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Visual Merchandising & Retail Design



**A spatial narrative of
journey & destinations**

Ahmedabad

VM-RD

Visual Merchandising & Retail Design

Volume 15 Issue 11 August 2020

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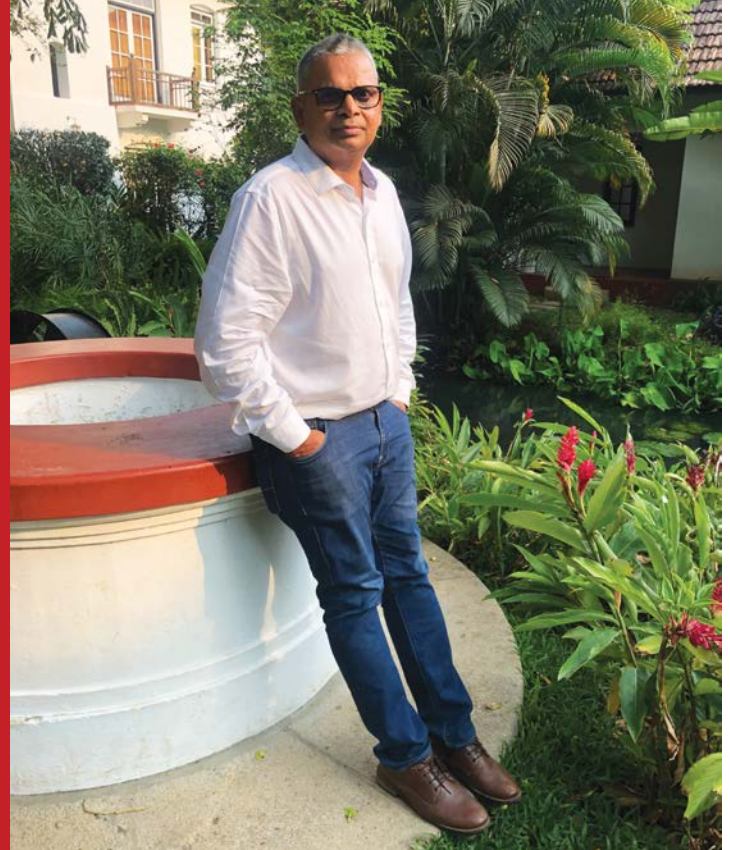
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Vasant Jante
Editor & Publisher

Juggling the Changes

In the last 6 months we have all come to make peace with the inevitability of change - working without the office space, learning without the classroom space, buying without the store space. Those on the other side of things- employers, educators and manufacturers/retailers respectively in this case - have also made peace with the transition. But the question is: transition to what? A new reality of altered shopping/consumption behaviours? A transformation in the whole economic dynamics triggered by lifestyle changes? A global consumer sentiment survey conducted by McKinsey among 45 countries last month around a few key parameters showed that when it came to India, 60% of the respondents were becoming more mindful of where to spend their money, 45% were changing to less expensive products, 91% had tried new shopping behaviour and 51% cared about health and hygienic packaging as important factors when it came to brand choice. And quite expectedly, it also showed that there was a marked shift to digital and online platforms for buying, with most categories seeing more than 10 percent growth in their online customer base during the pandemic. Many consumers also reportedly admitted that they planned to continue shopping online, even when brick-and-mortar stores reopen. But in most countries, including India, most of the online purchases have obviously been happening in very select categories - snacks, groceries, household supplies etc. So categories dependent on touch and feel buying in a physical store space have possibly two choices - wait it out or explore innovative new ways of combining digital and personal interfaces - based on consumer convenience. A look at some brand examples shows that those doing well are those who are closely aligned with customer needs and follow an empathy based approach in their product line and selling proposition. So going back to the question of what next, perhaps a well thought out long term strategy that takes into account multiple scenarios with a long term value proposition, rather than being a reaction to current market trends, could perhaps clinch it.

Vasant Jante

Vasant Jante
Editor & Publisher

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A spatial narrative of journey & destinations

AHMEDABAD

Located in Ahmedabad, Sternhagen is a collaboration between renowned design firms Opolis based out of Mumbai and Zurich based MACH Architektur. The showroom is all enabling transactions in an experiential environment.

Architects Rahul Gore and Sonal Sancheti started Opolis, a multidisciplinary design practice, in January 2001. Bringing their individual aesthetic strengths, technical expertise, creative inclinations and artistic vision to the table, the duo has made Opolis one of the leading architectural firms in the country. Recently the Mumbai based design firm collaborated with Zurich based firm MACH Architektur for the visually rich 'Sternhagen' project.

Sternhagen is a German brand dealing in premium sanitaryware and bathroom fittings and is owned



Rahul Gore, Principal Architect, Opolis



by the Acrysil Group. Acrysil also trades a complete range of kitchen appliances and other accessories under the brand name 'Carysil'.

“The Ahmedabad showroom for Acrysil was to house its two brands - Sternhagen on the 2200 sq. ft ground floor and Carysil on the 2000 sq. ft first floor in a commercial building. The fundamental idea was to highlight both these brands’ positioning to the professionals. The place was a B2B and a B2C retail space where the store would mainly reach out to design professionals with a few walk-in clients,” explains Rahul Gore, Principal architect, Opolis.

