



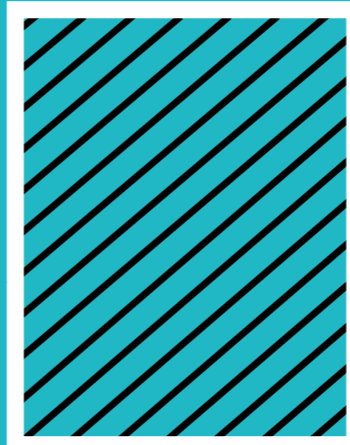
A shopfront façade is a mask and the mask becomes the identity of the brand. It is a game of attraction and we need to create a desire of being and wanting to make a statement. The façade is the voice of the brand and the communication to the outside world.

The final and ultimate goal of designer and architect is to unleash the imagination and maximise the practicality to create the 'mask'. This is an ultimate challenge to become the most attractive brand among all.

Stefano Tordiglione

FIRST IMPRESSIONS: SHOPFRONT DESIGN IDEAS III

DESIGN MEDIA PUBLISHING (UK) LIMITED



FIRST IMPRESSIONS: SHOPFRONT DESIGN IDEAS III



## PREFACE

I'm very happy and excited to have the opportunity to cooperate with the publisher again and produce the third volume of 'First Impressions: Shopfront Design Ideas'. Thank you very much for your support. This title has been published every one or two years, which shows how quickly the shop design is updated. Retail spaces are updated every three to four years, reflecting changes in consumer behaviours and habits. Nowadays, shopping malls usually adjust the location of tenants every three years to maintain a sense of freshness. This cycle calls for the renewal of store space, which is consistent with the cycle of a brand to have a new concept design.

Recently I met a friend who runs a shopping mall, and he said: "Running a retail business is like taking care of a child who will never grow up. It takes a lot more effort than other real estate projects." Indeed, the retail industry is changing at an alarming rate, with no fewer than seven or eight events/campaigns per year. As soon as one event is over, another is ready to launch. In order to keep fresh from time to time, shopping malls in recent years are more willing to have pop-up stores, so that the brands can be replaced regularly. At the same time, because of the shorter rental period, the pop-up store has become a good way to test the brand in the

local market, that is, to analyse consumer reaction in the market before deciding whether to increase the investment. This is a win-win solution for both the shopping mall and the brand, so they are all willing to adopt it. A short rental period with testing campaigns has become a successful model that makes the development of business more flexible.

In the face of the rapid changes in the market, commercial design needs to respond in a timely manner. Over the past few years, there has been a trend of luxury and high-end design style in China, followed by many nationally well-known brands. In recent years, with the rising awareness of nature and sustainability among the public, the fever of enthusiasm towards luxury has been restrained. Instead, now people are more concerned about the improvement of life experience. In terms of design language, preference on colour and material has gradually changed, from glittering decors to natural materials. Take the application of wood for example. A few years ago, natural wood was regarded as a low-grade material, but now we have realised that appropriate use of wood, particularly in combination with other materials, can create a sense of layering and hierarchy in the space, highlight

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## BIOGRAPHY

Stefano Tordiglione was born in Napoli, Italy, and moved to New York in the 1990s to work and study. His first design-related job started in London and then he began working with internationally renowned Italian studios. Stefano has a wide range of interests, and his works of art have become the collection of many private collectors. He is also a project manager and art director at the UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) and has organised many international events in Italy.

Stefano has been developing his career in the field of art and design for many years and participated in many exhibitions and private design projects. He moved to Hong Kong and founded Stefano Tordiglione Design in 2010. He feels that Hong Kong can bring real freedom to designers and that he can create truly innovative design here.

Stefano's intuitive design style originates from his international and interpersonal experience, and of course from his artistic background. From time to time, he transforms ideas found in art into his own concepts and uses them in project design.



the beauty of nature, and improve the overall effect in the retail space. Material is not good or bad in itself; it depends on the designer's application and translation and then the feeling and experience of customers when staying in the shop.

In recent years, the in-store business has been seriously impacted by online retailing, and brand stores and department stores have been most affected. The role of department stores as intermediaries is gradually disappearing. Consumers can purchase directly from the manufacturers on line. Because of this, now newly built commercial venues are mostly shopping malls, where it is easier for brands to establish their identity while the mall can keep a unified overall style and smooth circulation, as well as a well-organised and balanced operation. Now more and more brands provide both online and offline services in their experience-based interactive retail space. At present, the boundary between online and offline shopping is blurred. Instead of replacement of in-store shopping by online business, I believe the more likely trend is complementation and integration of the two.

