



# RETAIL

For those designers not involved with it – and perhaps some who are – retail design might seem an exercise in masochism. Insanely short deadlines for construction, space values calculated down to the millimetre, perpetually constrained floorplates asked to display too many goods, lighting design trimmed to a science and clients known to be among the most ridiculously demanding on the planet. The only thing not pinched are the budgets. Well, that may be less than true as well. Even the Hermès and Guccis of this world don't like to waste money. And to cap it off, one's design usually enjoys a pretty brief shelf-life, owing to the necessity within retailing for constant trend-catching. You make them a gourmet meal, the next day they're hungry again.

On the other hand, plenty of designers would love to get their hands on a great retail commission. Looked at another way, these projects are short and sweet: wham bam, on to the next one. They are high-profile; indeed, who wouldn't want thousands of people meandering leisurely through their projects, pondering the luscious materials and masterful details? They often lead to repeat business: many brands have more than one location, so play your cards right and your company could have years of business. They lend themselves well to handsome details; for designers who like to fuss, display cabinetry is a wet dream. They are rather 'complete'; rarely do the clients fill their spaces with unspecified furniture or knick-knacks.

Desirable or not, what makes retail design unique? As most specialists will attest, there is a level of science involved that can either fascinate or frustrate. So much, economically speaking, depends on successful retail venues that designers must be aware of: flow patterns, colour and lighting effects on customers, product positioning and relationships, what materials turn the users on or off, durability, etcetera... plus the delicate relationship between the architecture and the goods it is meant to enhance. It is hard to think of any other design category where design has to so directly defer to other inanimate objects. A hotel designer can afford to – indeed may be required to – draw plenty of attention to his or her design. Office designers can count on a fairly minimal infusion of material and furniture once they've done their bit, leaving their designs quite visible (in any case, few companies ask for 'loud' office designs). Residential designers, the most direct sufferers of clients' long-term changes to their work, usually have a strong sense of that process while they are doing their designs anyway, and are comfortable creating spaces for a limited group of specific people they know. But retail design is devoted first and foremost to the goods – clothes, shoes, cars, homewares, stationery, books, electronics, furniture... whatever – that the client is trying to sell. Whatever the designer inputs in terms of materials, display furniture, accessories or art, has to play backdrop to things that may be as lovely... or not. The whole game is in -getting the end-user to notice, not the shop, but the wares. Deference is part of retail design's DNA.

The corollary to this is brand knowledge. Retail design, now more than ever, has to evaluate, appreciate, know the essence of the brand it is designing for. Clients are obsessed with this, probably more than makes sense. But brand planning is of our age, and retail specialists have had to become experts on speaking the lingo of branding. If you are designing for Adidas or Armani, for Audi or Apple... you've got to get the core of those brands if the client's going to greenlight you. To neophytes, a Toyota is a lot like a Nissan, Jil Sander is similar to Prada. To the people who matter (the owners and buyers), they are night and day, and their retail venues had better show it. Woe betide the designer who doesn't at least say, let alone believe, that he or she has an acute understanding of the difference between one brand and the next, and more specifically, his client's brand and all the others.

Yet, once the contract's been signed, how hard can these projects actually be? Compared with the challenges of designing a Tai Tai's bedroom suite, or a Chairman's private meeting room, surely a mere shop is fairly straightforward? Surely.

Every square centimetre represents potential retail profit, so you have to maximise usage to nano-levels. But: customer comfort and flow is critical to increasing the time they spend in the shop, so you can't overcrowd them or let them bump into each other too much.

The whole exercise is devoted to bringing potential buyers together with objects for sale, so those objects have to be fully and immediately visible, requiring lighting and displays carefully planned for this. But: the goods also have to look their best, so over-lighting them can blanch everything out. They have to be lit like a beautiful woman's face: enough to see the beauty, not enough to see imperfections.

Everything in these spaces is basically for sale. But: exclusive brands play an implicit game of holding back, as if their goods are reserved for only deserving customers. This analogous duet of seduction must be embodied in what the designer creates; the scene of the romance between desirous buyer and alluring object of acquisition.

Retail competition is as ruthless as an Olympics, except it never stops. The designer has to put his client's business on the map and in the forefront. But: the design can't date too quickly, or compete with the product.

Get the picture? Moral of the story: respect successful retail designers more! When they are good, really good, they are masters of a very, very difficult activity. Consider this our annual ode to a branch of design that deserves our admiration, even as it costs everyone more money.



For its seventh store in the world, multi-brand luxury fashion emporium Villa Moda called upon internationally acclaimed Dutch design maverick Marcel Wanders to come up with the design purely because he hadn't done a retail space before. The fashion brand's founder, Sheikh Majed Al-Sabah, specifically sought out the furniture designer.

What he lacked in experience, though, Wanders clearly made up for with his creative flair. Located in the extravagant Moda Mall in Bahrain, the 1,050sq m store brilliantly captures the essence of the traditional 'souk' (marketplace). The brief was simple: to capture the chaos and buzz of the Middle Eastern souk within a luxury fashion context.

Local motifs and traditions were combined with Wanders' personal aesthetic. Wanders designed the store as if it were a small city; a lot of the elements have an architectural feel as customers move from one spot to another. The facade is covered with giant pearl-like spheres – a reference to Bahrain's heritage as the pearl stock market of the Middle East.

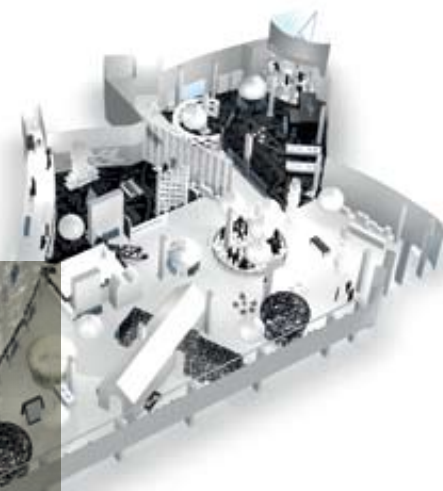
Wanders combined local motifs and traditions with his joyful aesthetic to develop an environment that has an Alice in Wonderland appeal. Colour tones comprise shades of silver, white, black and gold. Customers enter a long and narrow corridor that opens onto a high-ceilinged space that has mammoth patterns in black and white, on custom carpeting and overscale wallpaper. A giant sculptural flower pattern made in plaster greets you from behind the cash desk. Other special features include walls with Bisazza mosaics and custom-made carpets from Germany.

