarkt facade is decorated, pop-art like, with the repeating pattern of its own name. Like a gigantic soap bubble, the otherwise symmetrical shape of the blob is diffused by irregular indentations, a self-contradiction which is similarly characteristic of the Italian designer's strategy. Here architecture proves its worth as an advertisement: the tenant of the blob expects to attract additional clientele through the extraordinary appearance of the company premises.

What I strive for is a complexity like that of a historic city," Massimiliano Fuksas replied. "Medieval cities were much more intricate than the logically structured suburbs of today. I aim to introduce something of the dramatic or emotional atmosphere of an old city centre into modern buildings, into the suburbs. I have nothing against order; aspects like orientation, clarity and proportion are still important. But I want to raise the quality of the interior and create a rich experience for those who use my buildings. Modernism has a conservative character. It's all too easy. If you want to be successful, you have to be modern, just like swallowing a pill – with modernism you can't go wrong. It is a language, and that's it, basta. But in my opinion it is restricting to insist on a building as a pure white box, clean and totally serious. It doesn't work like it used to, so you have to offer something else. Nowadays we must give buildings emotion, inspiration and a free spirit. You cannot design a building and just that alone; people want something more. As an architect you have to look at what is needed in the future."

Complexity and contradiction are key to your architecture. They seem to be present in all your work. You make a strong gesture, design a strong form, but at the same time you contradict it. For instance, you diffuse a wall by giving it two layers and making the outer skin transparent. The rigid shape becomes softer and more ambiguous.

"Right, I have to have both clarity and contradiction. That is essential to my approach. Just as the baroque added irrationality and illusion to Renaissance architecture, I add contrasts to the rationality of Modernism. The reason I combine opposites is to create an interesting experience. An example is the congress centre I designed here in Rome, in the EUR Neighbourhood which was built in the Fascist era. Through its rectangular shape and transparent skin, the congress hall relates to the rigid geometry of the streets and the surrounding buildings, but inside you can see a huge, irregular cloud, drifting, almost floating, and containing the auditorium. Or look at the entrance – it forces you to go down and then ascend again, a kind of rite of passage. It's a much more interesting way of entering a building, and it provides different experiences and different emotions, compared to just walking in. I always destabilize things so as to create tension. It involves creating a shape and fragmenting it, contradicting it, but keeping some balance at the same time. There has to be an equilibrium between order and disorder. It is very much like art."

Congress Centre Eur, Rome, Italy (1998-2012)
Photo: Studio Fuksas

MITCHELL & MCINTOSH, SYBARITE:

‘MAKING PEOPLE HAPPY IS THE BOTTOM LINE’

The architecture of Sybarite is all about seduction. "That is what we have to do for our clients: to create a journey for the customer, so he will stay for a while and buy products."

Marni Sloane Street, London (2003)
Photos: Richard Davies

On the whole, few architects get excited about retail design. They see the genre as too commercial, as aimed merely at boosting sales. But Simon Mitchell and Torquil McIntosh of the London based firm Sybarite are not at all afraid of designing for retail clients. On the contrary, they love it. In their office in Chelsea, London, they explained what attracts them about it.

"The best thing, in my view, is the speed," Macintosh said. "Things happen so quickly. A client asks you to do a project, and then eight weeks later it has to be finished and installed. I love the rush. We are particularly lucky to work with upmarket clients who have a good budget. They must be willing to take a plunge: we give them an idea and they must willing to take it and run with it."

Mitchell: "In an eight week project, the client literally has to go along with your first idea. That means he has to be committed to working with you. When designing a commercial building, on the other hand, it could take years before you see it realized. We don't have that kind of patience."

McIntosh: "The tight deadline of a retail project focuses your attention sharply. The designer has to come up with the idea and consider all the factors in a split second; the budget, who is going to fabricate the design, how is it going to be constructed, how many pieces does it have to come in, how can we make it to size and is it going to fit through the door when we get to Harrods's third floor? All these questions have to be considered in a flash, and you have to present the result to your client and trust your instincts that it is going to work."

- In what way is retail architecture different from other architecture?