In recent years, the retail industry has undergone tremendous changes. The

prosperous development of fashion brands has led to the fast expansion of the retail industry. Leading international brands, such as Zara and H&M, have made great efforts in store siting and products display, while emerging brands, including Urban Revivo from China, are committed to creating trendy stores full of fashion and fun. In shop design they emphasise simplicity and modernity, and usually have characteristic design in a focus position, so as to create a young and vigorous brand identity. To design with fun is one of the most challenging requirements for any designers. Your design has to be simple but not monotonous, and to convey the brand's philosophy. In this book, readers can fully feel this trend in projects like EGREY, You Zih Yuan Sukiyaki, and Atelier Peter Fong.

Generally speaking, the projects included in the book are a reflection of the current thinking of commercial interior designers worldwide and the prevailing practice in the industry. I hope you like the book and I look forward to more opportunities to exchange and learn from each other!

**Stefano Tordiglione**

## INTRODUCTION

This is the third volume of the *First Impressions* series. Consecutive publication of these books has proved the importance attached by shop owners and clients to shopfront design. The name of the book, “*First Impressions*”, also implies the basic function of a shopfront for customers.

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A project by ST Design

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A shopfront is the façade of a shop facing to customers and passers-by. It is an integral part of shop design. A shopfront can establish an identity for the shop, which help customers learn about a brand before they have contact with the products and services inside. A shopfront gives the most direct and efficient information to customers. Therefore, shop owners, in any type of business, have been paying great attention to their shopfronts in order to strike the customer on the first sight.

### 1. What does a designer do?

“What does a designer do?” That’s a question a designer is often asked with. For

the general public, interior design means renovation; i.e. to make a space look better. In recent years, as people start to have clear ideas about their requirements on aesthetics and functions of space, interior designers and their practices have been highly valued. Actually, interior design is a user-oriented service. The basic task for a designer is to create a comfortable and functional space for the client. A space, regardless of its location, functions or programmes, as a place for living or working, needs the service from a designer. A space after design will serve you better, providing better living experience and improving your quality of life. Even a small project with a low reward,

will make a designer feel satisfying with his job, because his work will have direct and positive influence on his clients. Seeing a client dining with friends in the dining room you designed, or living comfortably in the house you designed, you will feel rewarding. During busy times of work or being suffering from the stressful job, such a rewarding feeling is something that will encourage a fighting spirit in you.

When we say interior design is a “service”, we mean a designer should provide a solution or proposal based on requirements from the client, who will make the final decision. So a designer should play an independent role, being reasonable and making design decisions based on the client’s need only, never to be interfered by any other factors, such as material suppliers or contractors. The ultimate goal is to realise the client’s benefit to the most.

## **2. A shopfront should establish a brand identity**

Commercial space design is a typical type in interior design; the space should be designed to echo the brand and its target customers. The designer’s task usually includes everything within the shop: layout, circulation, atmosphere, drawings, installations/shelves, even the display of products and decorative elements used after construction. Then,

a unique retail space is created, which will promote sales of products – that’s the ultimate goal of design. With his design skills/techniques, a designer shall interpret the brand in the 3D space in multiple ways, where customers will experience a 360-degree immersion in the brand space. For chain stores, the design should be adaptable. A chain brand might have more than 100 shops, in different locations and with different sizes. They should have the same brand image. This can be a great challenge for any designer. A conspicuous and replicable brand image is the basic requirement. In this case, usually we will learn about the brand story and then decide the ambiance needed in the new shop. We also produce a set of design principles and elements that can be repeatedly used to continue the brand identity in future shops. The increasing number of shops is also a way of promotion of the brand.

We often emphasise that a brand should have its own DNA, i.e. a unique identity of a brand. Among numerous competitors, an identity can help make a brand shine with charm. By graphic design, shopfront image, or promotional events, you tell the story of the brand and try to make its DNA integrated into the brand communication process. For those time-honoured brands, design is relatively easy as you can trace

the brand story to find inspiration. For newly established brands, don’t worry! Absence of a history is not necessarily a disadvantage; you still can build your own brand culture. A brand culture, though seemingly intangible, consists of the founder’s vision, ways of operation of the business, working style of the staff, and the relationship between the brand and its customers. There is a spirit in every brand, which is the power behind that sustains future development. Therefore, even a newly established brand can have its unique identity, which should never be ignored. Never follow the trend; trends come and go, but you should have something unique created that belongs to your brand only. Nowadays young generations, better educated, are bold in developing and expressing their personality and individuality; mainstream values of a society no longer means that much as for the elder generations. For this reason, today we have various brands on the market; a prosperity developed for customers’ need for individualised products and services. We believe that’s the trend in the long term; a trend in a mature market and society. In such a market, a brand should insist on its DNA and build its identity in the rapidly changing competition environment. Find your direction and follow it, instead of following any trends.

An important task in design is to

communicate the brand’s service and style while paying attention to customers’ experience. Shopping experience is an advantage of physical stores, which cannot be provided by online shopping. Design of a physical store usually starts from siting. When choosing a site, you should consider factors like location, orientation, circulation, and context. The surrounding environment is the first thing that starts customers’ experience. Today shop owners generally attach great importance to the site of the shop and believe in the strategy to develop impressive shops in which customers can experience all aspects of the brand.