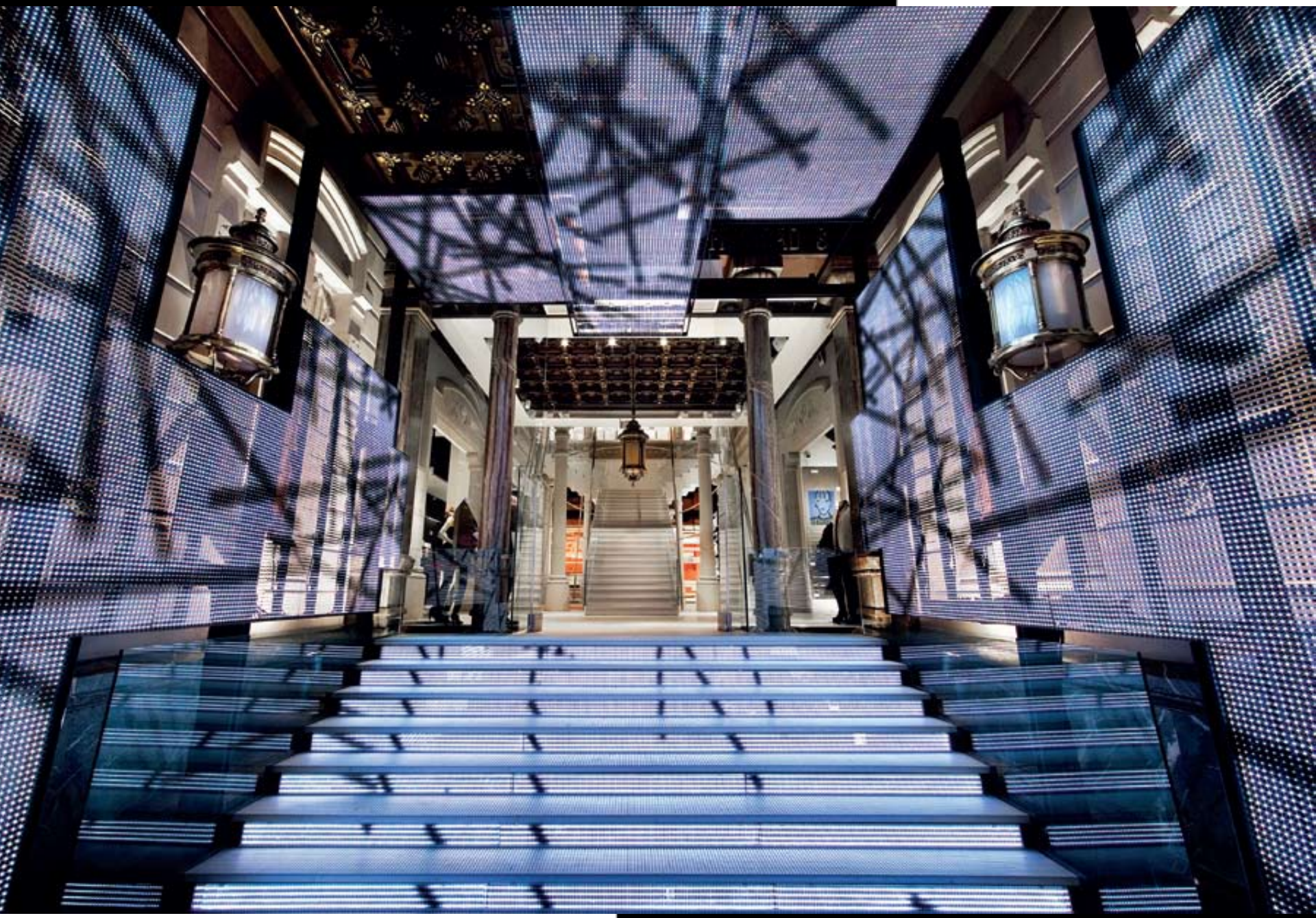
The design has now been nominated for the Conde Nast Traveller Innovation and Design Awards 2009, in the retail category.

## VILLA MODA STORE, BAHRAIN

Marcel Wanders Studio

Images courtesy of Marcel Wanders Studio





Barcelona's brand new H&M store is located in one of the most commercial streets in the city, Portal de l'Àngel. The building, which was once the head office of Catalana de Gas (now Gas Natural), is a vestige of the bourgeois architecture from the end of the 19th century, and features a genuinely old-fashioned staircase and a large empty space that reaches up into the dome.

Estudio Mariscal approached the project by trying to conciliate the 'old' with the 'new'. The result? A bourgeois, baroque style with modern, contemporary twists. A series of LED screens at the entrance provide an explosion of light, colour and movement. To respect the facade, only a small logo was placed at the entrance.

The contrast between old and new is highlighted, as the wooden display cabinets, chimneys and the original wooden dais have been preserved, sharing the space with the new metal furnishings. A central atrium emphasises the stairwell by casting a dome of natural light into the store. The staircase and the dome are two very important features of the alteration. This central atrium enhances communication between the floors and allows the natural light to pervade the interior. The cone is supposed to be a metaphor – a symbol of rising into the heights. A number of fake cacti, upholstered in colourful materials, are scattered around the new basement, giving it a quirky character and identity.



**H&M STORE, BARCELONA**  
 Estudio Mariscal  
 Photography by Rafael Vargas





## TOUCH SHOWROOM, LOS ANGELES

Studio Mousetrap

Located at the border of Mar Vista and Culver City in Los Angeles, Touch showcases a wide range of social and sustainable designs and accessories by its various designers from around the world. Among the highlights in this white-on-white store are Domingos Tótor's stunning vases and bowls, crafted from recycled cardboard; ceramics by Estúdio Manus; and bags and containers made with used milk cartons, by Portuguese design duo Blindesign.