The showroom spread across 4,200 sq. ft, was conceptualized as a ‘Journey’ with ‘Destinations’. According to Rahul, the ‘destination’ spaces were designed to put products under the spotlight, while the ‘journey’ spaces in between focused on elevating the visitor experience and were planned to enhance the relationship between the consumer and the brand.





He explains further, “The journey underscores elements of art, water and light and seamlessly connects them with concrete floor along with brass metal elements used on the floor and light fixtures. Art pieces play an integral part of the journey. As one enters the showroom, brass clad reception table with a back drop of 50mm dia brass pipes welcomes the visitors. An oak staircase leads them to the upper level where the Carysil brand is positioned.”

“The destination spaces were conceptualized with grey mirrors to ‘dematerialize’ the experience of the journey. Multiple reflections play a crucial role in elongating and thus driving home the space-time relationship of the journey. Destination cubes that visually penetrate through the slab connects the two brands spatially

under one roof, while maintaining their individual identities, is a major highlight of the showroom,” Rahul concludes.

Mohit Manghani

Credits

Design Firm

OPOLIS, Mumbai with MACH Architekturstudio, Zurich

Designers

Rahul Gore (OPOLIS)

Deepak Vishwakarma (OPOLIS)

Jan Fischer (MACH)

Monica Sandmayr (MACH)

Agencies

Concrete floor

Greenheart Floors

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Indian Design



mandap

Ethnic World



Mandap: A marriage of Opulence & elegance

VADODARA

Spread over two levels, the Mandap showroom in Vadodara, designed by Vadodara based JAD Arch Studio, spells luxury and opulence and is all about showcasing the brand's rich heritage.

Mandap, the men's ethnic garment label, takes inspiration from its long heritage and creates an experience of openness and bareness at its Vadodara showroom where traditional motifs converge with a contemporary design sensibility.

The showroom has been designed by Vadodara based JAD Arch Studio and is spread over two levels. Says Arpit Jain, Principal Designer, JAD Arch Studio, talking about the store design concept and execution, **"The owner envisioned having a luxurious merchandise store in a new city that he now calls home. So the idea was to create an ambience of opulence. We have used a neutral color palette to achieve this. One can also see stone, metal and wood in flooring, countertops, paneling and hanging displays. The ground floor has wooden furniture on one side, while the 6' wide long passage on the other side has a chevron pattern inlay with the use of marble. This pattern gives a subtle hint of the staircase that leads to the first floor."**



Arpit Jain, Principal Designer, JAD Arch Studio





He further adds, “The approach to the first floor from the wooden staircase has stone cladding followed by tile cladding on the side wall . The eye catching chandelier at the center and the use of stone, metal and wood etc in the form of inlays on floor, panels, and intricate jali work is in sync with the premium quality of products displayed here.”

Speaking on the unique aspect of the showroom, Arpit shares that the metal detail which runs through the store, in the form of a screen and hanging system, is one of the salient features. “This detail has been specially created after various trials and errors. After extensive research, a Moroccan inspired motif was picked to decode the concept of playing with clean lines and luxury. The intention was to try and create a value out of this raw motif by giving it a unique presence. It became a muse for logo, panels, etching, furnishings, screen etc.”

According to the designer, the budget of the spacious showroom was Rs 1.25 crore. He further says that through meticulous planning and relentless hard work, the design team was able to successfully complete project in a timely manner.

JAD Arch Studio, started in 2018, is led by Principal Designer Arpit Jain, who believes in delivering aesthetics along with functionality to the clients.



Credits

Design Firm
JAD ARCH. STUDIO

Principal Designer
Arpit Jain

Design Team
Arpit Jain, Ajay Suthar,
Surbhi Agrawal

Site Supervisor
Dilip Shahdarpuri

Carpentry Team
K. K Suthar
& Ass. (Kanu Bhai)

Stone Work : Pravin Suthar

Fabrication & Metal Work
The Art Room (Mehul Panchal)

Lighting Consultant
Akshay Pathak

Color Agency: Komal Chohan

Stone Suppliers
R. K Marble, Kishangarh

Paint: Asian Paints, Jotun

Lights: Hybec

Photography: Tejas Shah
Photography

Mohit Manghani



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Kitchen revisited at Euromobil's Milan store

ITALY

The name Euromobil is synonymous with furniture and home design. Gruppo Euromobil is backed by over 45 years of technical know-how and craft culture. The company focuses on environmentally friendly designs and technology. It employs selective production standards and has good export capacity with over 800 points of sale throughout the world. The company's first flagship showroom in Milan, Italy, designed by Matteo Thun & Partners Architecture is all about making the kitchen space even more of what it actually is - the heart of the home.

The full range of Euromobil's kitchen designs comes alive in their new Milan showroom, wherein the design concept is ruled by translucency, lightness, transparency and flexibility. The essential idea is about architecture framing the kitchen, which is heart of the home.

Known for its attractive Italian kitchens merging design, culture and quality, Euromobil has over 45 years of technological know-how and artisan culture. Now the kitchen expert has found a rich showcase platform in Milan. The design concept stems from the fact that the kitchen, being the heart of the home, conveys warmth, conviviality and togetherness. Also, it is a space where the atmosphere is key, besides the food of course.

