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THE LANDSCAPE **OF DESIGN**

Go inside and out exploring the elements of experiential design

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Clarges Mayfair by Squire & Partners ©JulianAbrams

THE EVOLUTION OF **RETAIL DESIGN**

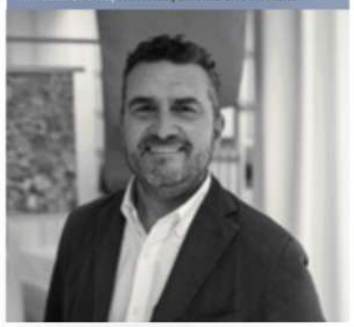
A trio of architects discuss the re-energised retail sector, reflecting on how they are evolving with customer shopping behaviours and creating seamless experiential spaces.

The retail space has seen a post-pandemic surge of energy; and for physical retail, placing the customer experience at the forefront has never been more important - there's no avoiding it.

From local shops and pop-ups to department stores and shopping centres, retailers and brands are reimagining the customer shopping experience; they are seeking out fresh and exciting ways to increase engagement, which then translates into sales.

Good retail design is key in supporting the customer journey from experience to transaction. Integrating the latest technologies and an element of sustainability ensures that the brand remains relevant and the customer receives an elevated shopping experience, which keeps them coming back.
With a noticeable shift in the industry in recent years, how are architects now working with retail clients to create spaces that enrich the customer experience and cultivate their loyalty? Here, three accomplished architects discuss.

TIM GLEDSTONE, PARTNER, SQUIRE & PARTNERS



As we navigate the post-pandemic landscape, the retail sector faces an exciting yet challenging opportunity to continue redefining itself. At Squire & Partners, our retail design approach is grounded in enriching customer experiences and cultivating loyalty. Drawing on projects with brands including Reiss, Brooks Brothers, Linda Farrow, Maria Luisa and Brixton Brewery – as well as prime retail in mixed use developments like Lancer Square off Kensington High Street, and the former King's Place Shopping Centre, now One Twenty King's Road – physical stores must offer a unique, interactive and experiential alternative, way, way beyond online shopping.
In this next era, retailers must prioritise design, authenticity, uniqueness and storytelling, whilst amplifying the origins of retail and how their forefathers operated, in order to discover the future. At Squire & Partners we work with retail clients to create spaces that enrich the customer experience by:

Linda Farrow shop by Squire & Partners ©JamesJones

Integrating F&B Offerings - Incorporating F&B into retail spaces promotes dwell time and facilitates events beyond traditional shopping hours. By offering customers a place to relax and socialise, stores become more than shopping destinations, they transform into community hubs, for example Brixton Market and Dover Street Market in London.
Personal Shopping and Consumer Relationships - Personalised service is central to the modern retail experience. Utilising detailed consumer information, we design spaces in which brands can create personalised shopping experiences that build strong, lasting relationships with their customers.
Human-Centred Shopping Experience - Designing with the customer in mind means creating environments that are both welcoming and functional. Balancing personal space within communal areas ensures customers feel comfortable and safe. By focusing on the human experience, shops enhance consumer satisfaction and the quality of service provided by in-store staff.
Reimagining Store Layouts - There should be a greater emphasis on personal space, which calls for innovative store layouts. We advocate for larger changing facilities to enhance comfort and reduce stockroom sizes to maximise floor space. This shift improves the shopping experience but also aligns with the growing trend of using physical stores as showrooms where customers can experience products.
Food Halls and Experiential Spaces - Food halls present a unique regeneration opportunity. By incorporating tastings, workshops, and other interactive events, retailers can create experiences that attract crowds. Experiences make shopping more memorable, encouraging customers to return.
Breaking the Barrier - Street takeovers with pop-ups or installations give an external presence which invites shoppers to engage and interact, drawing them into the store with activations that create more excitement than a manikin display.
Rooms for Shopping Parties - Incorporating private rooms for shopping parties adds a new dimension to the retail experience. These spaces can be used for events, shows, or exclusive launches, providing a setting for brand engagement.
Extended Opening Hours - Adapting to new consumer behaviours means extending opening hours to accommodate evening retail and events. This flexibility caters to different lifestyles.
Blurring Sector Boundaries - The future of retail lies in blurred boundaries between sectors. Our projects, like our HQ The Department Store and The Department Store Studios, demonstrate the potential of hybrid spaces that combine retail, office, F&B, and event functions. One Twenty King's Road is another example of a project with a blend of uses including workspace, leisure and retail - extending the lifestyle offer on the King's Road. These multifaceted environments attract a broader audience and keep spaces active around the clock.
Multi-Generational Shopping - Bringing together a wide range of offers aimed at different ages and groups creates a diverse shopping experience. Look to the Harlem Haberdashery in New York, where limited edition spirits are served alongside high-end fashion and pieces by emerging local designers. Retailers can position vintage apparel alongside vinyl records and the latest teen wear, bringing different consumer groups together.
At Squire & Partners, we are committed to designing retail spaces that are not just transactional but experiential. By integrating technology, sustainability, and innovative design, we ensure that brands remain relevant and customers receive an elevated shopping experience. This holistic approach to retail design not only enriches the customer journey but fosters loyalty and drives success in the post-pandemic world.

www.squireandpartners.com
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Harrods Lux Accessories by Virgile + Partners

EWALD DAMEN, CREATIVE DIRECTOR AND MANAGING PARTNER, VIRGILE + PARTNERS

The retail landscape has seen interesting shifts in the last few decades, transforming stores from mere product displays to immersive brand experiences. Price and quality-driven marketing has been replaced with more involved branding. This has been influenced by digital technology, with e-commerce and social media giving a whole new dimension to retail.