McIntosh: "Lots of retailers are competing for the same space. They want to get ahead of their neighbours and competitors and grab the attention of customers. Retailers are always driving themselves forward, pushing for constant change, and they want designers to provide effective tools for that."

- Not many architects are keen on that. The approach is generally less instrumental, and more motivated by the artistic, lasting values of architecture.

Mitchell: "Our approach to architecture is the same as the way we do any product design, whether it's a teaspoon or a skyscraper. We give it the same importance and we put a similar effort into it. There is no end to the challenge provided by everyday objects. Every shape of teaspoon is already out there, so it's hard to come up with something new. We work on different scales at the same time, whether it's a light fitting, a shop interior or a house."

McIntosh: "We enjoy blurring the boundaries between art, design and architecture. We don't see a sharp distinction between them. Our aim is to make spaces and things that people use, and that are pleasurable to look at, that people will enjoy. Making people happy is the bottom line. That's where the guts of our design philosophy comes from."

MARNI AOYAMA II, TOKYO

Each boutique of the fashion brand Marni is different from the others. Their flagship stores in major cities are especially distinctive: as much of the design is inspired by the geographical and cultural context as by the brand. The Marni flagship in Los Angeles is fifty percent pure Los Angeles, and the same applies to the boutiques in London, Singapore, New York, Tokyo and other capitals. The international clientele will be tempted to investigate what the Marni outlet looks like in a new city and, Marni hopes, will be inclined to buy new clothing there. And it works: the distinctive designs change the experience and puts visiting customers in the mood to buy items from the store's own collection.

Marni's Tokyo flagship store evokes a Japanese temple, a modern temple perhaps, in the way it plays with texture and with light. The walls, finished alternatingly in rugged shuttered concrete or in gloss fabric, and the pattern of randomly embedded slabs of marble embedded in the polished concrete floor, help define different zones of the store. This stimulates the customer to wander from place to place and discover the treasuries of Marni: the clothing, shoes, bags and lingerie.

The walls are punctuated by display cases finished in leather, plastic and fibreglass. With their integral lighting, the cases contrast dazzlingly with the floor and walls. The fluid stainless steel rails which support the ready-to-wear collection glide up the grand staircase to the curvaceous shoe display room. The latter is illuminated by a polished steel ceiling cloud which hovers over the central display, bathing it in soft light like an altar in a temple or church.

On the first floor, mannequins are suspended over fan units, their clothes shimmering and dancing as the they sway above the gentle updraft. A long rail unit continues the display of the ready-to-wear collection, while the wall opposite bears a host of randomly placed and sized display cases for jewellery, sunglasses and other small accessories.

Minami Aoyama, Minato-Ku, Tokyo (2007)
Photos: Nacasa & Partners

- In your designs, do you take into account specific knowledge about how people behave when shopping?

McIntosh: "Absolutely. There is a lot of information available about what you have to consider in a retail environment. Women, for example, don't like the 'brush factor'. If someone brushes against them, they will walk away from the area where they have been shopping. A woman might have been selecting a two thousand pound dress, but if someone brushes her on the bum she will go away without buying the product. We try to design in a personal space so that customers don't feel crowded or intimidated. They should feel protected on the one hand but free to shop on the other. There have to be places where a husband or boyfriend can sit down and feel at ease. It's often much more common sense than science; and that common sense has to be deliberately built in, not just left to chance."

- It seems to me that your designs show a strong consciousness of bodily movement. Is it your primary architectural goal to manipulate the movement of users?

Mitchell: "Certainly. Take for instance the Marni shop in Sloane Street, here in London. We wanted to create a surrealistic interior. A seamless white floor turns into a staircase that rises to the second floor. You see people walking across it in a kind of limbo, with light diffusing down from above. All that stainless steel snaking through the space makes it an enormous sculpture. Without that sculpture the space would feel quite naked."

McIntosh: "In Marni, two thirds of the store was on the first floor. The important thing was to get people to go up there. That is why we had the floor merging seamlessly into the staircase. We gave it a sweeping curve, so when the customer goes up or comes down it's almost like a Hollywood musical. Coming down the stairs is like making a grand entrance and it gives them a psychological boost."