So the architecture frames the exhibits and highlights the products by creating unexpected

environments. A courtyard focuses on the green conveying that the attraction is as much from the outside as it is from the inside.

The concept involves an elevated interpretation of nature with the focus on lightness, Earth and sensoriality. Visually limitless, the 2 floor space with its natural lights and neutral materials and volumes lends lightness and versatility.

The design offers enough flexibility allowing different scenarios to be created during daytime, while the main counter reflects the idea of a kitchen offering different functions of presentation. Passing through the garden near the entrance, a staircase leads to the lower level heading to the technical area of the showroom.

Matteo Thun & Partners is an architecture and design studio, headed by Matteo Thun and Antonio Rodriguez with headquarters in Milan, Italy. Encompassing a team of 70 interdisciplinary architects,

Store facts

Area 300 sqm
2 floors: 1 main floor
+ floor underground
Milano,
Corso Monforte
30/3





interior, product and graphic designers, Matteo Thun & Partners works from micro to macro scales with a focus on the management of highly complex projects.

N. Jayalakshmi

Credits

Kitchen

Euromobil

Furniture

Désirée

Lighting

Flos

Integrated systems for windows

Secco Sistemi

Bathroom

Cielo

Cover plate

Vimar

Floors

Palladio

Marmorino

Oikos





A window to retro minimalism

ISRAEL

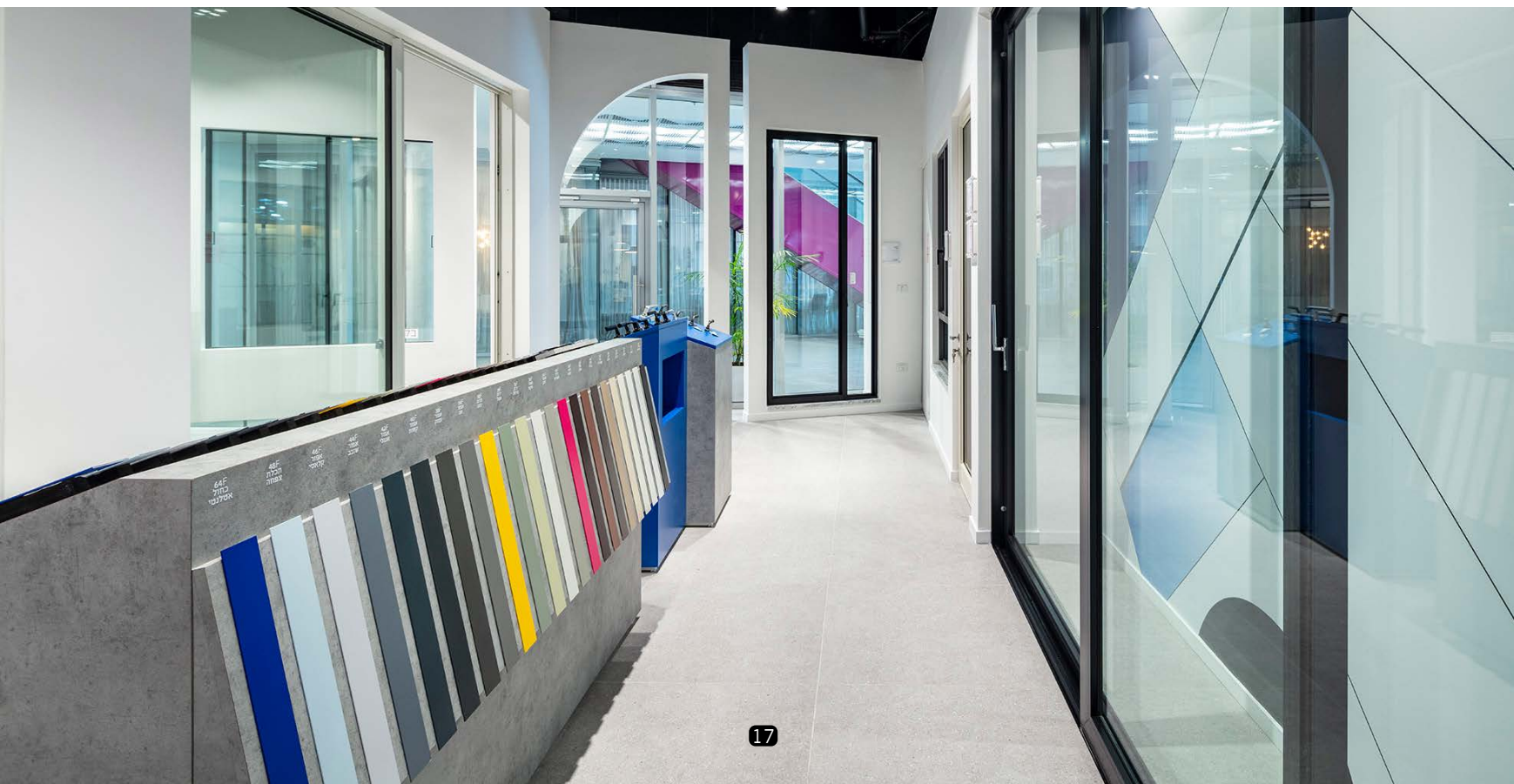
Klil is an established name in the design of aluminum windows and doors in Israel. A store design upgrade was initiated to highlight the brand's new Bauhaus series. Designed by Tel Aviv based Studio Samuelov, the new showroom design is all about bringing together precise functionality and seamless aesthetics.

