

Text: Lyndsey Dennis

SUSTAINABLE DESIGN: ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY

Can you create a visually stunning customer experience that engages and excites while using sustainable and ethical materials and processes? Retail Focus finds out.

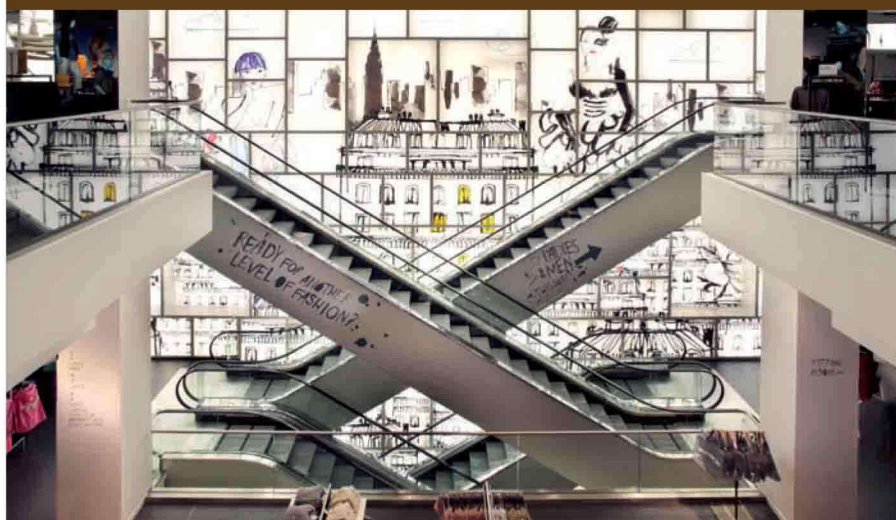
A successful retail space will draw people in and make them want to stay and experience the brand. Some retailers and designers are still concerned that 'going green' will have an impact on the overall look and feel of a store, and the overall customer experience.

Retailers such as Marks & Spencer, H&M and Timberland have strong sustainable design practices in place. According to the Global 100 Most Sustainable Corporations in the World index, H&M is included for the sixth consecutive year and is ranked at number 20 overall. 'Working with sustainability is a natural part of our business, integrated in everything we do, and it is a prerequisite if we are to grow in the future,' says Anna Gedda, sustainability manager at H&M. The brand is the only specialty retailer on the index and, along with Adidas, is also one of only two fashion companies featured. H&M unveiled its first fully sustainable store in Mexico's Monterrey in November.

Alan Pegram, founder and managing director of Global Display, committed to establishing a Sustainability Evaluation Tool and Accreditation in early 2014 when he was elected as vice president of the Shop and Display Equipment Association (SDEA). 'The concept of having an industry-recognised accreditation was to ultimately present retailers with the ability to include sustainability alongside the other selection criteria used when benchmarking potential suppliers,' explains Pegram.

'For many retailers, sustainability is a key feature of their core values: just look at Marks & Spencer and H&M. Their corporate social responsibility regimes place increasingly higher emphasis on sustainability principles to their whole supply chain and suppliers have had no choice but to go along with it otherwise they do not get past the pre-qualification stage. As we move further out of the recession, suppliers are starting to realise that they have to take sustainability seriously and that is not just because their clients tell them to,' continues Pegram.

He says there are several areas where sustainability can be integrated into shopfitting and displays. 'I think there are certainly areas that work better



Above: According to the Global 100 Most Sustainable Corporations in the World index, H&M is included for the sixth consecutive year and is ranked at number 20 overall.

in shopfitting and display for becoming eco-friendly. One of these is shelving, for example through the use of ECOboard.' These boards are bio-based panels made from agricultural residues such as straw and reeds that are bonded together with the natural lignine (a complex polymer) of the cellulose fibres. They can be used as an alternative to chipboards, MDF or plywood and, according to ECOboard that developed them, they have a negative carbon footprint of -0.62kg of carbon dioxide per kilogram and -0.95kg for production in the Netherlands.

Jason Traves, head of creative design and co-founder of Lucky Fox, believes sustainability in retail design and display will always present a challenge. 'Retailers and brands are under pressure to progress: designing and redesigning their stores and spaces using the latest innovations and developments in technology, materials and building techniques. This extends to window displays and in-store theatre, which is where the difficulty begins. Can you create a visually stunning customer experience which engages and excites whilst using sustainable and ethical materials and processes?' asks Traves. At the moment, he believes the industry is a long way away from successfully marrying these two objectives. 'A key issue is budget. Unfortunately the most cost-effective

materials and production processes don't tend to be sustainable or eco-friendly. Brands are understandably reticent to spend significantly more on projects with such a short lifespan, usually four to six weeks for most displays and window concepts,' says Traves.