The interior of the store, designed by LA's Studio Mousetrap, mirrors these sustainable designs. The designers opted for a clean and minimal setup, featuring light fixtures woven from recycled plastic wicker by Argentine designer Patricio Lix Klett, and stunning rugs made from recycled PET and other reused materials, by Brazilian Claudia Araujo.

The most noticeable thing about the store are the giant, semi-transparent, 7-foot-tall TOUCH letters on the front window. In a neighbourhood without much foot traffic, its function is to catch the motorists' eyes. While the letters are big and bold, the matte texture also gives them a certain elegance.

Stepping inside, one notices the space is essentially an odd-shaped shell, with white walls, sealed concrete floors and sandblasted, exposed wooden ceiling joists. The key elements within are the white platforms of various heights, which can be moved around easily. A 12-foot-long communal table made with locally manufactured reclaimed wood that stands to one side is ideal for meetings. A floating wall shelf that creates a continuous line of various heights is used to display smaller items on one side of the showroom, while an 8-foot-tall shelving divider breaks up the space and separates the display area from the office area.

Light sources were placed on tracks mounted above the joists, making them virtually invisible. Yet, they can be easily adjusted, providing curators much-needed flexibility.



## PATRICK COX SHOP, TOKYO

Sinato

Photography by Toshiyuki Yano

Japanese architect Chikara Ohno of the design firm Sinato has designed the interiors of the international luxury goods store Patrick Cox in Tokyo. The most arresting design aspect of this 79sq m store is its lighting.

Located in a 17-storey building in Tokyo's fashion-centric Aoyama district, the shop features mostly bags, leather goods and accessories. A series of pedestals lit by independent fixtures anchor the customers' focus on the products, while the rest of the shop is kept almost in the dark.

Ohno realised the products would look more striking if the light source shone from a much closer distance than the ceiling, hence he positioned each cylindrical steel pendant directly over the corresponding display pedestal. These fixtures provide most of the lighting for the space, without any lighting from the ceiling. As a result, this space creates a sense of "dark when viewed from above, and well-lit from below".

Patrick Cox has a circulation plan that takes its cue from a canopy of cylindrical volumes. Pathways in the shop seem to meander beneath a canopy formed by the largest of the drum shades. At the same time, these pendant fixtures cut the void and shape the space.





## ALBERTA FERRETTI FLAGSHIP STORE, LOS ANGELES

Sybarite

Photography by Jimmy Cohrsen



Lightness and transparency are the design pillars of this new Alberta Ferretti flagship store in West Hollywood. Sophisticated yet simple palettes of materials form the perfect backdrop to the designer's collection. The key design features of the 400sq m store are: the flexibility of the bespoke display system, the disciplined continuity of the palette and the skillful use of lighting to create an atmosphere that is sensual and ethereal.

A unique system of magnetic hangers and shelving, which can be placed freely against lacquered steel panels, provides the utmost flexibility for customers and staff alike. Composed of gloss lacquered fiberglass, these full-bust hangers bring the clothes to life, showing them in their natural and volumetric – rather than a limply two-dimensional – form. The freestanding elliptical rails are made from a new black stainless steel – a technique Sybarite developed especially for Alberta Ferretti. The 'V' profile of the rail disguises the hanger fixings and forms a crown under which the clothes appear to float freely. Lighting is used to optimum effect in this design. LED lights integrated into the steel rails direct attention to the hanging garments, accentuating texture, and literally highlighting the beauty and sensuality of the collection.

Sybarite's choice of materials is restrained and deliberate. The hard surfaces of Perspex, steel, concrete, plaster and fiberglass are all polished or lacquered, enhancing their reflective properties. The bespoke stainless steel rails in smoky black anchor the design, balancing the softly layered greys of the remaining colour palette. Clean and crisp, the polished plaster ceiling is unobtrusive, as the trench lighting seems to disappear into it. The design and palette are echoed in the exterior treatment, with a black stainless steel ribbon enveloping the facade, giving presence to a building that was previously a simple white box.



## UHA MIKAKUTO, SHANGHAI

GLAMOROUS

Photography by Nacasa & Partners Inc



What do you get if you mix elegance, charm and sophistication with lots of sugar? You get Uha Mikakuto. Here, Japanese design firm GLAMOROUS has upped the ante for the long-established sweets manufacturer, creating a concept for its 108sq m flagship sweets shop-showroom that aims to delight and indulge the senses even before customers step inside.

Located in a popular street intersection, the shop's exterior takes on an old-world charm, tempting passersby with its large, arched red brick windows. The sweets are displayed like precious gems in splendid colourful packaging.

Inside, the shop interiors resemble those of a European-style mansion; its classic-modern furnishings and golden brown colour palette softens the space while highlighting an experience of the luxury, class and affluence of a bygone era. The oversized lampshades act as light stands for the products. Their dominating presence is accessorised by two-toned crystals designed to represent candy and chocolates, while the smaller lamps, perched on shelves hung from the ceiling, add an element of mystery and intrigue as they appear to float in mid air.





In the words of Shirley Bassey, they're all girls need to 'please', 'stimulate' and 'tease'... And since diamonds are 'forever', it's only right the experience of shopping for a girl's best friend should be exciting and glamorous. Comprising a nine-storey building with a site measurement of 703sqm together with leased commercial space, Kuma decided to treat Tiffany's renovation as a work of architecture rather than a cosmetic renovation. The result demonstrates Kuma's ability to execute a sophisticated-looking design concept with precision.

Kuma started with the exterior, focussing his attention on an 80cm gap between the existing building and the site boundary. Echoing a carefully cut diamond, 292 panels made of glass and aluminium honeycomb were fitted to create the building's facade. Sandwiched by two sheets of laminated safety glass, each panel was anchored by four structural support legs and then installed at various angles in order to deflect and diffuse light like the facets of a diamond, creating an arresting change and relationship between the site and the Ginza streetscape.