Klil is a leading player in the design of aluminium windows and doors in Israel. The company, established in 1950, felt the need to update its showroom in order to showcase the new Bauhaus series and the values it stands for. Tel Aviv based Studio Samuelov, which has

been designing Klil's showrooms for many years now, was recently called upon to tell a new brand story with a new design idiom.

The main challenge in the design process was to tell a story about an almost invisible product, a window

that combines thin aluminum and a transparent glass, and which practically blends into the space. The team arrived at a creative solution - highlight this specific quality by giving the product an interesting quiet appearance, and allowing the store's customers to walk through it.





The transparency and the light coming through the Bauhaus windows was highlighted by utilizing geometric lines and a background of featured dry-walls. According to the statement by Studio Samuelov, the design approach ensured that the customers' eyes went straight to the middle of the window by using diagonal lines and adding rainbows to the dry-walls, thus softening the space between the windows. In the process it also created a neat depth between the windows and behind them, inviting the customer to walk through them to experience the full impact.

"We've used materials that relate to the Bauhaus series' transparency and cleanness: concrete floor, white panels, black ceilings, walnut veneer. For additional furniture we chose wavy lines and velvet to create balance and softened the straight lines of the rest," says the design company statement.

The size of the showroom is 180 SQ.

N. Jayalakshmi

Credits

Designer Studio Samuelov
Tiltan Caon

Contractor
Naim Gross, Tzahi & Naim

Lighting
Kimhi Architectural Lighting

Floors
Alongy

Carpenter
Haim Harush, Eichut
Carpentry

Graphic Design
Neta Cohen, Samuelov Studio

Design Producer
Art Design

Sofa
Assaf Furniture

Carpets
Tzemer Carpets

Additional furniture- Lamp, table, couch
ID Design



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Illuminating new standards of innovation

*It was a proud moment for Mumbai based leading manufacturer of lighting solutions , Focus Lighting and Fixtures Limited, after it won the acclaimed Red Dot Design Award for its newly designed Magnus Spotlight. The award is bestowed on products featuring outstanding design. In a special chat with VM&RD, **Amit Sheth - Managing Director & Founder, Focus Lighting**, highlights the special attributes of the award-winning Spotlight range, how it reduces the energy wastage while enhancing retail spaces, and more...*



“ I believe product & technology can improve energy cost by at least 40 %. IoT can also help considerably to save on energy. For example, during non-peak hours in retail spaces, brands prefer to keep lights on, but sensors can certainly help to reduce the wattage & save energy, without making the stores look dark.

How does it feel winning the acclaimed Red Dot Design Award for the Magnus spotlight range?

It's a great privilege to have won the Red Dot design award and as a company we are very proud of the milestone. I think the whole lighting industry would be proud of this as it is the world's most prestigious and influential design accolade, which only a few companies in the world manage to win. This achievement will instill belief in Indian companies as they can also design & manufacture great designs with technological breakthrough. It is a baby step to show the world that our country and our industry is capable of manufacturing products with highest standards.

Can you share more details of the award winning range?

A lot of innovation has gone into the Magnus Spotlight range. It improves energy cost savings by 40 %, compared to the standard LED products available with the same standards and specifications. Another dynamic feature is that it is tunable and complies with human centric lighting standards. It is by far the only product with primary optic to tune Colors homogeneously

It's a smart design with small size products compared to what is available in market and is IoT enabled for asset /people tracking and integrated with sensors for motion/humidity/air quality .

Other features include controlling light fuming & switching & off through various mediums like

- Voice
- Remotes
- Computers / laptop & iPads
- Centralised control of lights
- Remote controlling of lights

How do you maintain consistent innovations in lighting fixtures? What drives your decisions?



Magnus-Recessed-2x-moveable.jpg



Magnus-Surface-1x-moveable.JPG



Magnus-Surface-2x-fix.jpg



Magnus-Track-1x.jpg



Magnus-Track-2x.jpg



Magnus-Track-4x-Line.jpg



Magnus-Track-4x-square.jpg

It's just our passion. We want to be innovative & different, much more so than the market standards. But frankly, when we design we are not looking at the commercial aspects, but are focused on innovation and finding a way around the challenges that the industry faces. That is what drives us.

What are some of the typical challenges you face while maintaining high standards and innovation?

Maintaining high standards always comes with its set of challenges which revolve around :

- Consistency
- Maintenance of proper facilities and infrastructure including our in-house lab, special ESD flooring, clean room environment and state-of-art manufacturing facility
- Design capability

All the above come at a price. It may look easy, but it costs time, money and energy. It needs a vision and an eye for perfection, specially when the market is becoming so commodity driven & and there are many players who are taking the short cut to business gains.

How do you think energy efficiency can be improved in lighting solutions? What has been your own approach to it?

I believe product & technology can improve energy cost by at least 40 %. IoT can also help considerably to save on energy. For example, during non-peak hours in retail spaces,

brands prefer to keep lights on, but sensors can certainly help to reduce the wattage & save energy, without making the stores look dark.

