



Photo courtesy of Aēsop

# Down Under All Over

**WITH** over 90 'signature stores' in 12 countries – each individually conceived and designed in collaboration with local studios – Aēsop treads a singular path through the maze of 21<sup>st</sup>-century retail. The cosmetic company's brand-new Bibliotekstan outlet in Stockholm, designed by In Praise of Shadows, is its first signature store in Scandinavia.

'They [Fredric Benesch and Katarina Lundeberg of In Praise of Shadows] came to us with a handmade A5 book,' says Jean-Philippe Bonnefoi, Aēsop EU design coordinator. 'The design, typography and quality of the paper immediately resonated with us.' Based in Paris, Bonnefoi has overseen delivery of six completed outlets across Europe and has seven openings in the pipeline. Each time, he says, the process begins with coffee and conversation. 'We try to stir intellectual processes that will lead to creative associations.' The next step is the assembly of a collage comprising images, colours and textures that reflect the city where the project is taking place. This collage remains a reference point throughout the entire development of the design.

For the Bibliotekstan site, Bonnefoi, Benesch and Lundeberg discussed a number of Scandinavian signifiers – from the darkness of

Lars von Trier films to a portrait of Liv Ullmann by Ingmar Bergman. The former influenced the designers' vision of the sales counter, with its strikingly rough-hewn appearance. 'It is not a coincidence,' says Bonnefoi, 'that [Swedish artist] Lies-Marie Hoffmann used a chainsaw to give the vertical surfaces a raw finish.' The use of copper, cream-coloured gypsum and Dinesen HeartOak can be traced directly to the palette of the Ullmann portrait.

Describing a store as an opportunity to add something of merit to the streetscape, Bonnefoi works closely with the designers of each project, while remaining in constant contact with staff at Aēsop's head office in Melbourne. It is a process he sees as both organic and highly structured. As with all the company's retail projects, Bonnefoi and others from Aēsop's Paris office visited Stockholm regularly in the months prior to the opening, monitoring the design and construction stages, sharing meals with those involved and solidifying the partnership with Benesch and Lundeberg. 'Our approach makes us demanding clients at times, but we are great supporters of the architects with whom we work.' X

**Aēsop EU design  
coordinator  
Jean-Philippe Bonnefoi  
provides an insight  
into his work  
with the Australian  
retail brand.**

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