

IN-STORE

As purchase channels broaden, aesthetic environment becomes more important

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Acne Studios spring/summer 2016

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VERSAILLES, France Changes in the luxury world are bringing design and environment to the forefront, according to a panel at The New York Times International Luxury Conference on April 5.

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Having a uniform aesthetic is part of effective branding, and as the in-store experience changes in accordance with consumers' habits and digital channels, its design must follow. Spaces must convey a brand's emotions and ideas to make a strong impression.

"It's very difficult [to explain how the brand is created beyond products]," said Mikael Schiller, chairman and co-owner of Acne Studios. "'I think it's about sampling' what you do, curating and putting things together.

"What has been very important to us from a historical perspective is we are quite aggressive," he said. "At the same time, I think we have been able to keep a real thread through what we are doing."

Design for branding

Even the name of Acne Studios, an international Swedish fashion house, is a testament to the power of branding. Mr. Schiller states that the name was chosen because he and co-founder Jonny Johansson wanted to turn something with purely negative connotations into something positive.

Acne stands for "Ambition to Create Novel Expressions," but Mr. Schiller related how retailers including Harrods and Barneys initially refused to carry products with Acne branding.

Additionally, the house foregoes traditional marketing and advertising forms, finding them to be unfit for the brand. It opts instead for a journal, Acne Paper, which covers art, design, photography, architecture and culture.



Acne Paper

Everything from its stores including a flagship in Normalmstorg, Sweden, where the bank robbery that gave rise to the term "Stockholm Syndrome" occurred and an art deco building in Los Angeles to its jeans-influenced aesthetic, is part of creating a unified aesthetic environment that properly reflects the brand.

With more shoppers turning to online channels, where a brand experience is harder to convey, a compelling in-store design is even more important. Luca Guagagnino, director of "I Am Love" and "A Bigger Splash," films known as much for their aesthetic sensibility and set design as for their narratives, discussed the importance of detailing every piece of furniture and color in his sets.

Doing so brings the viewer into the world he is creating, which comes with its own characteristics and tones that could not be conveyed through other forms of communication. A store should do the same, aiming to create an environment that communicates a medium-specific message that the customer could not gather from marketing materials or even from products.

From aesthetics to sales

A luxury brand's retail environment should be carefully orchestrated to make consumers want to participate in the store experience, according to panelists speaking at the French American Chamber of Commerce's "The Luxury Retail Store: Real Estate, Design and Customer Experience Trends" event.

During the presentation Nov. 12, 2015, one resounding theme was that the increase in luxury's presence online has removed the necessity of interacting with a bricks-and-mortar location, creating a need for a sense of theater and engagement to draw consumers away from other possible activities to shop. By going above the traditional store design, bricks-and-mortar retail can better compete with online channels for revenue ([see story](#)).

Since buying a luxury product is often an experiential process for consumers, in-store design is increasingly important for luxury brands and can help drive repeat customers.

The store is a physical representation of the brand itself, therefore luxury brands should aim to uphold the same qualities in their store design as they do with their products. An elegant, bold and architecturally-innovative design should be the main focus for luxury brands ([see story](#)).

"If you're a fashion brand today there's so many things to think about so we tried to make it a bit simpler, not too complicated, and really try to focus from the beginning on the product and the packaging of the product and what the

stores look like and what services are in the stores," Mr. Schiller said. "It's a scary thing with social media, where you don't have control, but it's also great for sending a message. If you do great things, people will talk about it."

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