



NEW KIT ON THE BLOCK

Canadian retailer Kit and Ace expands its fashionable and functional clothing stores to New York and beyond

By ERIN M. LOEWE

Photos by THOMAS STORY (unless otherwise noted)



“Athleisure”

wear is a relatively new concept, and its explosive growth over the past few years shows no signs of abating. However, while many people prefer to live in their yoga pants, a comfortable, more sophisticated alternative may soon get their attention.

Enter Kit and Ace, a new and growing Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada-based retailer co-created by Shannon and JJ Wilson, the wife and son of lululemon Founder Chip Wilson. Shannon and JJ are merging their knowledge of textiles and retail to offer “technical fabrics”—most notably their trademarked cashmere blend called Qemir—that are comfortable, durable and fashionable.

What started as a concept store beneath the Kit and Ace offices in Vancouver in July 2014 is poised for quick international expansion. The new single-story, 1,851-sq.-ft. store in New York’s trendy Nolita neighborhood is considered a flagship for the brand, upon which many new store designs will be based. Kit and Ace has been opening an average of one store per week since the Nolita store opening last November.

To create a store with a sleek, urban aesthetic that was easily transferrable, Kit and Ace partnered with Vancouver-based Evoke International Design and Burlingame, Calif.-based B+N Industries.

“Passionately, we design our shops with a strong sense of place, but the nature of our rollout program requires us to have a large pre-fabricated component,” says Jordi Morros, head of shop development at Kit and Ace. “In collaboration with B+N and (Surrey, British Columbia, Canada-based) Divert Millwork, the Kit and Ace shop development team has produced a unique fixture package that is the foundation for our custom-built shops, with flexibility for future growth and economies of

scale. Basically, we’ve ended up with transformable spaces, installed in minimal time, at a quality level you would expect to find in a high-end home.”

The Nolita store exudes a relaxed yet modern vibe. Reclaimed redwood planks flank the exterior of the store, and inside, warm white ash floors and white extruded metal wall panels brighten the space. The simplicity is broken up by splashes of Kit and Ace’s signature blue, as well as copper accents.

“The materials used were intended to be representative of a simple West Coast modern design aesthetic,” says David Nicolay, principal and lead designer at Evoke. “We started working with white ash as the material for the walls; it complements the refined nature of the clothing. The combination of stained white ash, white panels, black ‘hot walls’ and copper accents were to ensure the product had an interesting background to sit upon, but still allowed the product to be the feature of the store and not compete with its surroundings. The added touches of copper throughout the store design were to further enhance the feeling of luxury.”

B+N provided the bulk of the fixture package, all the way to the peg hooks, which display the thread in the store’s tailor shop—an area that features an in-house trend designer who helps with monogramming and other customization services.

Gary Somberg, architectural representative at B+N, says the combination of the company’s 1224 and Fortina louvered upright systems was totally unique to Kit and Ace. “The perimeter walls were designed as almost a clean slate,” he explains. “You could completely redesign the interior of the store; put any face-out or any T-shirt box anywhere. It’s kind of neat how they can rearrange the stores by simply moving a wall bracket.”

The centerpiece of the store is a white-ash 8-ft.-by-8-ft. square table with copper logo inlays, topped by copper pendulum lighting (both



↑ Kit and Ace strives to offer fashionable and comfortable clothing in “technical fabrics” like Qemir, a washable cashmere blend that doesn’t shrink or pill.

→ Photography from local artists on display reflects the importance of the “creative class” to Kit and Ace.