He believes the best way for retail brands to improve their sustainability is to start with the physical store design from the ground up. 'Options such as using reclaimed materials has an impact. Low-power lighting using LEDs reduces power output dramatically. Long-term display systems which can be updated are an effective way to reduce waste. For example, a set framework incorporating lightboxes and display plinths can facilitate graphical changes and cosmetic updates to refresh the store environment. This is more sustainable than producing concept after concept. However, with this comes a danger of limiting the creative proposition of the brand, which after time could start to appear stale. As we all know, fashion moves and evolves rapidly, so the store environment and shopping experience needs to move with it.

'Until sustainable materials and processes become more cost-effective and progressive, our sector remains at a crossroads. Being environmentally aware is important to many of our clients at Lucky



Fox, but we appreciate there are a great many pressures affecting the business decisions they subsequently have to make.'

Charles Tweed, marketing director of LED lighting specialist Visive, says hurdles that once kept retailers from committing to green practices, including poor lighting and an expected low-return on investment, appear to be correcting themselves with ever-evolving materials and lower-cost options. Inefficient, unreliable, colour limiting and maintenance needy products are being ditched by designers and architects in favour of flexible, low energy solutions.

'The use of LEDs allows for designs to include a full spectrum of colour to be used in a solid state, striped, changing or dynamically moving light that can be programed to music or other sensory devices. These electronic capabilities are fairly limitless and the pace of technology will become smarter and more interactive based on shopper's desires and also set to themed events. The future for retailers to display their products in a dynamic, exciting, safe, efficient and environmentally friendly manner is now within their capability,' says Tweed.

'Retailers are now more committed to sustainability on a global basis and this is starting to reflect in their shop design

and display of products. Eco-friendly is a concept being embraced more readily by retailers that once cringed at its cost or down played its importance. Consumers continue to demand that brands fall in line with their values,' notes Tweed.

Giles Miller Studio's first foray into truly sustainable design was with Stella McCartney, where it used corrugated cardboard as a base material. This collaboration lasted several years and was momentous in that it matched a top-end fashion brand with a seemingly mundane but sustainably superior material.

The brief in this case was not related to the sustainability of the work, but more the innovative use of the material to beautify it and produce creatively progressive results that were up to the brand's high standards of aesthetics. 'The sustainable aspect of a material is an important consideration in design, but shouldn't ever become the single attribute in any design. As a creative studio we believe that sustainable consideration is an imperative part of our work, but is a given, and never the selling point,' says Miller.

'There is often a stigma associated with sustainable designs' aesthetics which can be that an emphasis on the sustainability of a design surpasses its creative attributes. It's our opinion that sustainability should never compromise a design's visual appeal, and moreover sustainability and the visual impact of a design should always be complementary,' believes Miller.

He believes it's vital that sustainability is considered within the world of retail and store displays. 'The circular throw-away industry of retail display wastes inexcusable amounts of materials with the fast turnaround of these short-term projects. Retail design should consider longer-term design solutions with more sustainable interventions that can still allow them the flexibility to tailor the feel of a space to a season or collection. Truly sustainable design would consider the end-life of products and materials, and the failure

Left: Giles Miller says it's vital that sustainability is considered within the world of retail and store displays, as was the case with this signature piece the practice created for Le Lido on The Avenue des Champs-Élysées, Paris.

Bottom left: Throughout the redesign of Fred Perry in Cologne, BuckleyGrayYeoman specified plywood, a cost-effective, locally sourced, low-tech and sustainable material.

Below: With all new retail developments, Canary Wharf integrates sustainable thinking very early on in the design process: AHR Architects is currently working on a low energy store design that improves the thermal performance of a building.

Bottom: Timberland has strong sustainable design practices in place.

Bottom right: Visive specialises in low energy LED lighting solutions.



to consider the afterlife of retail displays makes it a hugely wasteful industry.'