Retail briefs have evolved over the years because of this. Although the focus is still product driven, we see a lot more attention around how customers interact with the store environment itself. Consumers now desire a more expressive design that creates a stronger connection with the brand. For instance, luxury stores now feature unique, expressive designs rather than uniform aesthetics. Think Gucci, Burberry and Louis Vuitton. We have become more conscious of embedding a strong identity as an overarching design language. Our department store projects need to compete with increasingly stronger branded boutiques and set out a distinctive personality through style and materiality, making it a part of its core brand. Our work with Harrods has more classic elements, in comparison to the quite eclectic and contemporary style for Harvey Nichols, or a distinctive Art-Deco reference for Blooomingdale's as part of their brand DNA.

True brand loyalty goes beyond the bricks and mortar environment. Brands can now connect with their customers well before they enter the physical store. Social media, loyalty apps, and other digital channels deliver tailored messages, raising expectations for personalised store experiences, product selections, and bespoke service levels. Retail environments must integrate these elements into their design and user experience, blending personal and digital interactions.

Cultural awareness, social and environmental responsibility have also become crucial for brands to integrate into all aspects of their business. including retail environments and staff engagement. Sustainability and repurposing are now demanded by the brand's audience, driving the brand to be serious about implementation. Not only for choice of sustainable materials and energy efficiency, but consideration of the longevity of the store and how it's constructed and later dismantled. We even suggested recycling bins in certain projects where customers can return their clothes after use.

We've also seen a shift towards culturally nuanced design in retail. While global rollouts once relied on standardised design manuals, brands are adopting localised approaches to embed themselves into a culture and resonate with diverse audiences. This trend includes selecting unique locations beyond the traditional high street, often repurposing iconic buildings that have a strong cultural significance. For example, Apple has renovated difficult spaces such as iconic bank buildings into beautiful stores, and Nike by Melrose used data of the local community to shape the retail environment.

Moreover, retail environments must be highly adaptable. Innovative full-store takeovers, pop-ups, and thematic campaigns are popular installations that have bridged the physical and digital realms. They create experiences that enhance brand loyalty and customer engagement. The complex and evolving retail landscape significantly influences our store design approach at Virgile and Partners, ensuring we continue to create spaces that remain relevant and compelling.

www.virgileandpartners.com

LEE ROBERTS, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, ZEBRA

Our entrepreneurial spirit and creativity is what fuels us here at Zebra and what has enabled the firm to grow to the successful global business it is today, a quarter of a decade after it was founded. At the heart of the evolution of retail design is an overall emphasis on spaces that enrich the customer journey and foster loyalty. Context is everything when creating that unique customer experience. The spatial flow and orientation of that journey are key to create unique vistas and sensory touchpoints as the customer moves through the environment. This ensures that every aspect of the space contributes to an immersive and memorable time in-store. As we work across all markets, it's also important to recognise and design around cultural nuances and consumer behaviour, that can often flex depending on geography.

One fundamental it's essential to capture in the design process is authentically preserving a brand's heritage. Too often this gets overlooked in an all-conquering quest for a modern aesthetic. Capturing that essence of a brand's history and values is crucial in designing spaces that resonate with customers on a deeper level. We transform spaces around the world and while there is common ground with clients, you can never underestimate local knowledge and appreciation of cultural difference, something we aim to do in every project we work on.

Reflecting the Individuality of the brand through our design approach is fundamental: representing their core values, through product technology, brand initiatives, aesthetics, speed to market and customer accessibility. As designers, we must seamlessly integrate and reflect all of these elements into each client's retail presence, creating a consistent experience for the customer, helping to differentiate brands, which often operate in highly competitive markets.

Going on to consider design details, neutral material palettes are becoming more and more relevant in our work. These allow the product and digital elements of the brand to be the focus and in this way our design work supports customer loyalty and satisfaction, rather than just making a bold statement for the sake of it.

This palette must also focus on sustainable values, that's why material selection is so important. Thankfully, we see a much larger variety of cost effective solutions that contribute towards tackling climate change on the market these days, with much greater transparency on the product's life cycle from raw materials to end of life. This not only supports our responsibility and that of our clients towards creating a better planet, but also aligns with the growing consumer demand for sustainable practices.

Finally, understanding human connections is central to what we've always done and what we'll continue to do in the future. Thinking in this way shapes the environments we create across retail, hospitality, and beyond. That's why we encourage the brands we work with to consider an omni channel solution. This is key to create personalisation to the customer at any given touch point or interaction with the brand, whether that be by a mobile device or physical space. The offer must be coherent, connected and personal so that customers receive a unified and tailored experience, reinforcing their connection to the brand.

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NEOM store by Zebra