For a diamond's value to be high, it must be clear, and this concept became the underlying idea behind the store's interior. To create soft light, and thereby make the space look tender and translucent, Kuma employed a number of exotic materials and details, among these a transparent security shutter made of reinforced safety glass and a light wall of stone from the Adriatic Sea that was sliced to a thin 4mm. Highly polished mica-like stone floor from Sichuan, a cloth wall with aluminium leaves covered in silk and a showcase made of platane, a precious natural wood from Platanus trees, add to the jewel-like feel by projecting iridescent patterns that create an ethereal, floating effect.

To express and execute the style and grace associated with a Tiffany flagship, Kuma provided a wide-scale structure that stretched from the first to the third floors. Specifically, this was achieved through the big atrium at the entrance, and the wall of stone and glass facing it, joining street and shop. A wide wall made of wood links the first and second floors while a brilliant chandelier sweeps the second floor and the lounge area on the third floor.



# TIFFANY GINZA, TOKYO

Kengo Kuma & Associates

Photography by Masao Nishikawa





## TOBY'S ESTATE, MELBOURNE

Guy Matthews



## HUIS CLOS CIDADE JARDIM, SAO PAULO

Studio Arthur Casas

Photography by Tuca Reinés



With three coffee outlets and a wholesale business already established in Sydney, Australian signature coffee maker Toby's Estate decided to introduce itself to Melbourne coffee lovers by blending both the wholesale and retail sides of its business.

Housed in an old factory that used to manufacture denim in the 1930s, Toby's gave designer and industrial antiques expert Guy Matthews carte blanche to create a versatile space that combined office, a warehouse for coffee and a small cafe within their 300sq m parameters.

Matthews decided to keep things raw and rustic, and created an aesthetic derived from historical Australian architecture. The concept is reminiscent of the Australian outback – be it the interiors of a woolshed, a coffee-roasting plantation or a workers canteen in an aircraft hangar. In fact much of the space reflects those sentiments. Matthews started by taking Toby's antique Turkish roaster and turned it into the focal point of the space. He then enhanced and surrounded it with design elements such as a 5x4m photo enlargement of vintage roasting machinery, which serves as an elegant and vivid reminder of the historic nature of the coffee industry. Other special features include a pair of site-specific artworks designed by Matthews to reflect the colour and texture of coffee. Matthews also blended other inspirations into the project, ranging from film and theatre right through to museum installations, sculpture gardens, metaphysical paintings and even demolition yards, giving the space a slightly glamorous twist.

Over 70 percent of the property was constructed using recycled and salvaged building materials, fixtures and fittings such as the corrugated zincalume which lines the walls and table bases along with a few shadow cabinets containing national memorabilia. In the cafe, one of the walls features a succession of timber-framed windows which allow natural light to stream in during Melbourne's mid-morning rush – and hopefully enlighten patrons on Toby's decidedly ethical coffee production process, from bean to cup.



This high-end fashion store is a minimalist response whereby the designer creates the perfect backdrop for the merchandise to speak for itself. Located within a high-end shopping mall, the store maintains exclusivity with its large, ivory door, which slides open to reveal the retail goodies inside. All surfaces are matte, and consist of simple layouts and geometric shapes. Shelving space is carved out of cubes with glow lighting to display products, while in the centre stacked-up wooden blocks display accessories or double as platforms for seating. Boxed lighting above mirrors the simple geometry used throughout the space.





**SHANGHAI DESIGN CENTER, SHANGHAI**  
 Studio Twist

Welcome to the not-so-humble abode of modern design in China. The client, a Shanghai-based furniture retailer dealing in high-end European brands, sought to push the boundaries of retail design by wanting not only to market and sell products, but to build a venue where culture, art, lifestyle and design fuse to become one single entity.

Studio Twist was given the shell of a 3,000sq m vacant factory in order to execute its client's ambitions, which became the perfect vehicle for breaking new ground in the design of furniture display. The venue being blessed with a five-metre high ceiling, Twist carved out space for the furniture showroom at ground level, and an events, exhibition, seminar and gatherings space on the second level, while the mezzanine level served as a design museum displaying work by modern masters such as Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright. Much deliberation went into what would be the best way to articulate each furniture collection's unique design qualities, branding and identity. The decision was to create a three-dimensional space by building multi-level platforms of various heights that would act as zones for each furniture brand. The raised platform strategy also served as a storage facility for the products, adding an extra 700sq m of space to the site.

The spatial makeup of SDC is as dynamic as it is aesthetically gratifying. A 9.5m vertical hall that begins at the entrance sets a grand scene. This is then met by a 'rising floor' clad in timber, which penetrates the building on its main axis and gives an overview of the showroom, allowing visitors to plot their own path around the premises. The platforms vary between 1.5 and 0.45m in height, demarcating each brand's zone while creating new opportunities for engagement between visitor and display at various angles and scales. The setup also creates opportunities for discovery and surprise as visitors come in and browse.

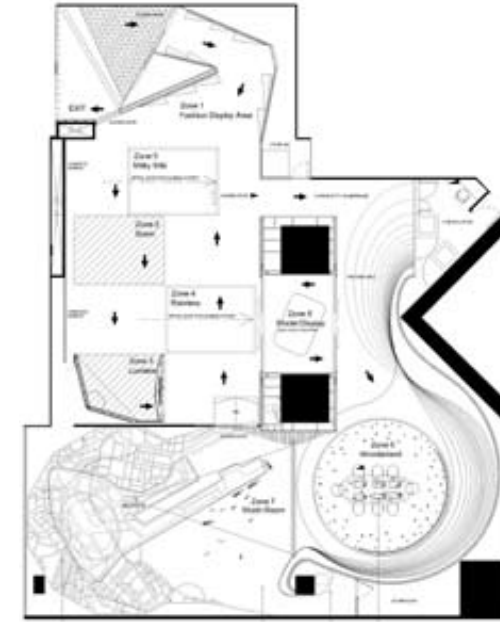
At the north-east side of the building Twist had the building's existing facade carefully removed to extend the interior area outdoors, forming a protruding box structure within the concrete columns. The enlarged space (reserved for a cafe) is also clad with the signature timber tiles merging the newly constructed area with the existing one. At the entrance, a 7m sheltered car dropoff is supported by an I-beam portal frame on one side, and cantilevered from a logo-signage wall on the other. This creates the backdrop to the lawn displaying a selection of outdoor furniture and sculpture pieces.