- So your architecture is less about making a beautiful space, and more about seducing the users to move and to stay?

McIntosh: "Seducing all the way. That's what we have to do for our clients – prepare a journey for customers, so they will take their time and buy the products. Not doing that is probably a mistake of a lot of retail architects make; it doesn't work when a customer walks directly into the whole space and can almost see all the products at a glance from the entrance. You have to take customers on a journey, so they feel like they are discovering the interior. They have to meander through it, so that it's a prolonged experience. Then suddenly they find the product they want, and it feels like you are the first person to discover it, like finding a valuable piece of furniture on an antiques hunt. You can create an emotional state for the customer

Cox & Power, London (2004)
Photos: Adrian Myers

Alberta Ferretti Los Angeles (2008)
Photos: Jimmy Cohrssen

through your interior design. If you succeed, you have done a really good job as a designer. It is our job to create a unique experience in each of the shops. No two shops are the same. That's the basic design motive."

Mitchell: "One of our strengths is that we spend a lot of time with our clients up front. We try to get into their minds and find out what they want their customer to feel like. We are able to make our shops identifiable with the brand – like this mannequin, which was one of our first product designs for Stefanel. Because Stefanel is a jersey knitwear company, we had to come up with a way the dresses, skirts and tops could grip the surface. Otherwise the knitwear would slide off the smooth mannequin and sag horribly. So we came up with a superhero zebra skin for the mannequins, using a combination flocking and gloss lacquer - you can drape a skirt on it and it stays in place. Now the mannequin has practically turned into their logo."

- You often use circular forms. What is it about the round shape that appeals to you?

Mitchell: "It is a simple shape that can be interpreted in so many different ways, a great shape. We use often use a circle to create special zones in the shop. In the Stefanel stores, the circle is always the focal point of the store. People like to enter a space that wraps around them. They want to feel captivated."

- What about illumination? Does light play an important part?

Mitchell: Light is probably fifty percent of the design. We use light to induce the customer to move around the shop and look at the products. In the Ferretti shop in Los Angeles, we put in floor spotlights to light the garments from underneath, a bit like in an old fashioned theatre. We aimed to create to get a patterns of reflections, of light and shadow."

- Often you use top lighting. It has an almost metaphysical quality. It seems to go beyond merely tempting the customers. Is that your intention?

Mitchell: Maybe this metaphysical quality expresses that we are very much anti-ego in our practice. You don't have to be religious to sing in a gospel choir, but when you are in it and you are singing, you feel you are part of something bigger. I guess that is what we are trying to do – to take spaces to a new place. The end of the ego. Ego death. We love ego death – we love it if we can get users to switch off their ego when they enter one of our interiors."

- You have a distinct signature, a definite style, but you have to work for companies that already have their own house style – one that conveys their image and identity as they see it. Do you sometimes see a conflict here?

Mitchell: "They come to us for a reason. They want to have part of us in their language. Our job is to understand what they are about, what they sell and what their philosophy is. Then we have to combine it with our own architectural style and flair. Of course there will be things about the design that tell you it's Sybarite-designed, even although it is primarily a Marni, a Ferretti or a Cox and Power store. That is really important to us. We have a strong architectural language, but you have to be able to differentiate between the brands."

- Le Corbusier once said that a house is a machine to live in. Do you see your work as creating machines to display things?

Mitchell: "We see it as creating sculptures. They function like theatrical scenery. They are not machines, definitely not. Our intention is to create a sculptural scene. Our philosophy is the same when we design a building. The aim is to design a sculpture that is functional and gives pleasure. That criterion applies to everything that is designed, from a wineglass to a bed or to a building."