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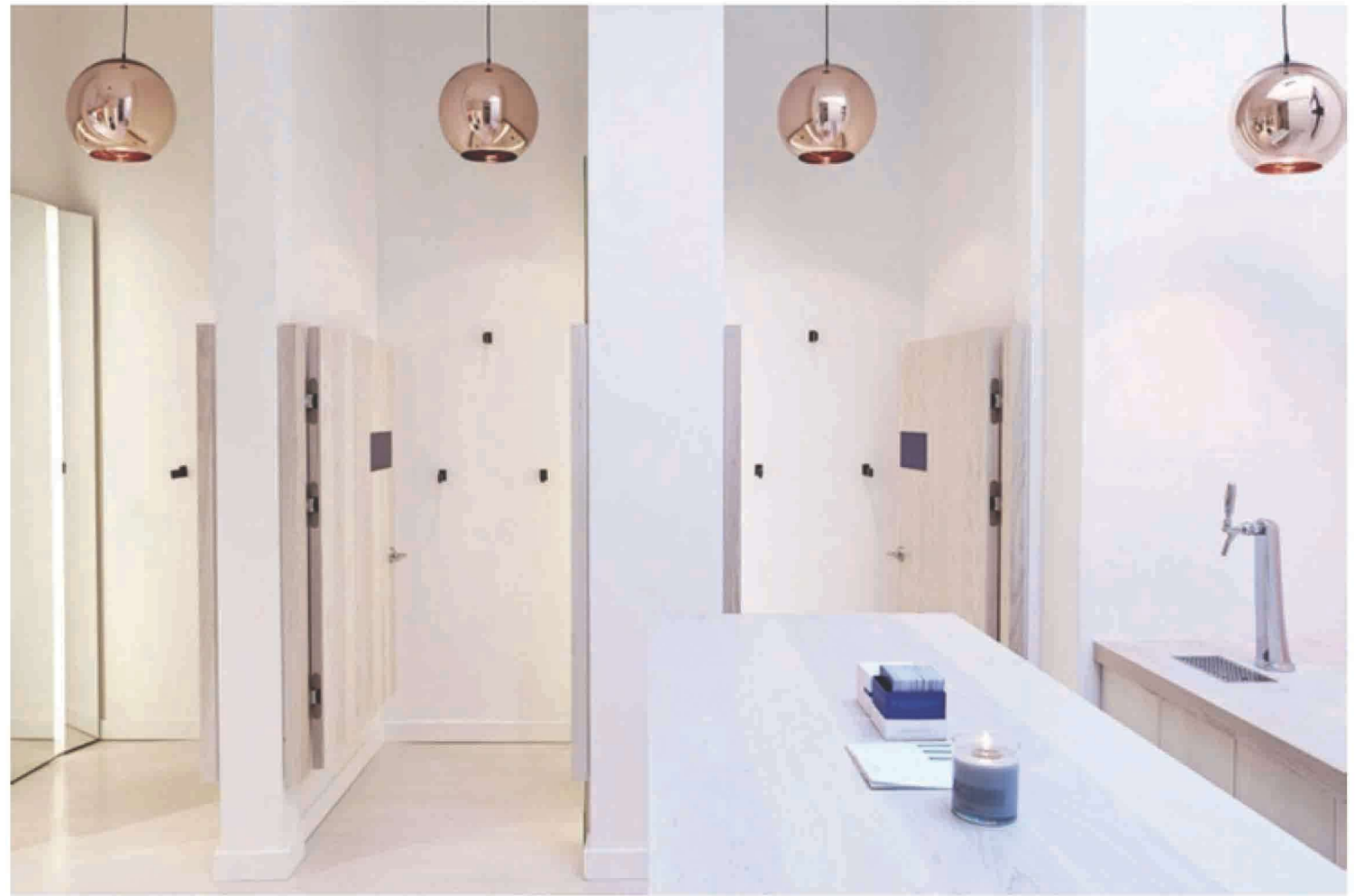


designed locally in New York). While the table acts as a workspace for employees and a gathering place for customers, its main function is to host the store's invite-only supper club, where creative types can meet and converse.

"The supper club tables are unique to each shop, as they are created by a hyper-local artisan," Morros says. "Being square is key, as it allows everyone to be engaged in one conversation...in short, it's a way for us to engage with the local creative class and start some real, organic conversations."

Whether its shopping for an upgraded comfy tee or the feeling of community that shoppers seek, Kit and Ace will try to meet their needs by expanding rapidly in the next two years. Morros says the company is eyeing many spots in North America, Australia, Japan and Europe. **dr**





← [Opposite page] Clean lines and a minimalist design are the perfect backdrop for Kit and Ace's functional yet technical clothing.

Photo courtesy of
KIT AND ACE

↙ [Opposite page] As it's considered a "tailor store," the Nolita Kit and Ace offers in-house alterations and clothing customization. Peg hooks creatively display threads, adding color and dimension.

↑ Kit and Ace's dressing rooms also have a Zen-like feel, with white ash wood and white walls, punctuated by copper accents.

Photo courtesy of
KIT AND ACE

← "Real Talk" cards are used to stimulate conversation at monthly invite-only "supper clubs."

Photo courtesy of
KIT AND ACE

“The added touches of copper throughout the store design were to further enhance the feeling of luxury.”

—DAVID NICOLAY, EVOKE



PROJECT FILE

Kit and Ace
New York

RETAILER

Kit and Ace

CONTRACT DESIGN FIRM

Evoke International Design Inc.

ARCHITECT

The McIntosh Group

GENERAL CONTRACTOR

Corcon Construction

STORE FIXTURES

B+N Industries

LIGHTING

Apparatus Studio

FLOORING

TAJ Flooring Inc.

FURNITURE

Uhuru Design

MILLWORK

Divert Millwork Ltd.

Information in the project file is provided by the retailer and/or design firm.

↗The copper pendant chandelier by Apparatus Studio is a focal point at the center of the store.