**MIKIKI, HONG KONG**  
Andy Tong Creations



Part of the retail experience projected to land at Hong Kong's old airport space, Mikiki is an effort to educate prospective tenants and attract young shoppers with a taste of things to come at Kai Tak Metropolis.

The show suite is split into four independent areas: Fashion Display, Mobile Shop Area, Wonderland and Mushroom. Andy Tong kept things light, playful and flexible at Fashion Display, using the simple design of a paper aeroplane as a platform to display products.

The Mobile Shop Area is further split into 'moving', themed stores, to display everything from perfume to pet gear. Deep colours, stained mirrors and grand lighting evoke the sensuality behind perfume, while the walls come to life with all the products in full glow at Lumiere. A similar concept is adopted at Milky Miki where bars of chocolate surround visitors to sweeten the offerings on display.

A Rococo-style mural dominates the entrance to Wonderland, a resting spot with a table and delicate tableware that mixes up the interactive experience. Things ultimately turn futuristic at Mushroom, where visitors are invited to take a look at the development plans of Kai Tak Metropolis. Scenes of the site are recreated along with a large scale-model of Mikiki introducing a shopping concept with a new look and approach for the future.





**ARTEMIDE, TAIWAN**  
Croxx International

Mindful of lighting specialist Artemide's philosophy – that light should be a source of pleasure and comfort, both physically and mentally – Croxx International decided to base its design of this store on the uplifting concept of sunlight breaking through the clouds.

To achieve this within the two-level site (the first floor measuring 44sq m and the second 95sq m), Croxx used fibre-reinforced polymer to build a lightweight freeform piece that stretches from ceiling to walls, engulfing the entire site in white. On the first level, the FRP is pulled and moulded to also form the shop's reception desk. The lamps then descend from above, 'breaking' out of the FRP cloud like rays of sunlight. The huge sculptural composition was given a lick of glossy paint, lending it a surface that reflects light and enlarges the space. Black mirror and glass, along with homogenous tiles on the floor, compose the rest of this project's simple material palette. Despite the somewhat archaic, romantic origins of its design concept, Artemide's Taiwan flagship also evinces a quasi-futuristic look (the interior of a UFO, perhaps?), with its glossy, curvaceous surfaces and floor-to-ceiling glass windows clearly marking out the brand as a leader in contemporary lighting design.



**PEUGEOT STORE, PERU**  
Metropolis

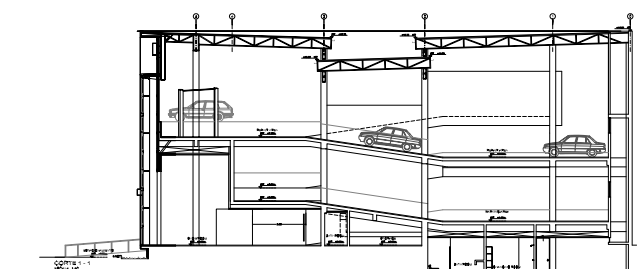
Photography by Elsa Ramirez

With rival automobile showrooms in the neighbourhood, Brailard couldn't let its Peugeot cars be parked in an ordinary lot. The existing site consisted of a showroom and auto repair shop over four levels. So, faced with limited space and the high standards of a French firm, Metropolis had to look for creative solutions to realise their demands.

The showroom is the first space to greet visitors. This idea, inherently logical, was effected to introduce the company's new merchandise to customers before they proceeded to the auto repair shop above via a series of consecutive ramps. Metropolis elevated the showroom space to the first level in order to provide a better view from outside of the cars above.

A 15m-high facade was erected at the workshop on the upper levels, concealing the repair area whilst boosting the brand's image using Brailard's corporate colour, blue, which stands out boldly from the building's light concrete grey frame.

The 'brilliance' of this simple design comes to life at night as lateral blue strips of fluorescent lighting, exposed over the glass facade, are switched on. An eye-catching indigo washes over the building, creating not only a showroom that effectively displays its merchandise, but also a site that actively engages the surrounding landscape and has unsurprisingly become an icon in the area and among its competitors.