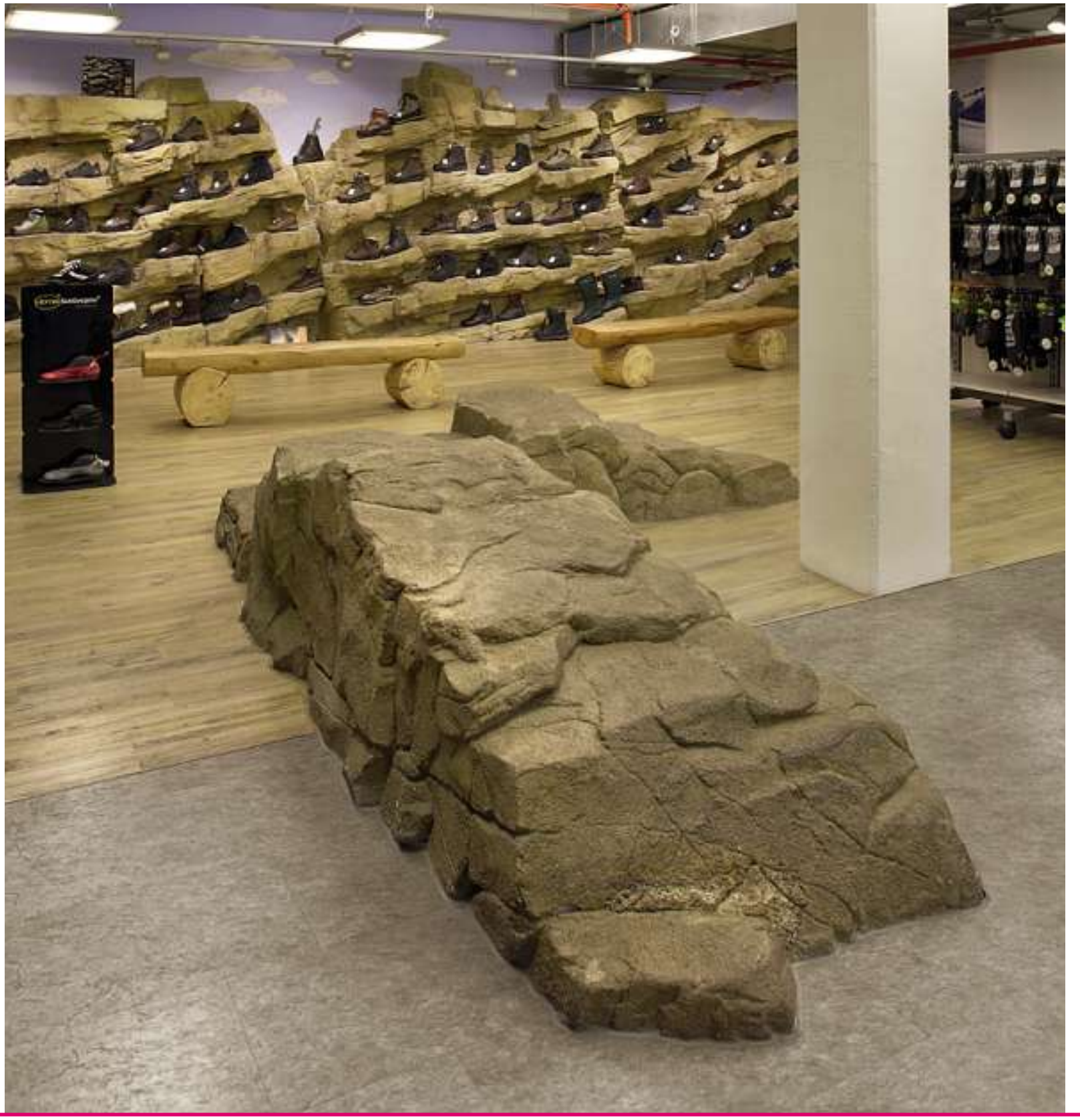
PROJECTS

Touch Solo 3543

Giorgio Zaetta Arredamenti bortoluzzi due SRL

CIOCCOLATERIE MIRCO DELLA VECCHIA

Location	**Bergamo airport, Italy**
Architect	**Giorgio Zaetta**
Interior designer	**Giorgio Zaetta Arredamenti bortoluzzi due SRL**
General contractor	**Arredamenti bortoluzzi due SRL**
Commisioned by	**Mirco della vecchia**
Flooring material	**80 m² Touch**



