



Setting Up Shop



Last month, Macy's, Wal-Mart, and Kmart all announced cutbacks or store closings, making some commentators wring their hands about the future of the industry. But the sector is known for always being in a state of flux, and there are signs from around the world that a new set of ideas is about to revolutionize retail. From in-store laboratories to neighborly nods, here are 14 innovations in the way we shop.

Ikea's laboratory extension Space10 combines the gallery-like tranquillity of a showroom with the inventive frisson of an art-and-crafts class.

Trial and Error

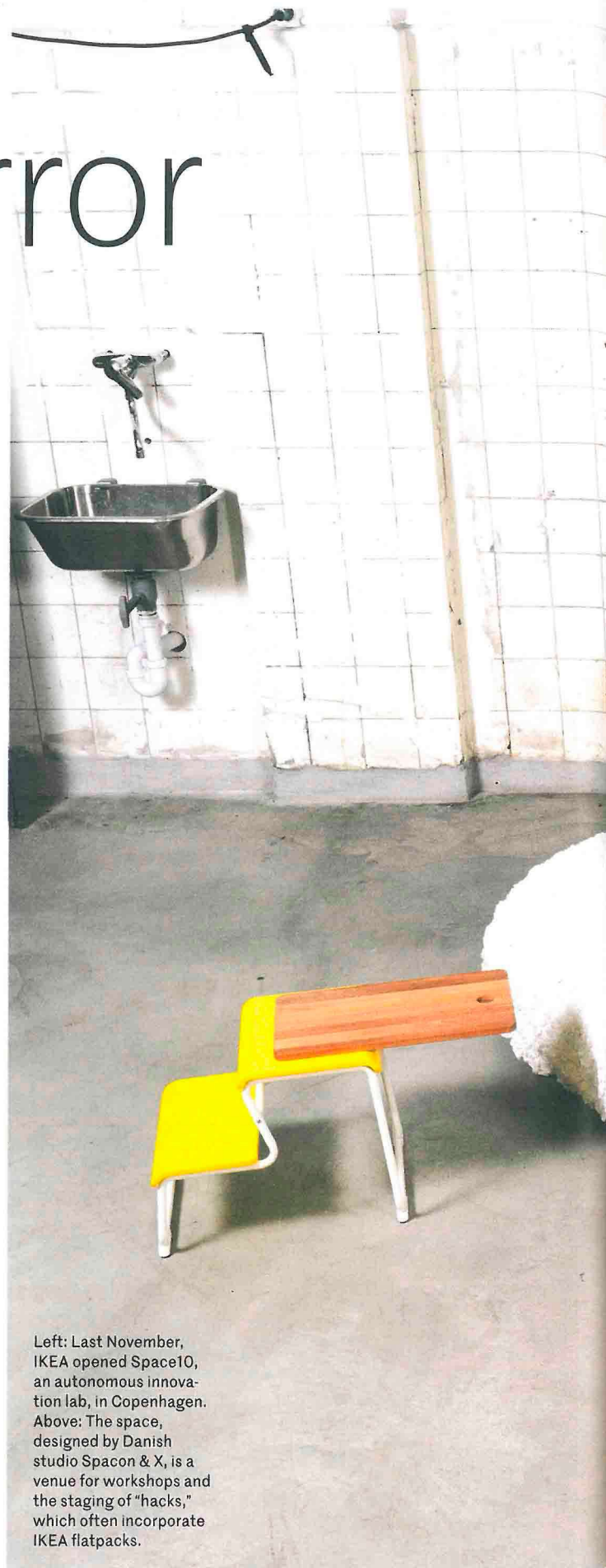
Brands are turning to the experimental in search of an edge in the retail market.

Fans of IKEA's Swedish meatballs might not think they need tweaking. The creative team at **Space10**, the furniture giant's new innovation lab, thought otherwise, using those delectable morsels as a way to imagine the future of food. In another thought experiment, the same tinkerers wondered how your lawn might signal that it's thirsty for a sprinkling and workshopped several prototypes.

If calling these science projects "IKEA hacks" is a stretch, that's exactly the point. Launched in November and independently run out of Copenhagen's meatpacking district, Space10 leverages IKEA's dominance in the domestic sphere in service of a broader mission: to investigate "the future of urban living through a series of labs," says CEO and founder Carla Cammilla Hjort.

Naturally, the notion of a laboratory might come off as a rather grandiose characterization of what is essentially a satellite retail space, but the metaphor nicely evokes a certain attitude toward an inventive use of space and programming sensibility. Today, it isn't very far-fetched for a brand to adopt a semi-scientific method, at least in terms of experimenting with alternative models of immersive environmental design. Spectacular window displays—which have their origins in the 19th century—are no longer going to cut it: The rise of e-commerce has sparked a renewed focus on physical emporiums.

In Seattle, **Starbucks** has enjoyed a positive response to its



Left: Last November, IKEA opened Space10, an autonomous innovation lab, in Copenhagen. Above: The space, designed by Danish studio Spacon & X, is a venue for workshops and the staging of "hacks," which often incorporate IKEA flatpacks.



blockbuster incubator in the city's Capitol Hill neighborhood. The **Starbucks Reserve Roastery & Tasting Room** opened just over a year ago and represents founder Howard Schultz's vision of a veritable temple of coffee. Frequently likened to Willy Wonka's chocolate factory, the roastery puts an educational spin on a public production facility, showcasing the process behind the product on the scale of silo and cuppa alike.

Reebok's FitHubs seem just as natural a development as flatpack hacks and café-fueled spectacle were for IKEA and Starbucks, respectively. Developed in collaboration with design consultancy Ziba, the first FitHub opened in New York City in 2012, and the store-cum-Crossfit gym has since expanded to 400 locations worldwide. As a spatial manifestation of Reebok's longtime commitment to promoting personal fitness, the FitHub strives for longevity, simultaneously harking back to the sneaker brand's '80s-'90s heyday and offering plenty of potential for future incarnations. Says Reebok global environmental designer Charles Gates, "The concept of pairing activities—in this case, personal fitness—with retail has proven to drive sales and additional footsteps through the door."

This is precisely why these retail labs are more than just inhabitable billboards (that being just one of their roles)—they're venues for testing hypotheses, as opposed to users or even sole products. "We believe it is very important to make innovation open and inclusive," says Space10's Hjort of the potential of similar retail platforms. "Way too often, innovation is something that happens behind closed doors, but if we really want to make the world a better place, we need to work together." —Raymond Hu