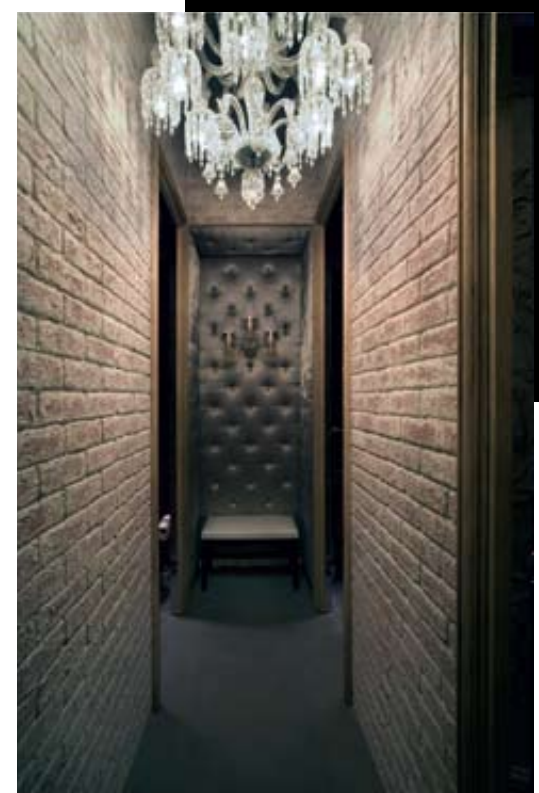
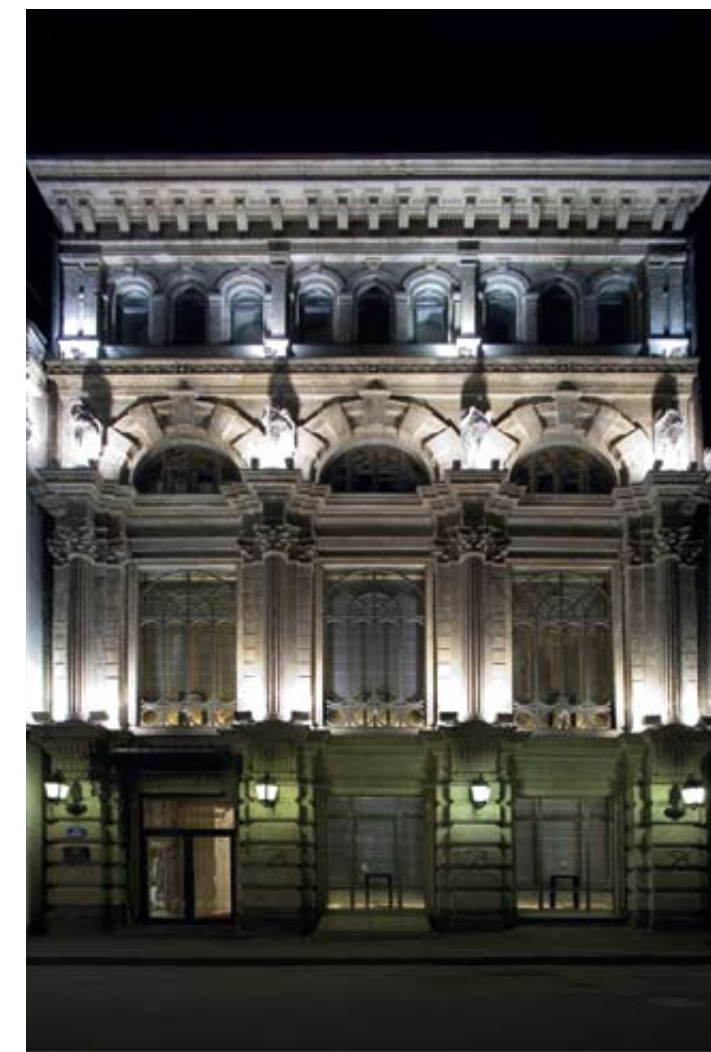
**MAISON BACCARAT, MOSCOW**  
Philippe Starck

If bling is your thing (and you're into Russian snow queens with chiselled features and white fur coats) then you've come knocking at the right palace... A crystal palace by none other than Philippe Starck. The Frenchman has taken the luxury, grandeur and the world of illusion associated with the brand and conjured a palace where, he says, "everything is possible".

Inspired by the sparkle from a facet of intricately-cut crystal, Maison Baccarat looks a bit like a movie set - you enter an aristocratic world with contrasts highlighted by the excess of magnificent chandeliers against the crude concrete of the boutique's walls.

The ground floor, christened Home, houses Baccarat's decoration, jewellery and accessories boutique along with its lighting and watch collections. Large thrones, long marble-top banquet tables and ornate candelabra remind us of a bygone era, or as the crystal-maker describes it, the sight is reminiscent of a scene from Alice in Wonderland. Boutiques One, Two and Three reflect similar sentiments. The Cristal Room Baccarat, which also serves lunch and dinner, is testament to that feeling. Starck has preserved the original elegance of the palace, while toning it down with more modern furnishings.

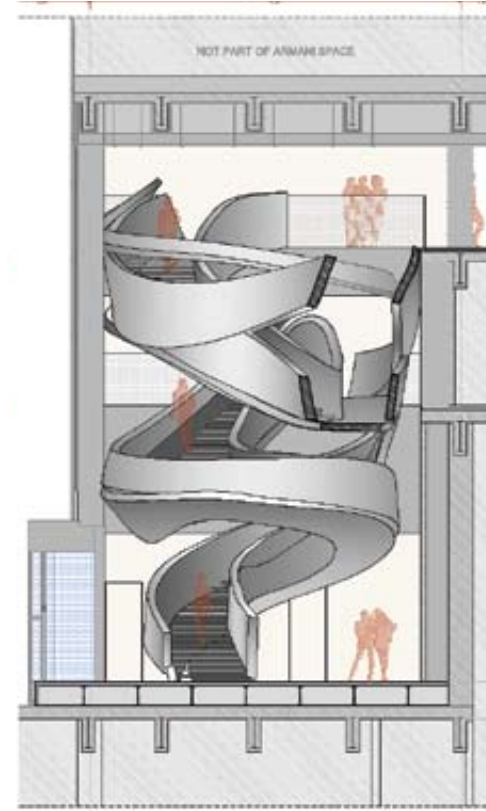
Fairytale or not, the project evidently stays clear of garishness, and has upped the ante with the sophistication of the brand it represents (even with its imposing mirrors and giant, lit table with crystal base). Art Deco being all the rage these days, the aesthetic is no stranger to this city. Now, don't we all want to fall down the rabbit hole and into this palace of illusions?





**ARMANI, 5TH AVENUE, NEW YORK**  
 Doriana & Massimiliano Fuksas

Photography by Ramon Prat



Spread over four floors, this 4,000sq m flagship comprising retail, bar and restaurant completes the Armani trilogy, together with its two sister flagships in Hong Kong and Tokyo. Uber mod to the core, beginning with its clear glass-clad exterior, the store was conceived by Fuksas as one, single fluid space, bound by a vortex-like staircase which snakes across the store like a white rollercoaster. The staircase, made in Italy, was built using rolled calendar steel and clad in plastic material, breathing life into this mammoth sculpture which defies conventional geometric shape and form. The randomness of the zig-zagging actually leads to the upper floors, which open out into a changing pattern of curved surfaces that add visual interest to the light-putty-coloured walls.

