

# Well-Suited to

## PAUL STUART STORE MAKES BOLD STATEMENT

### FOR “THE 1% OF THE 1%” OF SHOPPERS,

as designer Charles Sparks describes, store design must be the ultimate in luxury. But when the customers are also businesspeople and politicians, luxury design doesn't mean opulence.

At Paul Stuart's first store in Washington, D.C., luxury embodies the traits of the retailer's famed suits: classic, understated, and perfect. From custom rugs on the tile floors to the striated zebrano panels on the walls, the space communicates the design directive: “the voice of modern, classic elegance.”

“It starts with the building shell and what it gives you. We call it the bones of the store, and it's central to the design,” says Sparks, president and CEO of Charles Sparks + Co. in Westchester, Ill. Design highlights include glass curtain walls, a central staircase that appears to float, and seamless integration of merchandise into the design itself.

“Charles Sparks + Co. has been a great partner with us for many years,” says Bob Green, chief merchandising officer for Paul Stuart. “They designed both of our stores in the Chicago market and have a strong understanding of who Paul Stuart is. This knowledge and experience allowed them to execute this accelerated evolution of our design concept.”

### Site selection and structure

The design firm's involvement extended to site selection. Out of two locations, Sparks suggested a corner spot in a building at CityCenterDC, a new mixed-use neighborhood near the National Mall and five blocks from the White House—but only if the retailer could add an open stair and elevator—a major change to the building.

Combining retail, hospitality, and condominiums, the building was meant to house high-end stores on its first floor only. But the ground-floor space was too small for the retailer's needs, so Sparks recommended a two-floor store with a dramatic central staircase visible from two glass curtain walls. It would mean construction below occupied condos as well as extensive changes to the building, whose second floor had not been designed for commercial use. Space was needed for a tailor shop in the second (condo) floor, while the basement needed a suitable receiving area. “That's four spaces for only 10,000 sq. ft. of space,” says Sparks. “It involved the landlord's scrutiny of everything we wanted to do.”

The complex project required numerous meetings before visuals and finishes could even begin to be considered. Fifteen consultants were involved, including an acoustic engineer to certify that construction would not disturb residents, a structural engineer to ensure that the staircase didn't sway, an engineer for the curtain wall to certify that the glass could hold up awnings, and an elevator engineer.

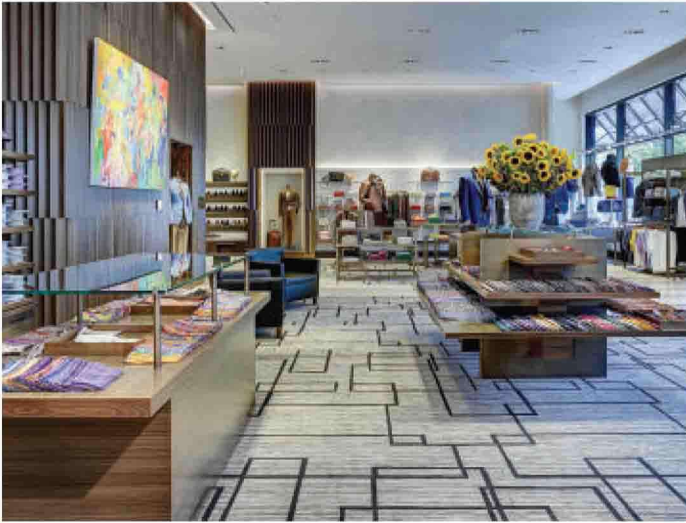


*Shirt and tie colors echo the look of Leroy Neiman painting on loan from the Smithsonian that hangs on one of the signature wooden panels. Paul Stuart customers value culture, so the company establishes relationships with museums and other cultural institutions near their stores. The Washington store is near the National Mall and the Smithsonian museums.*

# Washington

BY GAIL DEIBLER FINKE





*Left: Custom rugs play off the striated zebrano used in wall panel and fixtures throughout the store, bringing the linear design to a different surface and material. Free-standing panels, such as the one next to the window, hold merchandising units on one side and act as display backdrops on the other. Right: A custom chandelier continues the linear theme in yet another material and space. The store's second floor, built in what was originally intended as condo space, has a lower ceiling and a cozier feel. Ceiling coffers add more verticality while allowing for the HVAC, electrical, and other systems for the floors above.*

## Zim-zum zebrano

Designers transformed the resulting clean and contemporary lines of the store to embody understated luxury. Sparks says his firm specializes in translating a store's identity and customers—its “DNA”—into three-dimensional reality. The retailer's existing stores in New York and Chicago all feature vertical, striated millwork, so the design team focused on that for the new store's visual identity.

“To modernize it, we decided on a ‘zim-zum’ pattern of broken but vertical panels of zebrano, which stains to a beautiful amber tone,” Sparks says. Cladding perimeter walls, divider walls, and freestanding display panels, the striped wood became the center of a design based on “asymmetrical, compositional” physical elements. Their lines are echoed in linear patterns of rugs, the freestanding staircase, and the custom chandelier, all of which feature

straight lines set at angles.

To make the design a reality, Sparks turned to High Country of Longmont, Colo. (sister company to Leesport, Pa.-based Fleetwood). The fabricator had worked on previous luxury properties, including Neiman Marcus stores, and Sparks trusted them to provide the level of quality necessary for the D.C. store.