Amr Assaad, associate director at BuckleyGrayYeoman, says their main challenge as designers is to use design in a flexible and sustainable way, and also keep in mind that it has to last. This was the case with the revamp of Fred Perry's Cologne store. The brief was to work with the existing structure of the store, bringing the interior up to date and improving the layout. 'Using

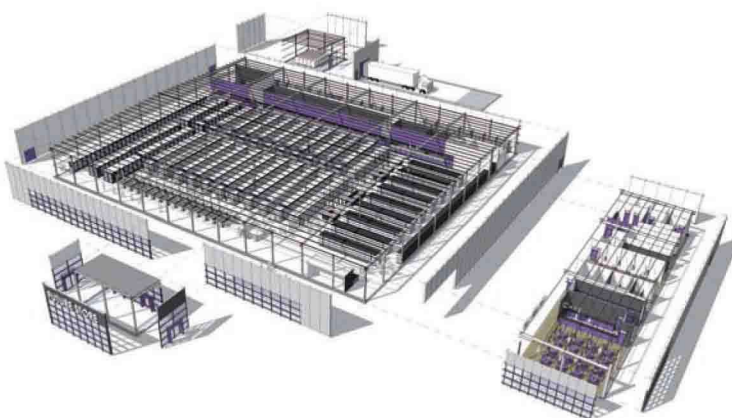


plywood, a cost-effective, locally sourced, low-tech, sustainable material. We created a contemporary shopping experience that maximises the impact of the retail space. The versatility of the material enabled us to use it in a number of different applications and highlight different functions and displays within the store,' explains Assaad. This project continues the design language BuckleyGrayYeoman has successfully rolled out at stores in London, Munich and Bangkok.

Lindsay Gaughan, head of retail at AHR Architects, is currently working on a low energy store that improves the thermal performance of a building in order for that building to have a lower heating and cooling demand, ultimately lowering energy consumption and the operational cost of the building throughout its lifetime irrelevant of international location. The energy

design. Retailers are coming to the fore with new and exciting ways of tackling the sustainability issue, however many are still put off by the belief that sustainable costs more. The low energy store model shows that this is not the case. We as designers, architects and retailers just have to think about how we tackle the problem from new and innovative angles,' says Gaughan.

So, does sustainable design have an impact on overall aesthetics? 'It doesn't have to. A well designed aesthetically pleasing scheme is just that at the end of the day. The sustainable element shouldn't be seen as a deterrent to that [the design] process. If anything it can add to the visual appeal of a building: more sustainable materials often help soften and create a tactile element to buildings and in the case of the low energy store a greater focus upon technical detailing and finish is



analysis completed on the store model demonstrated that stores in Montreal and Chennai had a payback period of 2.5 years and just over 3.5 years respectively.

The biggest surprise of the project was that the greatest gains were seen in the UK climate zone. A reduction in plant due to a reduced heating and cooling requirement resulted in just a six month payback period, with the concept then paying back further to the tune of £15,000 per annum, every year for the store's life. This equates to a figure of £375,000 (based on a 25 year life span).

'I believe that retailers have an ethical responsibility to consider sustainability in

required resulting in a higher quality finish to the building, increasing its visual appeal,' says Gaughan.

Martin Gettings, group sustainability manager of Canary Wharf, will be taking part in a sustainability seminar at Retail Design Expo next month and is a firm believer in integrating 'green' designs and practices in the area's retail offerings. 'We have a mix of existing and proposed retail space and developments where the opportunity for sustainable solutions is very different. With all our new retail developments we integrate sustainable thinking very early in the design process. This provides a very efficient "shell and core" - a blank canvass for the retailer to carry out their fit-out, with which we work closely to maximise appropriate sustainability opportunities. We also have an established tenant forum where we can explore sustainable opportunities in partnership with our existing retail tenants.

'It's absolutely essential that retail developments new and old consider sustainability issues and implement the right solutions in design, construction and operation. We can't afford not to!'

Dates for your diary



Ecobuild

8-10 March 2016

ExCel London

Ecobuild, the exhibition and conference for the sustainable construction and energy market, will feature 800 exhibitors and more than 50 conference and seminar sessions called Next Generation on the third day of the show.

Martin Hurn, event director of Ecobuild, says: 'Providing a fresh change for visitors to Ecobuild, "Next Generation" has been designed to give an inspiring and surprising glimpse of innovative solutions to future problems. Following on from what will be a compelling first two days covering homes and architecture, the third day will provide a thought-provoking finale to the event for visitors.'

For further information about the exhibition and to register for your ticket, visit: www.ecobuild.co.uk



Panel seminar: The importance of sustainability to the success of brands

Thursday 10 March 15:10-15:50

Retail Design and Branding Conference
Theatre 2

Retail Design Expo, Olympia London

Speakers for this seminar will include Alan Pegram, founder and managing director of Global Display and president of SDEA, and Martin Gettings, group sustainability manager at Canary Wharf Group, who will focus on the importance of sustainability to the shopper experience and to the success of brands.