As with its sister stores, the palette for Armani Fifth Avenue is pure and subdued – beige for walls, black for floors and ceiling, and metal for the shiny, glossy look – but the quiet atmosphere aims to suggest movement, with special attention to lighting, which accentuates the curvature of walls, spaces and merchandise. The products get more refined and exclusive the farther up one travels... But who said getting to the top was ever easy?





# THE SHANGHAI HOME OF ALFRED DUNHILL VACHERON CONSTANTIN MANSION

Kokaistudios

Photography by Richemont Group, courtesy of Kokaistudios

The concept here was somewhat unique: to combine two separate retail brands plus a private club and art gallery in twin historical villas set back from Huai Hai Lu, Shanghai's answer to the Champs Elysees. Dunhill and Vacheron Constantin each occupy a villa and are internally linked. Kee sits on the third and fourth floors, spanning both, while the art gallery is behind the villas, in a newer structure. The villas are designed as a private home – one that just happens to contain artfully arranged objects of enormous worth. Intentionally, it is difficult to see where original details merge with new retro ones, and the thorough blending of architectural materials and ornament is convincing.

The site, a protected historical heritage of Shanghai, covers an area of 4,200sq m. Kokaistudios was responsible for the restoration of the original surfaces, while at the same time preserving the originality of the villas, including the old steel windows, wooden floors, ceilings, staircases and original decorations. The historical villas house two flagship boutiques that were completely custom-designed – the Vacheron Constantin Maison in the east villa and the Shanghai Home of Alfred Dunhill in the west villa. On the third and fourth floors is Kee Club, a private wining-and-dining members' club from Hong Kong.

The mansion's exterior stucco was finished in the colour of ivory to copy the original 30s Shanghai technique of using elastic plaster finishes in response to the city's humid conditions. Local Chinese carpenters and craftsmen were commissioned to custom-make all the furniture in this project. Materials selected were in harmony with the villas, including brass with customised coatings, cream Italian leather of the finest quality and ebonised Chinese walnut, all configured to resemble the traditional Shanghai style of displaying tables and sofas.

To match the spirit of the villas, a unique collection of old paintings and objects were displayed as a wall design to match the products of Vacheron Constantin. Filippo Gabbiani, chief architect of Kokaistudios, designed a series of chandeliers and lamps inspired by the villas' black-and-white style of the 30s. The glass of the lightings was made using the original medieval techniques the Gabbiani family had in Venice – completely mouth-blown, handmade and hand-carved – to reach the highest level of lightness.

Outside, a system of messy concrete structures was reconverted to create an airy space all around the villas, which in turn was re-designed so that light could flow freely within the space through the large glass windows. On the north side of the villas, Kokaistudios installed a peaceful space for the art gallery, where an outstanding and refined composition of marbles reflected the daylight into the outside water feature.

Particular attention was given to the design of the mansion entrance, where an overhanging modern canopy finished in brass invited guests to enter. The entire mansion was made with an elegant combination of cement, brass and oak wood in a modern and contemporary way. The custom-made furniture, fitted within a functional and elegantly designed interior, matches the minimal palette of materials and colours on the outside, creating a harmonic cohesiveness that flows throughout the twin villas.



# Designing for Shopping: From the Experts' Mouths

**When Panorama is commissioned for a retail project, how do you get started?**  
We'll go through a research phase before the concept generation (be it a new brand or an existing re-brand). This will normally include:

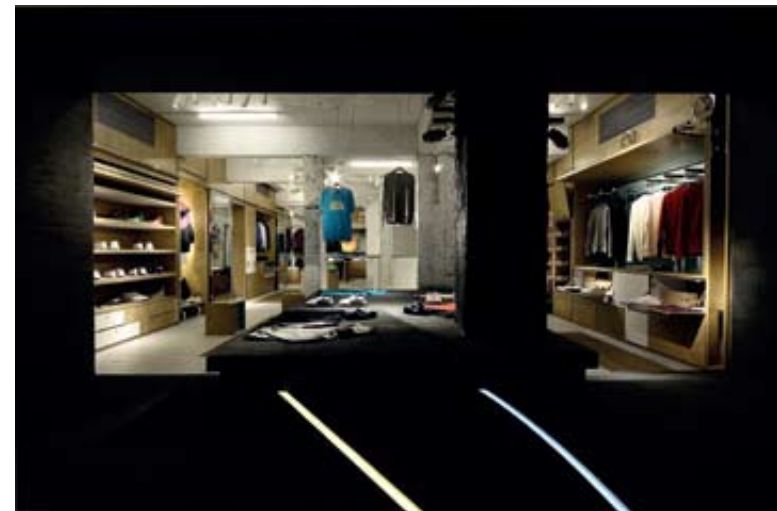
- Research on the company's history and culture / vision
- User research on their expectations / buying behavior / loves and hates
- Market research on existing competitors with the same positioning

**What role does brand image play in retail design? How high does it factor into the overall design?**  
I'd substitute brand "identity" for brand "image" as the most important element that needs to be well defined on the first day, as the former will not easily change but the latter could change from time to time (according to trends). We should produce a design scheme that fits the specific brand (like a person) which can reflect and relate its unique personality to the target customers, ie "brand association".

**What are the challenges associated with retail design projects?**  
The challenge is that the designer needs to understand the branding strategies of the client or their marketing consultant. We also need to speak the language of business apart from traditional aesthetic / functional areas in order to establish trust with the client and let them know that new business value will be created for them through strategic design.  
Also, more and more retail clients are asking for "total branding solutions" (SI + CI services) in one go, especially projects in mainland China. So we've recently set up a graphic team as well.

**What are the rewards?**  
The reward is the high exposure of the project, as it is a public space: huge numbers of customers will be using it and come to know about it.

**Other retail thoughts...**  
Good retail design = appropriate branding strategy + unique shopping experience.



## Colin Chan, Pan Yu – Side Architects

**When Side Architects is commissioned for a retail project, how do you get started?**  
We would explore the philosophy behind the retail brand/shop as a clue to develop a design concept for it. A strong design concept always gives a "punch" to the audience, especially with projects which are widely exposed to the public. A study of the client's products will then follow, which provides another clue for the best way to design the display method.