## **3. In combination with online shopping**

The combination of online and offline shopping is a destined future trend. Several years ago people worried about whether online retailing would replace physical stores. Now years later we believe that such worries are absolutely unnecessary. With the development of technologies, physical stores can make use of online data and provide better experience for customers. One of the most typical approaches is video screen. Products on display in the shop, as an important element in shop design, also count a lot in design decisions. The most basic means is posters, in which new products in the current season will catch

the eye. With video screens, “seasonal” display can be updated to “instant” display; which means that the video can be updated every month, every week, or even every day. Besides catwalk shows, the video can be adapted based on sales status in each shop or to propagate promotional events. Adaptability/flexibility is very important, especially for chain stores, so that you can give immediate response based on the need of market. Particularly in recent years, “fast retailing” has emerged as an efficient sales mode; those who immediately respond to the changing market will obtain an advantage over their competitors. Consequently, a new trend appears in shop design that leaves a large area for video screens. A screen is a permanent equipment in a shop, but its content can be updated at any time. It helps the shop to respond to any changes on market instantly. This needs support from the marketing department, which is in charge of producing new videos according to the sales data. In this way, video display can achieve its greatest potential. The brand owner can learn about preferences of customers via the online “big data”, and focus his propaganda on the changing market. So, online and offline operations support each other.

For luxury goods, such as watches and jewellery, usually people will get to know preliminary information of the products

from online and make comparisons among different brands. The Internet provides them with instant information as well as other buyers’ comments, which can be particularly useful to understand the product better. Then, they go to a physical shop to really experience the product by wearing it on their body. For this reason, potential buyers who step into a shop are more easily to become real buyers in the end, and the salesclerk will find it is easier to bring in sales. The shop becomes a place of transaction. This results in changes in design aiming to improve customers’ experience at the cashier’s desk. In high-end shops, a cashier’s desk has been designed different from traditional ones. Various credit cards and electronic money have changed the way to pay the bill. A customer can sit on a sofa comfortably in any areas in the shop and pay online with his cell phone. They don’t have to stand in a queue and wait. Shopping becomes a better experience. Today electronic money has become so popular that most customers prefer this way. What they have to do is only to scan a QR code and click to pay. Consequently the area for cashier’s desk becomes smaller, where supporting services are provided such as bill printing, packaging and storage. More room is left for products display. Some shops even place their cashier’s desk at the service counter in the back-of-house area. This can influence

circulation within the shop, which becomes more open, with smooth flow of customers without crowding. That’s what advancement of technology has brought to shop design.

#### **4. Sensory experiences**

A shopfront, as an integral part of a shop, plays a key role. Shopfront design communicates information about the brand, whether to build a grand image, or to produce a lively, interesting feeling. On the street, among a superb collection of beautiful shopfronts, yours should be designed to stand out. There is little doubt that a shop first has its visual impact on passers-by. Nowadays shopfronts are designed to even address all the five senses; vision, audition, olfaction, gestation, and touch. Though among these senses, vision is still the most efficient. A striking shopfront can catch the eye of customers out from a great distance, arouse curiosity in them, and then attract them to walk up and step in. A shopfront can be seen as a big sign, with an attraction that can never be replaced by online shops. Shops and their façades are more and more finely designed to communicate spirit of the brand. A shopfront impresses customers first and that often becomes impression of the brand in their mind. That’s what the name of the book, “First Impressions”, implies.

There is no perfect equation in design that

can transform your ideas into functional and beautiful design results. However, the five senses seem to provide an efficient approach to build an identifiable brand. We’ve talked about vision above, and will discuss audition and olfaction in the following paragraphs. Gestation is seldom involved, except for cafés and restaurants. Different sensations, when used appropriately, will strengthen impression of the brand and differentiate it from other competitors. The sense of touch, which has long been ignored in shop design, is now gaining importance. The touch on your skin and the tactile feeling will definitely add to memories about the brand. In the open space in a shop, customers are likely to touch different materials, especially products on display. To feel the product in one’s hand should be encouraged as a way to leave a strong and unique impression. Materials like metal, glass and stone feel cold, while wood, fabrics and leather feel warm. That’s the general feeling though we never try to find the reason behind. For example, the secret of shoe shop design lies in the use of carpet. Next time when you step into a shoe shop, pay attention to the floor. The areas for you to try on the shoes are usually thickly carpeted. Apart from aesthetic function, it is used to make you feel comfortable when you put on the new shoes. The feeling brought out by the carpet will be part of your memory about the shoes! It has been proved to be a



*LV Foundation, Paris*

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useful method in promoting sales in a shoe shop. Obviously, pleasant touch can increase customers' favour towards a brand. It is realised in design details and worth being treated carefully.

