

COLUMNS

## Nordstrom New York: A retail experience assessment

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*Nordstrom's New York flagship is designed so that each floor is a display window. Image courtesy of Nordstrom*

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Department store chain Nordstrom a couple of months ago opened its seven-story, 320,000-square-foot women's department store in New York to great acclaim.

The retailer's architects have smartly achieved the challenge of gluing together multiple different buildings at the top end of Broadway and 57th Street on different levels and floors, unifying them together with a clean palette of floor tiles, painted walls and subtle ceiling lighting.

The exterior is designed to impress, and the waved glass fascia windows certainly do that. You would expect this theme to be carried through the entrance and into the store, creating grand and playful moments.

But that is not the case.

Starkly put

Rather, the space is clearly designed to be flexible, with no recessed carpeting or set fixtures to restrict dramatic change a sensible move for a store of this scale in a volatile retail climate.

However, this solution brings a new set of challenges: The somewhat-stark interior creates a sense of monotony and, as a result, your eye is not drawn to any one specific area. Thus, brands that have a sense of real personality, or need warmth and intimacy, are lost.

The atmosphere is too utilitarian, too obviously flexible and lacking in the glamour and playfulness one would expect from an iconic retail brand's flagship New York location.

The customer service level within Nordstrom is as high as ever, and the new digital aids for returns and online pickups are heavily weighted to solving impatient New Yorkers' need for fast and frictionless service. This is assuredly a smart move.

But Nordstrom NYC is a surprisingly analog store. Sure, there is technology solving express and customer service issues, but there is very little technology there to surprise and delight. Where are the "wow," Instagram-able

moments?

FOR LANDMARK stores of this scale to survive and thrive in a city such as New York, the brand experience, personality and store atmosphere need to be injected with color, life and wonder.

No doubt the new Nordstrom store will be a revelation for shoppers who are still coping with the loss of Barneys New York and other favorite stores this year.



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