Allura Wood WR02

Allura Stone SL238

Photo: Fotostudio Christoph Leniger

BLUE SKY OUTDOOR FASHION

Location	**Hannover, Germany**
Interior design	**Breiert Shop & Design, Quedlinburg**
Flooring installation	**Hotowetz + Wegener GmbH, Pattensen**
Flooring material	**618 m² Allura Wood, 157 m² Allura Stone**

C&A ECO-STORE

Location	Mainz, Germany
Architect	Ehrich + Vogel Architekten, Düsseldorf
Interior designer	Fuhrmann & Keuthen, Technische Gebäudeausrüstung, Kleve
Flooring installation	Austermann GmbH, Dülmen
Flooring material	7500 m² Marmoleum Dual, Fresco

Marmoleum Dual 779

Marmoleum Fresco 3872

Photos: Manos Meisen

Marmoleum Real 3131

Walton Uni 171

RODENSTOCK "CONCEPT SHOP"

Location **Munich, Germany**

Architect **Zeeh Bahls & Partner Design, Diessen am Ammersee**

Interior design **Thomas Honegg**

Flooring material **150 m² Marmoleum Real, Walton Uni**

Effect Volta 5077 

Effect Volta 5199 

Effect Volta 5100 

Effect Volta 5073 

Flotex Sottsass Terrazzo 990701 

Allura Glass GL01

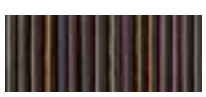
Photos: Erik Poffers

BCC

Location	**Utrecht, the Netherlands**
Architect	**WSB Interieurbouw BV**
General contractor	**BCC electro-speciaalzaken BV, Schiphol Rijk**
Flooring contractor	**Sturka, Tiel**
Flooring material	**2000 m² Flotex Sottsass, Effect Volta, Allura Glass**

AVANGARDE L´OREAL SALON

Location	**Dębica, Poland**
Interior architect	**Marcin Chmura LOFT**
Flooring contractor & installation	**MIMAR**
Flooring material	**40 m² Flotex Sottsass**



Flotex Sottsass Wool 990606

Photos: Piotr Schönborn

Marmoleum Fresco 3847 | Marmoleum Dual tiles t2607 | Marmoleum Dual tiles t3030 | Marmoleum Dual tiles t3221

TOYS "R" US

Location **Chiba, Japan**
Architect **Keiichi Nihonyanagi Architect & Associates**
General contractor **Showa Co. , LTD**
Flooring material **3000 m² Marmoleum Dual tiles, Fresco**

PANACEA

Location **South Australia**
Interior Designer **ABITARE PTY. LTD. Steven Henderson**
Flooring Contractor **FLOORS PLUS Peter Rossi**
Flooring material **200-250m² Walton Crocodiles, Marmoleum Vivace, Real, Dual, Surestep R12**

Walton Crocodiles C123 | Marmoleum Vivace 3408 | Marmoleum Vivace 3415 | Marmoleum Dual 580 | Marmoleum Dual 345 | Surestep R12 8599

Photos: Hiro Ishino Photography

Touch Duet 3525

Photos: Fabio Cussigh

GALLERIA BARDELLI, ACCESSORI

Location **Udine, Italy**
Architect **Renza Pitton Architetto**
Flooring contractor & installation **Zanuttini, Udine**
Flooring material **40 m² Touch**

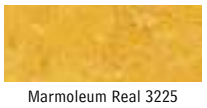
LE FRINGE HAIR SALON

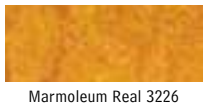
Location	Sydney Westfield Shopping Centre Bondi Junction, Australia
Architect	Giant Design
Interior architect	Ed Kenny
General contractor	Lomac Floors Sydney
Flooring material	250 m² Marmoleum Fresco, Real