In recent years art elements become popular in shopfront design, which are usually used to enhance spirit of the brand, especially in large-scale flagship stores. In collaboration with artists, you can easily add an artistic quality to the brand image. Different kinds of art elements can be used. Painting, sculpture and photography are preferred, since they belong to visual art just like space design. Furnishings in the shop can be art work, too. They are artistic ornaments in which a brand is subtly connected to art. You might worry about the cost. However, the use of artistic elements not necessarily means increase of budget. In contemporary art, personal feelings are more stressed than economic value. So you don't have to bid for popular

artwork at auction. Collaboration with young but talented artists can be productive. Appropriateness weighs more than price. The ultimate goal is to enhance the brand with an artistic quality. It is commerce, in one word. Of course, when the brand has been well developed and has an ability to put greater emphasis on corporate social responsibility, it can cooperate with museums or art institutions. Expensive art work can be used to strengthen cohesion of the community. Many world-famous galleries are sponsored by big enterprises. Some companies even found their own art foundations. For example, the LV Foundation in Paris, is an organisation dedicated to the international development of contemporary art. They regularly have exhibitions on different motifs to promote the general public's contact with art. Cooperation with voluntary organisations is another way to give back to the community. Such cooperation can result in mutual benefit for both the community and the brand.



*Starbucks café at EXPO Shanghai*

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Sustainability is a popular motif in recent shop designs. Facing with increasingly serious pollution problems, people begin to reflect on the damage to environment by human beings. Especially in the city, the air is stale, the space crowded, and the quality of life is decreasing. People are paying more attention to protecting the environment and to the source of materials, and the impact on environment and human health. Newly built architecture is proud of gaining a LEED certificate. In LEED, sustainability of architecture or green architecture involves many things, including siting, water usage, materials, and air quality. All these factors will be reviewed. It is one of the most popular green building certification systems in the world. Originally it was developed for public architecture only, but now, commercial projects and retail spaces are also included. For example, some of Starbucks flagship stores have gained LEED certificates, including the Starbucks café opened at

EXPO Shanghai. In this project, expansive glass is used on the façade so that natural light can penetrate into the interior and the use of artificial lighting is minimised. Organic materials of low volatility are used to reduce impact on human health. Till now, Starbucks has more than 1,200 cafés opened in 20 countries that have been certified by LEED. It is the most "green" business among café brands. Small companies can also be environmentally friendly in their daily operation; for example, to reduce the use of unnecessary packages, turn off spare computers and equipment, use energy-saving devices (such as power-saving lights), and use recycled materials in renovation. Everyone can contribute an effort to improve our environment.

### **5. Shopfront design principles**

Shopfront design is a job that needs you to weigh and consider. Requirements from both the client and customers should be taken

into account. Space should be efficiently used for products display. Façade and interior together should provide customers with a pleasant shopping experience. In the design process, several principles should be followed: [1]

### **Be recognisable**

This is the prime principle for shopfront design. A shopfront that cannot be easily recognised is a failure in design. A recognisable shopfront not only will attract customers in, but help returning customers to find the shop easily. It is also easily described among customers in communication.

Therefore, shopfront design should not be too complicated. The colour palette should be pleasing, and the sign clear and understandable. Important information should be efficiently communicated to customers in a way that will enhance their memory about the shop/brand.

### **Consistency**

The style and design of the shopfront should be consistent with the brand's culture, philosophy and product style. Staff uniform, shopping guidance, service and quality of space should all be consistent conveying the same brand spirit. Following the consistency principle will help you establish a brand identity, build trust among customers,

and attract target customers. A shopfront should be consistent with the surrounding environment, too. A shop located on a busy shopping street should be designed differently from one located on an ordinary street in a neighbourhood.

### **Differentiation**

A shopfront should be designed to be able to differentiate itself from other neighbouring shops. Only with your own identity and style, can a shop be easily recognised by customers. On the shopfront, you can showcase your business style and unique features by using custom ornaments that recognisably belong to your brand only.

Shopfront design is part of place making in which an atmosphere should be created that echo the products on display inside the shop. The atmosphere, both inside and outside, should be able to attract customers and more importantly, be determined based on the type of the business, products and target customers. The goal is to make the shopfront, on first sight, appeal to passers-by, who will stop, stare at it, and then have a desire to shop in it. As soon as they step into the shop, fresh sensation will be brought up, which will stimulate the urge to buy.

### **Be customer-oriented**

Retail spaces serving the public must be

customer-oriented and try to meet various requirements of customers. Human-centred design will make customers feel the kindness of being concerned. In interior design, ergonomics and shopping psychology should be addressed, with convenient shopping facilities provided in a pleasant environment, creating a jolly shopping experience for customers. This way, the shop will be remembered by customers and gradually gain public praise, promoting reputation and popularity of the brand.

