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LIFE STYLE

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Designing In-Person Experiences for Luxury Retail Brands

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What is the best way to create luxury retail settings, workplaces and other branded environments to achieve elevated and memorable luxury experiences?

In the retail world, among the most important aspects of in-person experiences for luxury brands is that they should be singular and unparalleled. Working with fashion leaders such as Aston Martin, Chanel, Michael Kors and Versace, a few valuable themes and lessons emerge in best-in-class experiential luxury retail.

First, luxury retail store design must reliably tell the brand story and, in many cases, an associated product story. It speaks to visitors and customers through a system of visual cues, environmental graphics and displays, pure interior design and architectural solutions — not just through texts and audio-visual systems or product presentation. They can be enhanced through the use of immersive and interactive digital experiences, but those virtual elements cannot create a luxury experience alone. The physical, the sensory and even the olfactory and tactile results — and the integration of a perfect human intervention in the customer experience — are all essential to success.



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Second, these touchpoints and retail elements must work together seamlessly in a focused effort to tell the brand story. Nothing is tangential if it is part of the communication of the brand's value and promise. Retail design firms tend to focus on classic elements of visual merchandising and store design: Signage and advertising, color palettes, and interior décor emphasizing fixturing — the shelves and hanging displays, thematic window presentations — and interactive storefronts that speak to passersby after hours.

Instead, luxury retail is an omnichannel experience that conjures dreams as much as it focuses buyer attention. It separates us from everyday reality as much as it puts us in touch with a better, greater universe where everything seems poised, compelling and wondrous.

Third, forget what you think you know about retail design and architecture in the luxury and ultra-luxury retail realms. It is not necessarily about luxe, or minimalism, or comfort or even “aspiration.” Today's mindset for luxury purchases is about fit — how an environment seems clearly tailored and customized for an experience to emerge. It's about wellness, psychological and physical, personal and global, including an idea of how good health is not only possible in a world of high-ticket-item consumption, but it is the most desirable path. It also reaches to the complexity and diversity we see in the world, including ideas about how both exotic and local elements alike can be brought into our lives to enrich and soothe us.

Taken together, these aspects of luxury retail design work to express rather than to educate, though they do both. The luxury brand opens a world through its retail platform that shows customers how to live, as Frank Lloyd Wright would say, or reaffirms that how the customers are living and choosing is exactly right.

For luxury retail design outcomes, think simple. And think serene. But imply a supporting universe of great ideas, of history and legacy, of craft and handcraft, and of technology and digital tools. Bring in the sun, where possible, but with care — tune the environment with controls and proper physics natural illumination .





Looking at interiors and materials, you must be specifying the best finishes and furnishings, yet emphasizing natural materials and silhouettes that are clean, minimal and composed. A Zenlike sense of purpose and simplicity means more than clean and uncluttered – it means everything is anticipated, built-in and used as intended. Presented inventory varies indirectly with price – just show a few of the best, the most desirable, the classics and and the newcomers most closely identified with the brand.

Environmental graphics, such as signage, should be helpful and well placed though often much smaller and more discrete than expected. The benefits of good lighting are essential to success, so work with the architect and lighting design team with intentionality.

Make your people work with the experience. Training, dress, bearing and knowledge are the key aspects to cultivate and nurture as part of the retail experience. Some design firms create branded apparel or provide cut sheets for garments along with the full package of integrated architecture, interiors, environmental graphics and technology enhancements.

With more and more shoppers turning to online sources, the importance of effective in-person experience makes luxury retail today even more appealing. Luxury retail design motivates individuals and groups, bringing likeminded shoppers back into brick-and-mortar stores and acting often as a standalone marketing tool. On their phones or back at their computers, these experience-filled

shoppers are reminiscing the feelings that welled up inside them while immersing in the physical luxe location.



Serene, simple, comfortable and relevant? That's how a customer should feel after exploring the luxury retail world, setting them up for more connection and more investment in your business location and brand.

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