



# Study Abroad

From the U.K. to China, retailers around the globe are reimagining their brand envelopes to create compelling destinations for shoppers.

*By Lauren Mang, Contributing Writer*

AS ONLINE SHOPPING CONTINUES TO DOMINATE INDUSTRY CONVERSATIONS, savvy retailers are looking for new ways to entice customers through their doors. One marked strategy is the shift from a transactional to an experiential model.

“Convenience and experience are king,” says London-based Leigh Dennis, executive director and retail practice group leader for U.K./Europe at





*Extra gallery space for Tate Modern translated to more dedicated space for its museum shop, enabling a separate entrance for extended shopping hours.*

CallisonRTKL (Baltimore). Dennis explains that globally, and across all channels, customers have four budgets: the traditional idea of time and money, as well as the next-generation budgets of boredom and frustration. “These budgets are unique to the cultural quirks of the market,” he says. “The smartest brands are very sensitive to the balance of culture quirks versus brand DNA.”

Speaking to the in-store experiences that customers crave, in June 2016, London’s Tate Modern art museum opened a 10-story extension building that



gave the gallery extra space to exhibit more international contemporary and modern art to its growing number of visitors. The additional space also allowed the museum to increase its retail offerings and create a space that went beyond the expectations of a typical museum gift shop.

“The main driver for Tate [Modern] was to transform the retail store into a best-practice destination that functioned as a premium high street retailer,” says George Gottl, CEO of multidisciplinary design agency Uxus (Amsterdam). That meant starting with a prime location: Space was secured at the new wing’s entrance, so the store, open until 10 p.m., could be accessible from the outside after regular museum hours. It also has street-facing windows for visual merchandising opportunities.

Uxus then proposed a “Tate Takeaway” concept, which positioned the gift shop as a place where shoppers can take a memory of their museum-going experience home. “Art is very emotional,” says Gottl. “People are moved, and often, they want to take something away with them as a memory, but most can’t afford a piece of museum-quality art.” What they can afford, he notes, is a postcard, a T-shirt or a book – curios that the designers aimed to present as small works of art within the store.





*The design of Chinese fast-fashion retailer Hotwind's stores reflects the brand's minimalist approach. This location is organized by product category and is easy to shop.*

The merchandising strategy centered on the idea of “permanently temporary,” a flexible system that could adapt to a large range of products and be moved around, depending on the store’s needs. Fixtures are on wheels, and a series of lightboxes create visual markers within the space for navigation, preventing the product from getting lost under the almost 20-foot-high ceilings. The lightboxes can be changed out every season so the store takes on a different look.

“It’s future-proofing,” says Oliver John Palmer Michell, Uxus’ chief creative officer and architect. “Over the life of a museum, the demographics change, and depending on what the exhibitions are, you might want to skew that demographic.”

## EXPERIENCE MATTERS

When a new prototype was initially created for ice cream heavyweight Häagen-Dazs (Oakland, Calif.), it was designed with the recent growth in Asia’s luxury market in mind. As that expansion slowed and changed, the brand called an audible. “Instead of pouncing on Asia, [the retailer] would take a mature market that was a bit stale and try to breathe new life into the concept,” says Jean-Paul Morresi, creative partner at Watt Intl. (Toronto). The brand settled on Europe – particularly Berlin – since, as Morresi notes, an eye toward Europe was what drove the trends in luxury and prestige in Asia.