Today customers no longer regard shopping as a purely purchasing activity, but as a combination of shopping, recreation and social activities. Therefore, retail stores should not only have a wealth of goods, but provide a comfortable shopping environment, so that customers can best enjoy the service.

### **Efficiency**

If reasonably designed, a retail space can function well in its daily operation, including stocking, transporting, storage, and selling. Close coordination of all aspects will save time, improve work efficiency, and increase economic and social benefits.

To use the above principles, we should pay attention to some details:

(1) Market positioning: Learn as much as possible about target customers (age groups

and professions) and products (types, prices, and styles), and then create a space suitable for the brand culture.

(2) Learn about customers' shopping behaviours and communicate visual information on the façade (by shop windows or graphics).

(3) Draw customers into the shop by the façade. Create a reasonable layout that makes full use of the retail space.

(4) Ornaments used should be suitable for the brand. In terms of decoration, put quality before quantity. The ornaments and their colours should make pleasant coordination or contrast.

(5) Shop design should be simple yet varied. The ceiling, wall, window and sign should be designed in accordance with the brand philosophy.

(6) Products display should not be too complicated, nor too simple. Try to achieve a balance between change and order.

(7) Create a comfortable atmosphere. A sofa, a hook, or a cradle; details can help create a warm and intimate space.

(8) Lighting and music will enhance the visual effect in the shop.

## **6. Shopfront design elements**

Shopfront, as an integral part of shop design, usually consists of the following elements: brand logo, entrance, window, and wall (maybe with graphics or

ornaments). Among these, logo is the most important element. A logo is a unique sign of the brand, expressed in letters or symbols to represent the brand in a conspicuous way. Most established brands today have registered their logos as a basic way of protection in order to avoid infringement and future business disputes. Application of the logo should be based on a system of norms, by which the logo is appropriately used in graphic design, web design, or space design in and out of the shop. In this way, a consistent and recognisable brand image/identity can be established. Specification should be given about the size, proportion, colour, materials, location of the application, etc. Tiny details should be listed, so that staff/employees, even in different regions, can implement the system easily and exactly in the same way. The logo on the façade is a crucial touch, which tells the name of the brand at first glance. So a logo should be placed in the most obvious position. Seen in the distance, the logo should be clear enough to be identified. When approaching, it should be seen being a little bit higher than the level of sight, comfortable and striking. Materials of the logo and its background should be able to make it stand out among numerous brands. Even in those days when design briefs were simple, logos, in a simple form, were more often than not designed to be eye-catching. Nowadays,

when people require more from design, the role of logo on the façade is increasingly emphasised.

Entrance is a necessary part of façade design. As a connection between the interior and exterior, the function of the entrance is obvious, but unfortunately it is often ignored. The process of entering is finished in one or two seconds, but this space still can be felt directly. The width and height of the entrance need to be coordinated with the overall façade, being both elegant and comfortable. Flow of people in and out will cause damage to details on the door or carpet. Though they are ordinary details, maintenance is important. After all, it is part of customers' first impression of the shop. With appropriate daily maintenance, the entrance will welcome guests into the shop as a successful beginning of a pleasant shopping experience inside. This is a visual and experiential first impression. Music or fragrance can add to unique feature of a brand, completing an enjoyable atmosphere in the retail space. Music and fragrance should not be used arbitrarily; instead, they need to be well connected to the brand and are the result of careful selection. These auditory and olfactory elements, which are usually arranged at the entrance and subconsciously exert their influence silently, will allow customers to feel the brand



*Lobby of a Shangri-La hotel*

atmosphere from their very first step into the store, where their senses are aroused in an immersive way, in an environment completely different from the outside world. Shangri-La Hotel is good at playing with olfaction. Have you ever noticed the unique fragrance when you walk into the lobby? It's rare to use fragrance as your business identity. It is said that audition and olfaction are directly connected to the most intimate memory and emotion, so it is no wonder that many brands have developed their own fragrance, establishing an "olfactory recognition system". These invisible designs, though beyond the scope of the designer's work, play an important role in the overall shop design. From the shop owner's point of view, support from an expert in brand planning can really make a difference. An entrance, as the first step into the shop, should be designed to reveal essence of the shop inside and strengthen corporate identity.

The window is the most changeable part of shop design, for the simple reason that shop window is updated to display latest products in each season. The window is usually at the

same height as the entrance, and can be on either side of it, or both of them. Shop window design is not only a part of shop design; more precisely, it is an independent subject. There are common rules about the size and height of shop window. These rules determine the proportion of windows to the façade and entrance to produce a relatively harmonious aesthetic feeling. Especially when windows take a large area on the façade, the rules can make the windows on different parts of the façade unified. Inside the shop, window display is usually updated according to characteristics of the products or sales campaigns of the brand.