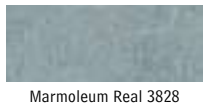

Marmoleum Real 3055


Marmoleum Real 3139


Marmoleum Real 3224


Marmoleum Real 3225

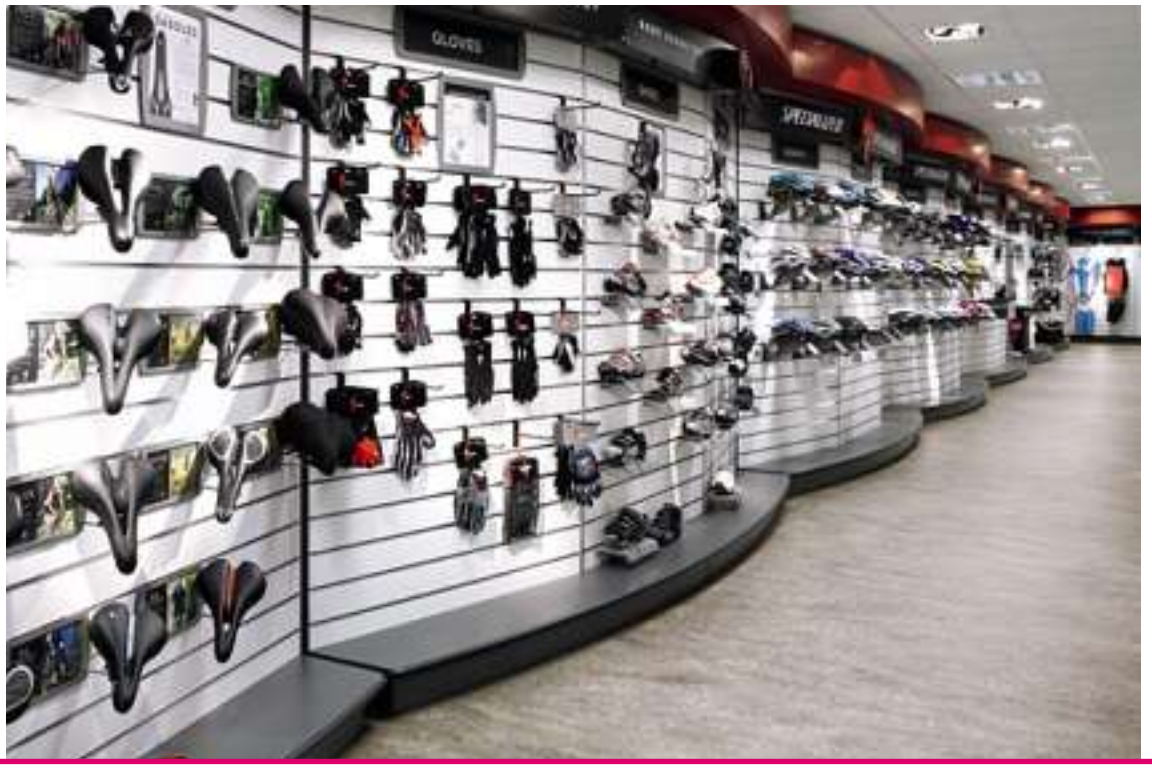

Marmoleum Real 3226


Marmoleum Real 3828

Photos: Ed Kenny

A brightly coloured, rainbow cocoon of Forbo Marmoleum has attracted the Fly Forbo Award 2010 for Giant Design Consultants of Crows Nest, New South Wales.

Their winning project, Le Fringe hair dressing salon at Westfield, Bondi Junction, features an exoskeleton ribbed effect of various shades of Marmoleum interspersed with glass which gives vantage to the continued colour panels across the floor and ceiling and a fully coved rear bench seat within the salon. The mirrored rear wall doubles the effect and coupled with the broadening, angled bands really plays with the perspective of the room.



Marmoleum Vivace 3405

Artoleum 5305

Allura Wood WR02

SPECIALIZED UK HEADQUARTERS

Location	Chessington, Surrey
Architect & Building contractor	Constructive Workspace
Flooring design	Adam Burtt-Jones, Constructive Workspace
Flooring material	140 m² Artoleum Graphic, 245 m² Marmoleum Vivace, 275 m² Allura

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