

SHOW ME SOMETHING GOOD

Architecture meets retail in the next generation of pop-up shops

by FIONA SOLTES

Megan Berry's innovative retail pop-up company, by REVEAL, packs much into a 6-by-6-foot space: Carefully chosen items from a number of inventive brands. Dressing rooms. Portability. Angled shelves that heighten curiosity and drama from the exterior.

Each boutique — known as a REVEAL — even powers itself, is waterproof and lockable and can be set up or taken down in 20 minutes.

The most significant element, however, is the combination of disciplines within its walls.

Berry, a student at the Harvard Graduate School of Design whose company is a venture in residence at the Harvard Innovation Lab, brings her experience in architecture, real estate, art, interior design, textiles, store development, business, marketing and research to the table.

In architecture, a “reveal” provides a view to something new, perhaps even unexpected. Berry's own path, likewise, has revealed the challenges that emerging fashion and product designers face in launching new lines. One step at a time, that journey has led her here.

“Right now, retail is broken,” Berry says. “It's extraordinarily expensive to go and launch your own bricks-and-mortar store. Conversely, if you go into a retailer, it's really difficult for a young designer to come up with the capital to meet the margin requirements.

“Our goal is to be a leader in discovery retail, and to be a new platform for the customer to uncover brands that they would have a difficult time finding.”

Berry speaks with designers regularly, seeking ways to become more inclusive.

“We're looking for brands that might have just launched but don't have a retail strategy,”



she says. “We can develop that strategy with them. Or brands that have tried retail and been extremely successful in some parts of the country and want to expand to different geography, but their capital restraints have kept them from being able to do so.”

MOBILE RETAIL

Working with by REVEAL, brands see their products displayed for a few days at a time in a judiciously chosen spot — be it city sidewalk, building lobby or park — tended by a well-trained, knowledgeable associate. Sales are made to enhance the brands' e-commerce sites; proprietary software allows a seamless transaction from brands' existing inventory, and items are drop-shipped to customers in real time. Brands also are able to receive feedback and customer engagement data that allows them to “iterate just as quickly with lessons learned as they do on their websites,” Berry says.

Berry's keen interest in research birthed by REVEAL; further research will help determine what it will become — and how it can be most useful and exciting for both brands and consumers.

“It is all about being as mobile and flexible as possible,” she says. “Our entire vision from the company side for the design is that it can go anywhere customers are. We are able to have our design in parks, in public plazas, in hotels, in



Jia Li (left) and Megan Berry

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— Megan Berry,
by REVEAL



airports, on sidewalks. Traditional retail architecture can't go there, and we want to be able to provide that consistently relevant experience in places that may be really hot today because it's a great local event, and dead tomorrow.

"We want to be able to have that flexibility to react as quickly as possible to new and exciting trends based on urban patterns."

Working with various prototypes and consultants and seeking feedback from brands, retailers and other industry representatives, the REVEAL boutique has moved from a small box to something more engaging — one with a patent-pending design.

So far, by REVEAL has been through numerous beta tests and joined with New York Fashion Week in September to showcase brands. That effort highlighted the latest and greatest in the city, such as Mestiza New York, a line featuring ornate, vintage glamour cocktail attire inspired by the co-founders' Philippine-American heritage.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Berry's enthusiasm is palpable. But she's equally as excited to speak of her past events, iterating, growing and adapting all along the way. The Harvard Innovation Lab (i-lab) has

been vital, as have collaborations with the Skandalaris Center for Interdisciplinary Innovation and Entrepreneurship and XRC Labs, whose partnership with Parsons School of Design helped with access to young designers.

XRC Labs connected Berry with Jia Li, the force behind Jia Collection, a much-lauded line of modern reversible clothing that transitions from office to evening. Like Berry, Li views fashion through the lens of architecture; beyond simple inspiration, engineering concepts drive how garments can be constructed in a way that all touch-points are still precise no matter which

Louis in July; the event allowed the brand's story to be told, and Li was happy with the sales as well as the real-time feedback from customers.

"I definitely want to do it again," she says.

DRIVING INCLUSIVENESS

As the concept continues to expand, Li will likely have increased opportunity; Berry envisions room for all. Consider Caraa, which offers luxury sport bags that can be carried cross-body, as backpacks or as totes. They're a symbol of the "brands across the spectrum" that Berry has included —



way they turn.

Li was invited to a launch event at XRC Labs, an innovation accelerator for the next generation of disruptors in the retail and consumer goods sectors. Berry gave a presentation on her concept and Li realized right away it would be a perfect fit.

"My product is unique in that it needs explanation about the way the designs are reversible and multifunctional," says Li, who believes her designs create value by saving space, time and resources.

"If there's someone there to explain it to the customer, they'll get the benefits and understand a lot more easily. But when I was selling to retailers ... I'd get feedback from them that unless they had staff to explain, people wouldn't actually get it. They were just clothes hanging on a hanger, and people would not see that they were different from other brands."

Jia Collection provided a number of tops for a by REVEAL event in St.

and hopes to include in future events. Individual boutiques can house a single brand or four or five, complementary but still autonomous.

"We want to be able to provide that first step to retail for every designer that launches, from industrial designers of new products, to book publishers who want to engage with customers in new ways, to fashion designers who want to get feedback on their latest purse," Berry says.

"We want to be that really exciting point of interest. Whether you're walking along a boulevard in Paris, or you're downtown in Tokyo, or at a tourist landmark in Sydney, we want to be able to be there and have a very exciting presence, and be that trusted purveyor of unique items that traditionally are difficult to find. ... We definitely have a global vision." **STORES**

Fiona Soltes, a freelancer based near Nashville, Tenn., loves a good bargain almost as much as she loves a good story.