Shop windows usually appear at the height of people's eye sight, allowing passers-by to have a peek inside at the shop's latest collections and tempting them to enter. On one hand, design of the window will be combined with the overall façade, and on the other hand and more importantly, it is a free space, constantly adapted to accommodate different products. The potential of rich and varied changes is the most fascinating aspect of window design. Materials used need



not be too durable; the point is on design novelty, with pattern, colour, slogans and other elements to appeal to customers. It should be noted that all products, no matter how charming they appear, if displayed alone in the window, are less likely to show their charm. Additional design elements will add to the interest of shop window. Usually the shop owner will commission a design team to update the window design regularly. Plans have to be set months or even a year earlier to ensure that window design and installation coincide with the release of new products.

#### **Dual tasks**

Shop window is a place for display of brand culture, and promotion of sales is the main purpose of window design. Based on the dual tasks, the design style can be different according to brand culture, seasonal collections and marketing objectives. A window is the eye of the shop. As part of the shop façade, the window is a display space to communicate product information, serving as consumers' shopping consultant and guide. Shop windows are a powerful tool in expressing characteristics of a shop by displaying representative products. Reasonable window design can give people a glimpse of the interior and allure them to step in.

#### **Highlight sales information**

Some windows are designed to focus on communication of sales information. Design approach can be quite direct: in addition to products display, posters with promotional information can be used, so that customers can see the information clearly and will be stimulated to enter the shop. Design approach should be simple and straightforward. This is particularly suitable for consumers who are sensitive to the price or middle- and low-price brands. A brand in its sales season that aims to achieve certain marketing results a short period of time can be designed with such a window with information directly communicated to customers, such as discount, new collections, and festival promotions.

#### **Brand culture display**

Sometimes a shop window is designed to focus on the communication of brand culture. Apart from products on display, no more commercial information can be found; the shop window is given an artistic air. By elegant design, instead of direct release of business information, the window is a means to communicate brand culture. This window design method is implicit and indirect, which is usually used by high-end brands, who would like to highlight their spirits and styles targeting at certain consumer groups. A brand that wants to establish

and communicate its brand identity can be designed with such a window.

#### **Information communication**

The communication of information must accurately reflect characteristics of the products. The product must be differentiated from its competitors in material, texture, or function, and the task of window design is to correctly find and communicate this difference, so that customers, without reading instructions or specifications, can get the unique feature of the product. Clothing, for example, should be distinguished in texture (wool or chemical fibre), and medicine in formula (traditional Chinese medicine or Western medicine). Attention should also be paid to make sure the products on display are representative of the brand and complete information is provided, with accurate words, pictures, models and prices.

#### **Information control**

In modern era with information explosion, we are surrounded by a great deal of information every day. For physiological reasons, human brain tends to refuse to receive excessive information, ignoring the irrelevant. A survey in the United States reports that a person receives at least 800 pieces of business information from morning to night (or 1500 at most). However, only 15 to 20 of them could be remembered, and they are mainly

messages with a single demand. From this we can see the importance of single-demandedness in advertisements.

Information in visual advertising has a "frequency" in it. "High frequency" information is complex and changeable, usually with lively colours. "Low frequency" information is simple and clear in form, with plain colour. A man who has been subject to "high frequency" information will be over stimulated, and excitement wears off. He will suffer from visual fatigue and retardation. Therefore, "high frequency" information makes against drawing customers' attention or creating pleasant memory.

Hence, your design must communicate an appropriate amount of information and briefly grasp its unique feature. Remember "less is more": graphics and words should be concise; decoration, without being too complicated, should be used to complete a handsome façade; the colour palette should be simple and clear; and products on display should match up with each other, avoiding blind stacking.

#### **Colour and form**

How to make an unconscious glimpse at the shopfront into conscious attention? Colour and form play an important role by stimulating visual excitement and leaving a

strong impression. Shop windows should be able to produce a strong visual impact, with distinctive characteristics created via the use of color and form.

To achieve this, we should pay attention to some qualities of human visual system and try to make use of them. For example, the effective viewing area of human beings is less than 30 degrees, and the best viewing area is below 10 degrees. Therefore, the horizontal length of a shop window should not be too long. Generally a window with a length of 5 to 6 metres is the best choice. Small products should be displayed and well organised on appropriate installations. Large products should be arranged with a clear hierarchy, highlighting a focus interest. Multi-focus will cause visual disorder, and the most important part might be weakened or ignored. A window is a three-dimensional space, so different viewing angles should be taken into account. The layout should be designed according to the sight of pedestrians. Usually a man's gaze sweeps a window from left to right, from top to bottom. Observation of the upper left quadrant is better than the upper right one, and the upper right one is better than the lower left one; lower right is the worst area.