Can you share some thoughts on your approach to lighting design - how it needs to be in sync with the overall store design, ambience and brand character?

When we look into lighting design we categorize it into:

- Window - First meeting point for the customer & first impression of the store
- Perimeter lighting - Needs to be crisp as customers first look at the perimeter wall after entering the store
- Focal points - Draws people's attention
- Trial rooms - 70 to 80 % of decisions are taken in the trial room. Most of the stores, especially large format retailers, ignore the importance of overall visual comfort here.

Keeping all the above in mind we have designed our fixtures which :

- Are the smallest in the world
- Enable color changing as dynamic lighting does help in windows
- Come without spillage - Unlike conventional LED, and this feature is especially important for perimeter & focal points to ensure the light is where it is needed and not on walls and floors.

In a post Covid world, what are the biggest challenges for the lighting industry? What do you think this industry needs to do to go to the next level?

Two things have posed serious challenges. First, we have tremendous pressure on cost cutting and I feel it's worldwide. At the same time credit periods are increasing. We also have pressure with regard to recovery of our debts.

Secondly, all are talking about safety, so the easiest way is to make the store look brighter. But we don't agree with that view. Our stores are already bright. There needs to be a right balance between brightness, glare & heat-less visual comfort.

What are your own plans for the immediate future? Any new solutions or investments you are looking at?

We foresee retail to be slow, but we have been constantly investing into other verticals of lighting .

In recent years we have seen the entry of lighting consultants. What role do you think they can play in elevating the industry?

They are like Google maps who guide the clients. I think it is imperative to have lighting consultants as they add value.

Mohit Manghani

‘The best is yet to come’

*At a time when people and businesses are grappling with the question of ‘what next?’ it is reassuring to hear voices of positive conviction. **Huzefa Merchant, Founder, INSYNC Shop Fittings (SAFE ENTERPRISES)**, motivational speaker, author and recipient of many accolades including that of ‘One of the Top 100 influential retail minds in India’ for three consecutive years and winner of the Young Achiever’s title at the Golden Globe Tigers in 2018, strongly believes that the best things happen to those who never give up. As someone who has steered INSYNC into a well established position in the retail solutions space, Huzefa is a standing example of his conviction that it takes vision to run and sustain a business. He recently launched the Engage Fit N Light System that encompasses the many benefits of a phygital solution for the retail space. In an exclusive chat with VM&RD, Huzefa talks about the new solution, about how a truly phygital solution gives the business enabling edge to retail, his vision for Indian retail, and more...*



“It’s important to be relevant to the times and to the customers, understand their needs and help them overcome their challenges. Some of the best retailers and brands who are doing very well now are those who demonstrate empathy.

To begin with can you tell us more about your new solution Engage Fit N Light System and the problems that it seeks to solve ?

The crux of any new solution are the challenges that it seeks to address. One of the biggest challenges that retailers face today is that of retaining their sales staff; this despite the fact that 37% of Indian consumers and 40% of global consumers consider product info and store attendants who provide relevant information as very high markers for in-store experience. The second challenge has to do with how traditional retail environment works, especially when it comes to aspects like lighting. The other challenges are to do with customer queues and self checkouts. And then, there is the need to raise a brand’s experiential value.

So we’ve created a phygital solution that takes into account all of these factors. The solution, while offering an efficient lighting solution, also acts as a Smart Assistant that relays the right product information to the customer at the moment of purchase. In terms of the experiential factor, we’ve also created aroma dispensers which can be plugged into the merchandise rack and which can be in sync with the merchandise collections.

What kind of research went into developing these solutions?

Over 5000 hours of research and 15000 hours of development. The learning journey began in 2009-’10 and everything we have learnt has been pumped into this system. The parent company SAFE Enterprises has been in market since ‘91 and we have a lot of understanding, a treasure trove of insights from all the designers and brands that we have worked with.

The best part about our new solution is that it’s made in India, created in India, developed in India and designed by us, and is inexpensive.

Speaking of cost and technology, do you think this is the best time to make retail brands aware of the increasing need to integrate meaningful technologies in retail?

Yes, especially if you look at the most important objectives of a retailer today - reduce pilferage, wastage, inventory cost and opex, while enhancing the experiential factor. By integrating these phygital technologies and controlling the influence on the customer, the retailer can certainly increase sales conversions at a fractional incremental cost. Essentially, right technology means more data, which means better understanding and better merchandise planning, which leads to lower opex. You see, we have to remember that today we are competing with e-commerce giants who have the huge advantage of data, which gives them the entire journey of the shopper. After all, everything today is a digital bread crumb. So with this phygital solution we are endeavouring to do that in physical retail - empower retailers to compete with e-commerce players one on one by combining the strength of data with last mile delivery capabilities.

You have in fact been one of the most vociferous voices in support of physical retail. Today if you had to address and motivate this entity called the Indian Retail and all those associated with it, what would be your message?

My message would be that the best is yet to come. Retail needs to bounce forward, move beyond this pandemic to the next level. Also, despite these challenging times, we have not capped our R&D. We understand that these are trying times financially, but we have made our peace with it. We know that retail is not going anywhere. The moment the lockdown is lifted, people will want to go out and visit retail spaces, provided they are made safe. So we have lined up some very relevant safety solutions as well, which we will be launching soon.