“Creating a true luxury environment requires devotion to details,”

*Exceptional service is a hallmark of Paul Stuart, whose luxurious suits and clothes are all their own brand. The display wall hides the fitting area, where customers are served drinks and small foods. Clothing is taken to New York City for tailoring; minor tailoring is done in a tailor shop on-site.*



**Paul Stuart** |  
CityCenterDC, Washington, D.C.

- Size: 10,000 sf
- Completion: June 2015
- Design: Charles Sparks + Co.
- Fixtures: High Country
- Laminates: Lamin-Art, Wilsonart
- Carpet: Shaw Contract Group
- Flooring: Junckers Hardwood, Mannington Commercial
- Special material: Tiger Drylac
- Photography: Charlie Mayer Photography

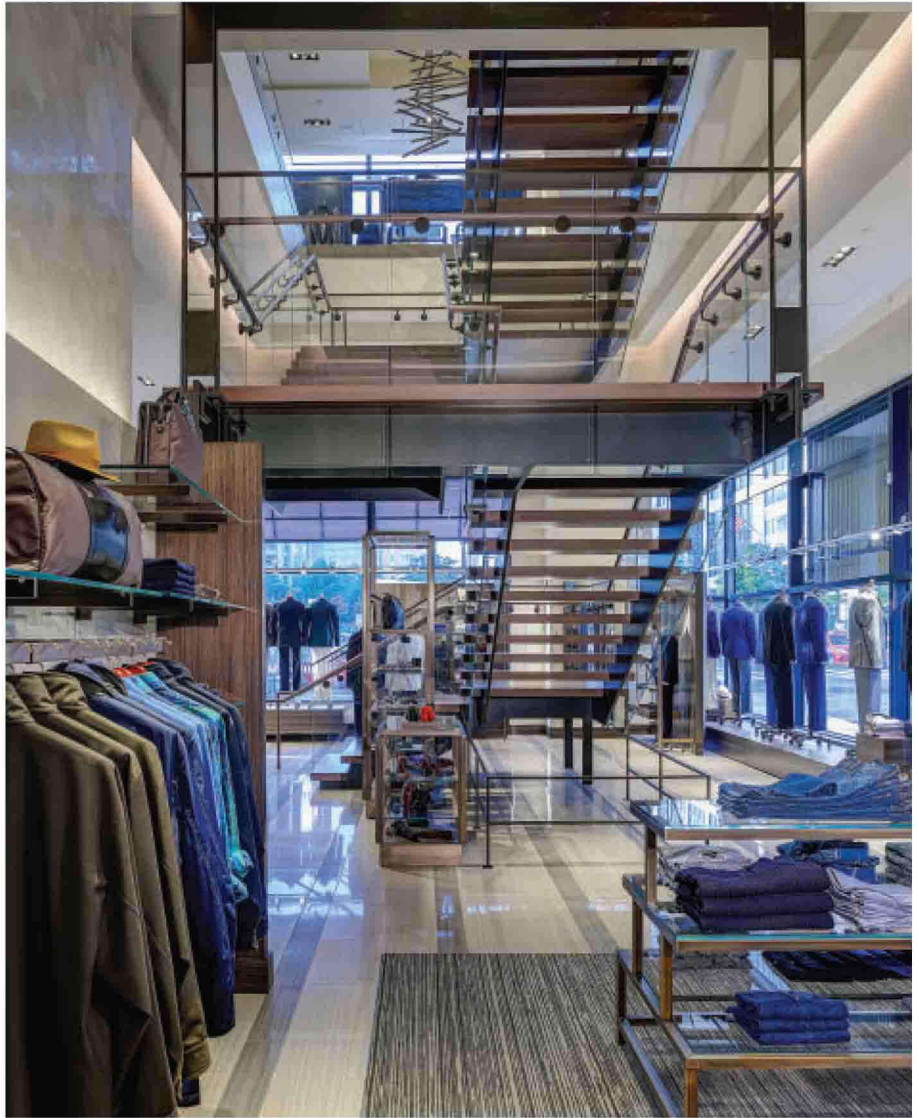
says Trevor Ryan, VP of projects and client experience for High Country. “The materials used and how they are finished is essential. The textures and tones created have to be flawless, and the fabrication details should be equally seamless and invisible to the eye. When 98% of the store is perfect, the remaining 2% is all anyone will see.”

That quest for perfection drove construction of the irregular “zim-zum” pattern, created by rows of shorter lengths of wood. Each row is topped by another row set at an angle to create visual depth and a play of light and shadow from the angles and the spaces between planks. The technique requires each piece of wood to be perfectly finished and capped.

“The greatest technical challenge in the project was executing the panel design in a cost-effective manner,” says Ryan. “Our engineering and production team devised a production method that would best utilize our machinery to pre-make parts before assembly. In the end, we pulled off a beautiful result that the designer was happy with, and we managed to stay within budget.”

### Design standouts

High Country also provided the wood for the stair (made by a different company) so that the finishes would match exactly. The floating stair, like the chandelier that hangs beside it, brings the two-dimensional lines into a 3D



*The store’s signature element, a massive staircase, is visible from both sides of the corner through the two-story glass windows. The linear design elements of the wood panels and rugs is transformed into a wood and glass staircase.*

space. Masculine and self-contained, it has three landings and glass panels that keep customers safe from falls but allow them to see the entire store and the surrounding neighborhood. From outside, it is visible day or night.

“With such a strong design element, you don’t need to do a lot of other things,” Sparks says. “We didn’t over-design. The budget was pretty tight, so we relied on the stair, the panels, and natural light from the full-height windows—the bones of the space.” Sparks credits the implementation of the complex panels to High Country’s professionalism and attention to detail

from the first shop drawings to the final installation. Ryan adds that the project’s success is the result of intense collaboration among the entire project team. “The designers and clients were wonderful to work with,” he says.

Sales have exceeded expectations. “We couldn’t be happier with the finished product,” Green says. “As we look at the design needs for each project in the future, we will take cues from the positive design concept at CityCenterDC.”

*Gail Deibler Finke is a Cincinnati-based writer specializing in design topics.*