### Design techniques

In shop window design, we should start

from the motif of display and adhere to the principle that function is everything. Here, form follows function. The following design techniques can be helpful in your window design:

- (1) There should be a simple and clear motif, such as Christmas, New Year, spring, autumn, or sales campaign.
- (2) Don't make the window jumbled; select representative products only.
- (3) Provide adequate information to customers with well-designed promotional posters.
- (4) Attention should be paid to proportion, balance and coordination to give people a good aesthetic experience.
- (5) Update regularly to create fresh images of the brand.
- (6) The window, as a framed picture, should have a pleasant colour scheme.
- (7) Design appropriately with a taste; don't be too fancy. Eccentric decoration might make people shrink back at first sight.
- (8) Design with changes in fashion and seasonal motifs.
- (9) Be clean and tidy.

Here are some tips for fashion store window design:

- Select representative styles for display; the selected garments should represent the overall style of the brand.
- Grasp the visual focus of customers by three-dimensional communication.

- Don't jumble the window with too much clothing; simple and clear display maximises efficiency.
- Leave empty room to highlight the clothing on display as the leading role.
- Price labels will enable customers to quickly understand the brand's grade and market position.
- Clever use of artificial light to highlight product characteristics.
- The number of models is 2 to 4 depending on the size of the window.
- The use of multimedia will enable customers to be stimulated by vision and audition.
- Keep the window spotlessly clean.

Apart from the entrance and windows, walls take up the most area of the façade. From an aesthetic point of view, the façade wall can be designed completely different from the interior. For example, the interior produces a feeling of warmth and pleasure by use of wood and soft light, while the exterior can be designed with a modern minimalism style using metal and glass. The interior and exterior can have different feelings, but both should be designed based on the core of brand culture. They might echo or contrast with each other, but the key comes down to the brand's story.

Exterior wall often takes up a large area, so people are more likely to recognise

the shop via the wall in the distance. In addition to the role of decoration, the most important thing is to enhance identifiability, especially at night time. In dark night with poor visibility, the wall of a shop, with the use of decoration, lighting, video screens and other means, will enhance attraction of the shop, facilitate recognition, and make the shop into a landmark. These details can be very important to build brand appeal. Sometimes a shop looks better at night than in daytime, because in a dark background, the well-lit façade can be strikingly eye-catching. Potential of lighting belts, video screens and other luminous devices is maximised, contributing to a bustling, lively, and joyful night streetscape. Human beings are gregarious animals and feel safe in brightly lit places. A façade with lighting subconsciously offers them security – at least it is a place of good management. Various shop façades compete with each other in the bustling city, and at the same time they make us feel the convenience and protection in the city. This is the impact of design, in addition to enhancing the identity and reputation of a brand, on the psychology of urban dwellers.

These are the typical elements of shopfront design that a designer will take into consideration. However, in face of fierce competition, new trends have been developed. Generally speaking, a shopfront



*A project by ST Design*

is the façade of the shop. The proportion of façade to interior area is relatively consistent. For example, a one-storey space has a one-storey façade. This is the most common practice, which is usually seen in shops in shopping malls. The advantage is that shopping malls and shop owners can arrange the position of each brand in an orderly manner allowing fair competition. However, when a shop is located on the street, the proportion of façade to interior area can be greatly increased, resulting in increase of design space. In particular, a shop owner can lease connected façade areas – be it on the two sides of the shopfront (left and right sides), or façade above, or even the entire façade of the building. These connected areas can significantly expand the scope of the shopfront, so that the shopfront’s attractiveness is exponentially enhanced.

Shopfront design is not only an artistic play of elements; it involves architectural and structural technical practices, particularly for famous brand flagship stores. A shopfront is

a fixed advertisement, promoting a brand 24 hours a day. This is of great benefit to the establishment of a good identity, which the customers will associate with the brand’s products and have a favourable impression. When it comes to siting of a shop we often say “location, location, location!” Location refers not only to the floor area of the shop, but to the façade. Obviously a shop facing to the street takes an advantageous location. This trend in shop design has become increasingly popular in recent years, with unanimous agreement from the client and designers.

As the area of retail spaces continues to expand, designers, more often than not, will have to deal with architectural problems in their job, especially in multi-storey shops, where the demand to work with structural system is likely to occur. When a shop owner rents several floors in a building, he or she usually wants to cut down on structural renovation, so the design space can be quite restricted. Designers should also take into

account building service elements, including drains, power systems, air conditioning outlets, and even the position of vehicle entry and exit adjacent to the shop. In terms of function, these elements are more important than aesthetics, and usually we hide them so that they do not have much impact on the overall visual effect. For the immovable ones, we try to find a solution to beautify them. In short, while taking into account functional requirements of the building, we try to maintain the overall aesthetic and unity of the façade. It’s a challenge for designers and architects, and of course, part of our fun. How to balance functional and aesthetical aspects of architecture is an eternal debate. When people pass by an outstanding shop and are attracted by the shopfront, they may not pay attention to the functions inside the building, nor may they have the knowledge to understand. It doesn’t matter, as long as they feel good about the façade and feel comfortable when staying in the space. That’s an acknowledgement of the work of designers and architects. As a professional team, designers and architects, like a command behind the scenes, give full play to the potentials of façade.