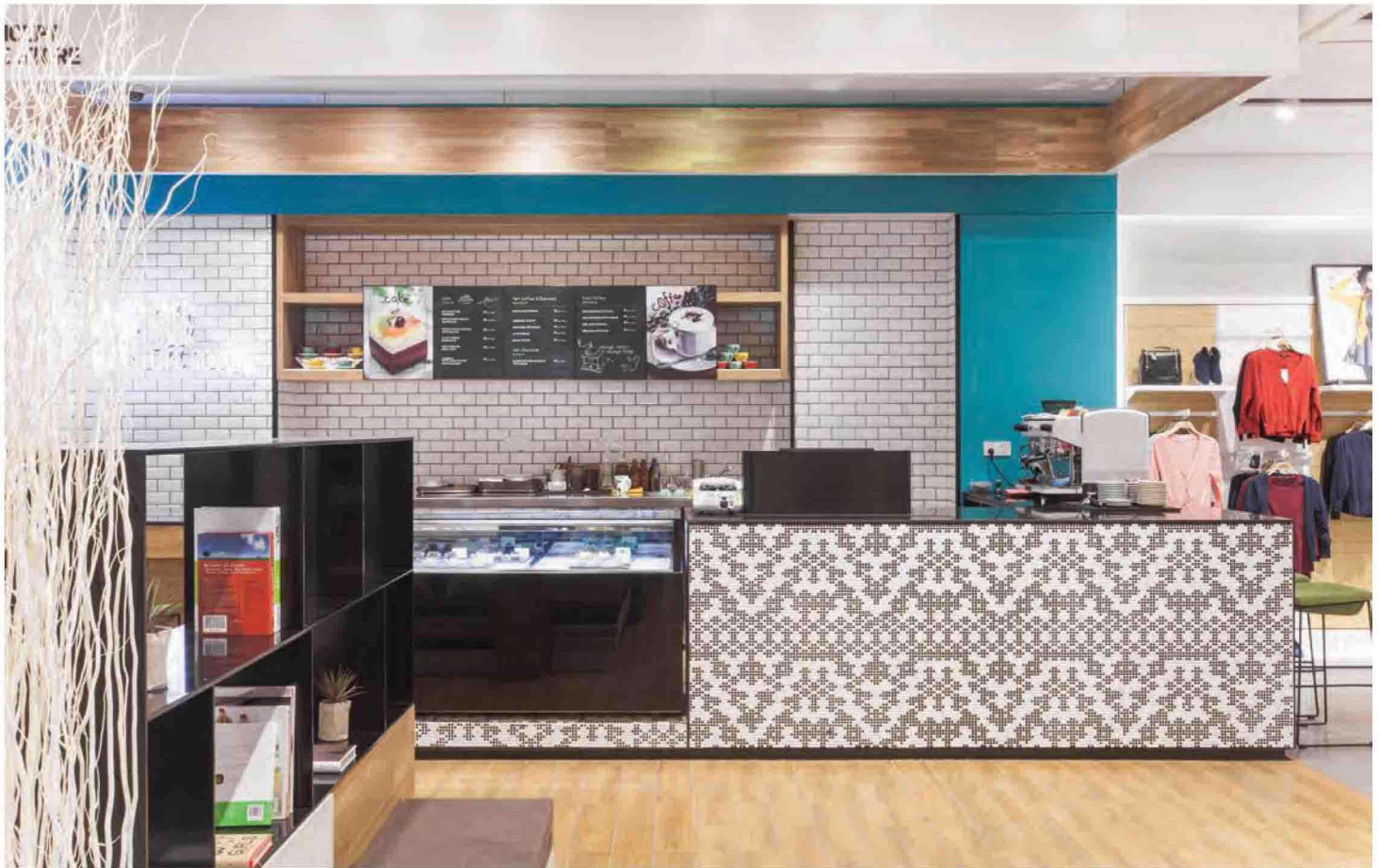
Inside, materials lend a richness of texture that reflect the complexity of the company’s sweet treats. The design team pulled back on the traditional burgundy brand color and, instead, swathed the store in variations of a contemporary champagne-gold hue, creating depth.

It’s divided into two distinct experiences: The take-out line where customers can efficiently select their scoops on-the-go and the more relaxed sit-down table service area. “The brand’s findings in Asia drove the table service element,” says Morresi. “The Häagen-Dazs international stores are elevated experiences ... They’re little temples to lovers of ice cream.”

The concept was rolled out across Europe, including locations in Paris, Germany and parts of Spain, and an opulent kiosk version was developed in Saudi Arabia to rise to that region’s grander definition of luxury.

With changing market conditions improving, Häagen-Dazs again began eyeing China. “The attitude of the Chinese target audience to luxury – and what had





*Life Hub, a central area set aside for interaction, welcomes customers and their friends to connect. A coffee bar and reading nook give them a reason to stay awhile.*

signified it – had changed dramatically,” he says. “The same level of an overt demonstration of luxury had become frowned upon.” Instead, a new concept focusing on localization was developed for the Asian market.

#### **GATHER 'ROUND**

Chinese fast-fashion retailer Hotwind is banking on providing an experience for its customers with its in-store Life Hub. The women’s and men’s apparel and accessories shop features a simple and comfortable

design that emphasizes connections with others via a central area, complete with a coffee bar and a nook for reading and relaxation.

“Hotwind customers always come with friends,” says Liu Kai, founder of RIGI Design (Shanghai). “Our original goal was to present a lively life space for customers to show the equal relationships between brand and customers through a friendly design.” The store’s many seating areas invite customers to come in and stay awhile, “building interactions and viscosity between them and the brand,” Kai describes.

“The essence of design is to provide solutions,” says Kai. “The most important [yet] difficult part of design is to find a balance between people, product and commercial space.”

Internationally, the ease of online shopping is no doubt here to stay, but brick-and-mortar retailers are betting on physical interaction and a sense of place to compete. “You have to offer [shoppers] more than a one-dimensional experience,” Uxus’ Gottl says. “By offering them a multi-dimensional experience that’s much more immersive, you motivate people to go to the location, because they can’t experience that immersive, sensorial experience online.” ▴