**What role does brand image play in retail design? How high does it factor into the overall design?**  
A successful brand image inevitably attracts an audience better by its reputation and attracts more visitors into the shop as a chain reaction. The interior design should work mutually with the brand image, as they can benefit from each other. Sometimes a brand image can be established with a stunning interior design.

**What are the challenges particular to retail design projects?**  
Time is always the most crucial factor for retail design projects compared with other types, as they always bear the high rental burden. Hence, clients keep the design and construction process to a minimum. The challenge is in squeezing out your ideas and skills in no time.

**What are the rewards?**  
A widely exposed portfolio. It's always fun to see how people experience/criticise the completed projects.

## Horace Pan – Panorama



## Shirley Chang – Chang Bene Design

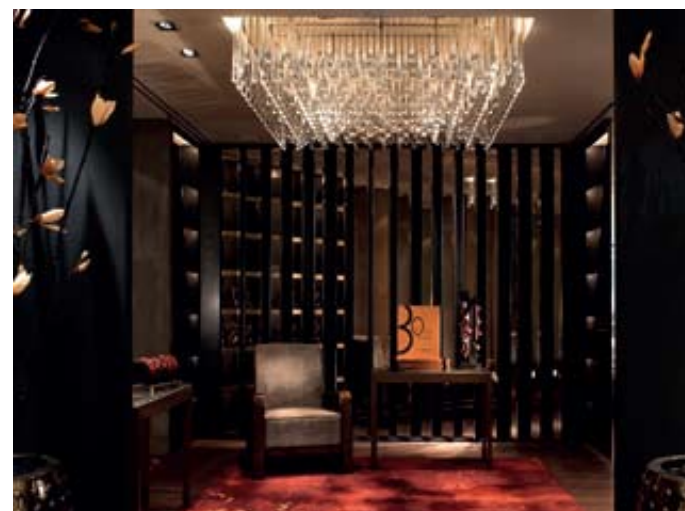
**When Chang Bene Design is commissioned for a retail project, how do you get started?**  
We begin with a narrative, similar to a story but still abstract at the beginning. This narrative can be text and/or images, and it has to relate to the essence of the product.

**What role does brand image play in retail design? How high does it factor into the overall design?**  
Brand image is an expression of the essence of the product; it is a very focussed way of looking at things.

**What are the challenges associated with retail design projects?**  
You have to do things that stand out among other retail businesses; it has to be somewhat unique, entertaining, seductive and irresistible.

**What are the rewards?**  
The rewards usually go to the owner company, and us as well when we are recognised for our work.

**Other comments...**  
The important thing is that the clients have to be very clear about what they are selling!  
Usually, their brief is too complicated, too many ingredients but none of them stand out...  
We try to get them to distil their thoughts into one simple sentence.



## Samuele Martelli – Oobiq

**When you are commissioned for a retail project, how do you get started?**  
The most important point at the beginning of a project is not related to the design, but to the communication. I think this is valid for all projects, but for retail it is even more important. A brand comes to us because they need a space to sell products, so this space is going to tell a story: it is the philosophy of the brand, the quality and the outlook they need for themselves, to create the most appropriate space. So the client has to communicate to us their feelings, who they are and what they want. Sometimes a client will tell us "just do what you want" and honestly we don't feel comfortable at all when that happens. Projects are for clients, not for designers themselves!

In retail projects communication always starts with brand positioning, checking competitors' images, and then we go inside knowing more about the philosophy of the brand and the image they want to show customers. When you sit around a table with a coffee – or tea if you are in China – it is the most important moment.  
Then, per the brainstorming we try to develop a concept. Sometimes we just start from a word or an object, or maybe from a feeling, and we try to go from the idea to a 3D space. Then we show the concept to the client and do some more brainstorming. There are no rules in this process. Design is not something you can foresee.

**What role does brand image play in retail design? How high does it factor into the overall design?**  
A lot, I would say. The brand image is not given only by the products, but also by the retail space. The "box and what is inside this box" have to both play the same game. What is hard for us is when a brand asks for a retail image but it really doesn't have a clear brand image. Luckily this is happening less and less, but sometimes it still does. There are brands that may be inexperienced ask for retail design, but they don't really know what they are looking for. I think in Asia, compared with the huge number of brands we have here, the role of the brand consultant is not that developed, or clear enough.  
Here's an example: a few months ago a Chinese company asked us for an image for their fashion shops. A must for the client was a luxurious feeling, with precious materials. To give us an idea, they showed us pictures of well-known, high-class Italian brands. The point was that their products had an average price aimed mainly at young girls with not a lot of money. We immediately told them that a luxury image of the shops would have scared the potential clients away; that they would think the clothes had higher prices. It took weeks to let them understand this, but in the end they got it... Even if a lot of companies in Asia are surprisingly advanced, others still don't know anything about brand image and they need to work with consultants before developing too fast.  
But that's the point: the retail market in Asia is that fast...

**What are the challenges associated with retail design projects?**  
The challenges are related basically to clients that are always more demanding, as they know more, they travel a lot, they know perfectly the market so they know what they want. I am working mainly in China, with Chinese fashion brands and I have to say that a lot of them could be perfectly compared with European ones in terms of fashion designers – even because they are working mainly with Italian or French fashion designers – and in terms of retails. So this makes everyday life always harder. This is related to the design part.  
I have to say that what is challenging in China is also the ability to reach quality. The scheduled time for the construction is always so short that often there is a lack of quality. In our daily routine we always "fight", trying to compromise on a good design, the budget, the construction time, costs and quality. That's a great challenge and really hard to deal with for designers who are working in China for the first time. The experience in retail is a key point.

**What are the rewards?**  
I think the best reward is when you know from the client that their business is increasing after we changed the image of their shops. It means it was a good job, not only in terms of pure design, but it means we understood each other and the relationship of product-shop is working perfectly.  
And you feel really proud when somebody calls you because they hear about the good job you did for somebody else...