## **7. Two keys to the success of shopfront design**

The importance of shopfront design is self-evident, and in my view there are two keys

to successful shopfront design. The first key lies in understanding the ultimate purpose of shopfront design; i.e. to improve sales performance. All in all, sales are the soul of the business world. All kinds of design and decorations on the façade should be aimed at bringing up people’s interest to step into the shop. The shop itself is a sleepless “salesman” who exists to tell customers, “We’re here. Please come in!” This is what designers should keep in mind. In order to achieve this goal, each brand requires more from shopfront design and is willing to increase the budget.

I remember when I first came to Hong Kong, in 2007 maybe, on Canton Road there were only a few brands covering the façade of the Harbour City mall. Ten years later, as one of the streets of highest retail sales in the world, shops on both sides of Canton Road have made every effort to create splendid shopfronts, covering the high façades of the buildings. In the past ten years, the sales volume on Canton Road brand had been increasing continuously, and the greatly improved shopfronts had played a significant role. The same story happened in Myeong-dong, Seoul and in Ginza, Tokyo. Though without statistical data support, brands around the world continue implementing the strategy to promote their business and enhance brand identity by improving their shopfronts. When

brands around you are improving, in order to maintain competitiveness, you must improve yourself. In the face of fierce competition on the market, you have to make progress to win the “battle”, and gradually a cycle of “competition-progression” is formed.

The above point of view may be objected by some people, who don’t hold the way to give design a strong commercial quality. However, design is, inherently, commercial and functional. Design is professional services provided to clients to solve their problems. It is different from art. Art can be totally free from money and plays only with personal feelings. By comparison, design is firstly about functional requirements (including consideration for users, business marketing, and brand image), and then aesthetic beautification. The designer’s task is to balance function and art in an excellent design. Clearly with this task in mind, the designer can face up to clients’ business-related requirements. On one hand, we need to meet needs of the client, while on the other hand, we have to produce artistic solutions. Maybe this is a lifelong pursuit of designers.

The second key to the success of shopfront design is to allow shop façades to contribute to the development of public realm. Shopfronts, facing to streets and crowds, are

part of public space. Of course customers are welcome to shops. However, most of the people walking on the street are not target customers. We need to accept this fact with an open mind. In addition to meeting the brand brief, a shopfront designer should listen to opinions from different groups. Though it’s impossible to respect opinion from everyone, at the very least, we hope that the shopfront is pleasing to the eye for most people.

Designers should strive to integrate shopfront design into the local environment, creating a distinctive brand image while at the same time, making people in the community feel comfortable. The difference between “conspicuous” and “eccentric” is subtle, which, however, makes people feel totally different ways. Be careful. Here’s a small story. I was born in Napoli, a city in southern Italy. In ancient times, it was part of the kingdom of Naples, a rich and prosperous country. Many classical church buildings, through a long history, have been kept. Today Napoli is no longer as prosperous as it used to be. The city is overcrowded with immigrants from all over the globe. Gone are the golden glories of the past. However, every time I go back to my hometown and see these historic buildings, I still feel greatly touched, and I admire the wisdom and creativity of my ancestors. The church which was built hundreds of years

ago, though declining today, still keeps its charm. Whether you have a religious background or not, you will admire the aesthetics and ingenuity of the ancient men. Architecture built hundreds of years ago, to this day, still looks “pleasant to the eye”; it is eternal beauty, which has been integrated into the surrounding environment. This is the contribution of architecture to urban development, and it particularly contributes to the development of public realm. Now I am a designer, involved from time to time in various projects; shopping malls, shops, hotels, restaurants and so on. Although I dare not compare myself with my ancestors, I hope to preserve their pursuit of “contributing to environment” in my work.

## 8. Conclusion

Shop design, with an all-encompassing approach, integrates space, display, on-line and off-line technology, and the five senses to form a complicated design system. As part of it, shopfront design is very important for the establishment of brand identity. Façade is the appearance of a shop, leaving the first impression of the brand to customers. The interior and exterior are interdependent and mutually supportive. Good design inside and outside the shop will strengthen the brand in customers’ mind. Design trends are updated every day, and technology is developing rapidly. We need to follow dynamics on the

market and understand customer behaviour in order to provide a specific solution for each brand. Design is a personalised service and is created based on unique needs of each brand. Every day news reports about the new development of artificial intelligence (AI), and many jobs will be replaced by computers. As a human-oriented service, I guess design should be one of the last professions to be replaced by artificial intelligence (if it can be replaced). Instead of being in worry, we should be optimistic about the challenges and opportunities brought about by new technology, and try to produce user-oriented design that focuses on human needs – this is the initial aspiration of designers. I hope we will always remember this and continue to make progress in design.