You have built a strong brand in the retail solutions space. What does it take to build a brand in this segment, especially in today's times when retail is at a crossroad?



Delivering the phygital benefits with a smart solution

Let's take the example of Kirana stores here. They have emerged to be the backbone of India amidst the Covid scenario. It is because they have adapted very well. By utilizing platforms like WhatsApp and their interactions with their customers, they have kept their communication channels open and offering better services, even though they don't have huge databases like the organised players do. So to build a brand, it's important to be relevant to the times and to the customers, understand their needs and help them overcome their challenges. Some of the best retailers and brands who are doing very well now are those who demonstrate empathy.

Your stated vision has always been to empower the Indian retailer and take Indian retail innovations to the global stage. How do you see InSync playing a key role in taking that vision forward?

There's a lot going for India - the human capital, the fantastic labour capability, the brilliant minds, and the natural resources. If we can channelise our sense of invention, we can do a lot. Of course there are some setbacks, like the negative perceptions about Indian entrepreneurs, which can be very challenging. But slowly and steadily with practice, these perception can be changed. And that's my mission - make sure that Indian innovation



in this sector is looked at with respect.

Finally, what is it about retail that keeps you going?

Retail has everything rolled into it - art, science, sales, creativity and everything that any business needs. Most importantly, retail is the backbone of any economy. If you can keep retail booming in a country then every sector will boom - manufacturing, logistics, human capital, etc. So retail keeps me going and I love what I do.

N. Jayalakshmi

‘Right mannequins successfully convey the brand story’

*Belgian mannequin manufacturer Bonami Mannequins has developed what it calls “the first sustainable mannequin that is 100% recyclable”. Made of BONPLAST™ that has several advantages, it is unbreakable, has durable construction which resists marking and damage and is lightweight, which results in faster and easier dressing and moving of the displays around the store. In a chat with VM&RD, **Nico Bonami, CEO and Founder, Bonami Mannequins**, shares more details on the need for such sustainable products and the highlights of the new eco-friendly mannequin.*



“ The final consumer expects today sustainable fashion, but the story can only be complete if it can also be presented on a sustainable mannequin. The interest comes especially from big fashion players, because they have been working on sustainability in the broad sense of the word.

Could you explain the factors that drove the launch of the 100% recyclable ‘Future mannequin’?

With consumers become more knowledgeable and aware of the impact of their lifestyle on the environment, they also become more conscious and purposeful in their choices. In the fashion industry, consumers are once again looking for authenticity and want ethical and quality clothing to last a long time. Multi-sectorial initiatives will be key to get results in order to minimize the environmental impacts fashion and textiles have across oceans, climate and biodiversity.

In direct response to this, sustainable design is fast shaping up to us. We’ve spent several years on research and development to create and produce mannequins using advanced eco-based manufacturing that is friendly to the environment, while at the same time meeting the retailer’s demands for a perfect fit, design and sustainability.

To meet the requirements of today’s environmental challenges, we have developed a unique “Future mannequin” that is 100% recyclable. A first in the history of retail design!

Can you take us through some of the product features?

As a Belgian manufacturer of mannequins we took the challenge to combine our unique design and excellent quality into a fully sustainable material. Our Future mannequin is made of BONPLAST™ which is 100% recyclable, since it belongs to the family of thermoplasts such as PC (polycarbonate), ABS and PP. The ingredients of the Bonplast have been engineered to the specifications only for mannequins. The metal systems (magnets) can be easily removed, so that it can be granulated very easily. It has several other unique and distinctive advantages:

- Unbreakable, the durable construction will resist marking and damage

- Lightweight, which results in faster and easier dressing and moving of the displays around in the store
- Innovative magnetic system for easy dressing
- No waste, clean production process;
- And last but certainly not least: 100% recyclable. You can recycle the whole mannequin.

Another significant technical advantage is that we are able to use recycled raw materials as well as product recyclability, thus making our Future Mannequin the truly sustainable, eco-friendly solution.

In how many stores are these being used now?

We launched our Future mannequins (= sustainable collection) at the Euroshop this year. There we noticed that there was a lot of interest in our sustainable mannequins. We have received good contacts, but a few weeks later, Corona struck Europe. As a result many fashion stores have been closed for several weeks/months and we are currently still waiting. As first I can already tell you that Topshop and Harvey Nichols in London will be the first to start as a trial.

What is the average lifespan of these products?

They are unbreakable. In shops mannequins are dressed and undressed several times, which often causes damage. Because the material is so sturdy, it can take a

little push and in principle it can last a lifetime. If the customer would like to have another figure, the mannequin can be fully recycled. So it has very little impact on the environment.

What is the cost difference between these and regular mannequins?

The new production process ensures that we need large quantities, so the price can even be lower than a regular mannequin. We only need quantities.

How has been the client response to these products?

We have received very positive response from potential and existing customers. We notice that there is an increasing demand for a sustainable alternative. The final consumer today expects sustainable fashion, but the story can only be complete if it can also be presented on a sustainable mannequin. The interest comes especially from big fashion players, because they have been working on sustainability in the broad sense of the word.

How challenging is it for you to manufacture and promote such eco-friendly mannequins? What do you think can lead to more sustainable practices in this industry?

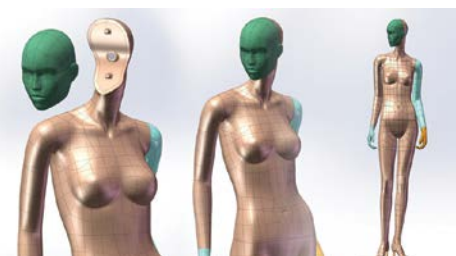
It is indeed challenging, because price is still an important factor. Nevertheless, we are convinced that the combination of a beautiful design with the perfect fit and 100% recyclability give us a good combination to convince. Furthermore, the material has



great advantages such as being unbreakable and light, and we work with an innovative magnetic system for arms and legs. All these factors ensure that it only benefits the customer who works with it.

What kind of trends do you anticipate in the near future in the mannequins segment?

We live in an ever-changing world, where people are influenced by a million things every day. But the purpose of a mannequin, which is to draw the customer into the store by showcasing their products in the best possible light, has not changed that much over the years. Having the right mannequins to present a collection is of utmost importance to any retailer, as they need to convey the store's aesthetic, offer the perfect fit for the garments and successfully convey the brand's story to the customer. However, while most traditional mannequins are made from fibreglass or PVC, a lightweight plastic, the mannequin of the future for us is made from a durable, sustainable material that is 100 percent recyclable. But also diversification is important: all sizes from skinny to plus size and all types of skin tones and all together in one window.



The art of visual story telling in stores as community spaces

At a time when lifestyle, businesses and services are all getting redefined, the retail space is more than just a transactional point, evolving more into a community hub. Given this, what is the design sensibility that works best? In this column, part of her series for VM&RD, Angela Kreutz shares her take.

As interior architects we create spaces for individual encounters and multilayered experiences, and in the process we stage a narrative – the kind of storytelling that invites customers on a journey and conveys the spirit of a brand. We lend brands concrete dimensions, provide them with the space to unfold and render the abstract tangible.

Today, stores are meeting places, places to linger and experiences in themselves. And the emotionalization of their surfaces plays a fundamental role in this regard. Redesigning and

covering these surfaces flexibly and in new ways to appeal to the relevant target groups over and over again is essential to the customer journey and thus to a successful customer experience. What is important in this respect is to sense and anticipate customers' wishes, to guide them through the store by means of visual merchandising and to inspire them by setting the products out in the right way. Ideally, the customer journey also includes the

right website and communications strategy on social media.

With everyday life and the world of fashion moving at such a rapid pace, retailers and their stores have to remain equally flexible: Merchandise racks need to be as flexible as possible, replaceable and easily modified. Curated spaces are taking on a much greater significance as a consequence. Moreover, technologies are also playing a key role in today's ever-changing product presentations. It is more and more the case that the store is becoming an immersive and experience-oriented form of advertising for the products it carries and a direct portal for all available sales channels.

It bears remembering in this context that the ostensibly analogue world is by no means as inflexible as it used to be. However, technology on location will on its own not be able to bridge the gap between the Internet and the here-and-now, just as no QR codes on a product can make that leap. What we need, then, is new architectural concepts

that no longer perceive space as a fixed, unchangeable continuum, but instead as a basis for dynamic narrative landscapes. What we are always talking about here is the interaction between humans and brands – and about the question of how we can elicit certain emotions in the customer.

One example of this is the world's largest BOSS outlet which our interior designers and architects

“ What we need is new architectural concepts that no longer perceive space as a fixed, unchangeable continuum, but instead as a basis for dynamic narrative landscapes. What we are always talking about here is the interaction between humans and brands – and about the question of how we can elicit certain emotions in the customer.”



recently designed for Metzingen's outlet city. From the very outset, customers there are encouraged to identify with the Hugo Boss brand when they enter the store via a slowdown entry. A digital floor manager accompanies them to all areas of the outlet – it is never the case that customers have nobody to whom they can direct any questions they might have.

To complement the comprehensive Hugo Boss service, touchscreens have been integrated into the cubicles. These can be used to summon staff for help or advice, for example. Thus, these digital elements supplement individual customer advice, without completely abolishing the personal aspect. For this reason, there is also a bespoke tailoring section where customers can have their garments adjusted, thus getting an impression of how much craftsmanship Hugo Boss puts into tailoring its customers' clothing. Here, the way that the

customers exchange information with the brand ambassadors and their identification with the brand complement each other. Last but not least, the bistro complete with patio affords customers an opportunity to take a breath of fresh air, allow the experience to work on them and come into contact with other customers.

The focus is very much on the dynamic interaction between people and space, and therefore on creating a holistic shopping experience that combines analogue and digital elements.

Angela Kreutz, has been the CEO at Blocher Blocher India, Delhi, since the foundation in 2008. Additionally, Mrs. Kreutz is partner at the German parent company for architecture and interior design, Blocher Blocher Partners. The marketing expert studied Communication and Art in Germany and USA. After various engagements in the media business she came to Blocher Blocher Partners in 2002; internationally, Mrs. Kreutz is responsible for customer relationship, amongst others.



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When empathy matters in the business sense

If there's one lesson that's emerging very strongly from the pandemic then it is that empathy may be more than just a social or personal virtue. It could actually translate into higher sales for brands who closely understand customer challenges and address them meaningfully. From fashion and lifestyle to FMCG, there are enough examples of brands across industries who have managed to stay on top of things by simply addressing very specific customer needs. This would of course mean more than mere marketing gimmick. For example, a recent news item reported how casual fashion brand Uniqlo's Japanese same store sales rose 4% y-o-y in July. The rise in domestic same store sales including online purchases, reportedly followed a 26% jump in June, after a three-month slump. According to analysts, it was Uniqlo's focus on practical, everyday clothes, driven by consumer demand for comfortable 'stay at home' wear during lockdown that helped it cope



with the pandemic slump better. Indeed, data and analytics company GlobalData, having shared some very sobering predictions for the apparel segment recently, has also reiterated the need for these brands to continuously engage with their customers while reinstating trust. As Vijay Bhupathiraju, Retail Analyst at GlobalData, said, "Brands need to continuously engage with consumers

and build trust by delivering messages on safety and hygiene measures taken during the manufacturing process and in-stores to drive more consumers to the stores." In GlobalData's June 2020 survey of 'Consumer Attitudes and Behaviour Globally - Week 1', 84% of consumers stated that trustworthiness, risk-free and familiarity are factors which influence their choices of products/services.

Safety is where the moolah is, but how long?



The prevailing customer mood means safety is a no-compromise area. Rising quickly to the occasion with safety products are players across segments. Innerwear brand VIP Clothing Ltd was among the latest to foray into the safety wear in India with the manufacture of masks. As per the company statement, the product has been designed with high quality 100% soft cotton, breathable, and absorbent fabric and comes in different variants: for adults and children. As Kapil Pathare, Director, VIP Clothing Ltd said, "Change and adaptation are the pre-requisite to any business's sustainability. Without making the efforts to change and evolve as fast as the macro changes, businesses will lag." Yet another example is that of lifestyle retail brand Tynimo, which has installed a first of its kind vending machine stocked with safety essentials at the Kempegowda International Airport, Bengaluru. The machine has been installed at The Departure Hall, offering a contactless and convenient experience for travelers to buy masks, gloves, sanitizers and other essential safety products. By extension, these forays by retailers and their requirements in this area, necessitate retail solution players too to tap the safety segment. But the question is whether this is an

answer to an immediate business need? Or is it a long term strategy to focus on an emerging new segment, and if so what is the USP as more and more players enter the business?

‘Fair’ is now unfair, but what’s in a name?

‘All’s fair in love and war’ goes the famous line. Well, till very recently it applied to brand wars too, as brands took the liberty of pushing aspirations in their marketing spiel. But not any longer, as consumers become more tuned to social sensitivity and social media becomes the battle ground to fight long standing social prejudices, racial issues, gender discrimination and more. Not to be caught on the wrong side of the social battles, brands are now quickly reevaluating their brand positioning and rephrasing their communications. Hindustan Unilever (HUL) recently said it will drop the word “fair” from its skin lightening cream ‘Fair & Lovely,’ as part of rebranding its flagship brand. This was after Johnson & Johnson decided to exit the fairness cream category in India. Soon French cosmetics major L’Oreal Group too said it would remove tags like white, fair and light from all its skincare products. All these companies have had to reassess their products and branding following the



‘Black Lives Matter’ protests across the globe. But the question is, are all these mere exercises in word play or do they signify something larger in the brands’ internal thought processes, which is reflected in their products and how they market them to their customers? Brands have always played a very active role in nurturing social aspirations. By

defining these aspirations they can in effect bring about social changes. So winning the fight against any social prejudice based on skin colour and other attributes will need an authentic brand narrative, one that is rooted in their product values and what these values stand for.

Ready, tech-set, go: Malls’ new mantra

As malls roll up their sleeves to get back into business and safety guidelines become a standard protocol, technology seems to be the big enabler. Recently, DLF Shopping Malls partnered with Inresto to create a contactless dining experience at restaurants and food courts across its malls. According to the company, the digital technology will empower restaurants and food courts within DLF Shopping Malls to offer a seamless customer journey and a



safe dining experience. In another instance, The Phoenix Mills Limited (PML) announced a partnership with the tech platform Dineout to offer a contactless dining experience to customers at restaurants, cafés, and food courts in Phoenix Mills properties, including High Street Phoenix and Phoenix Marketcity in Mumbai, and in Pune. Yet another example is that of Gurgaon-based O2O commerce and fintech platform DotPe partnering with Nexus Malls for placing a common QR code across various floors of the mall. Guests can scan the QR code placed on the tables and view the menu of all the restaurants through their phone browsers just like an e-commerce catalogue. The success of any tech collaboration in retail will depend on how well the entire customer journey has been taken into account and thought through while developing the solution. While ‘contactless’ may be the current mood, the need for social contact can never go away

from the human needs hierarchy. So for any technology solution to really drive business in retail and deliver the returns on investments, it will have to consider the entire spectrum of customer needs and behaviours and also the long term trajectory of shopper behaviour. This data when woven into the solution can make a tangible difference.

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