Retail
Design
Lab

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW
ABOUT DESIGNING A STORE

THE BIG BOOK OF RETAIL DESIGN

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Foreword

Let me first say thank you...

Although it may seem that I wrote this book all by myself, which is true in the literal sense, there is knowledge woven into it from years of work by an entire team. I would like to thank this team for their efforts, their knowledge and fine collaboration. When I refer in this book to PhD students, researchers from the Retail Design Lab, or colleagues from our Faculty of Architecture and Arts and the University of Hasselt, I am referring to this fine team: Carmen Adams, Charlotte Beckers,Stephanie Claes, Lieve Doucé, Nonkululeko Grootboom, Kim Janssens, Elke Knapen, Ann Petermans, Elisa Servais, Koenraad Van Cleempoel &.Jan Vanrie. Of course without the support of Hasselt University and our Faculty there would not even be a team. So thank you.

Although not part of the Retail Design Lab team, I do see them as my 'team' at home: many thanks to my husband Ward and son Bent for their patience and unconditional encouragement and love, and Flo our labrador who provided the necessary companionship.

...and introduce the book...

This book grew out of a feeling to share knowledge, to make as many people as possible wiser in how to design proper stores. Ever since I

started teaching at Hasselt University while doing my PhD, this passion to share knowledge has been growing. I was overflowing with passion for retail design, so it felt natural to share it. The first few years I only taught students, but after a few years there was also interest from practitioners. Professionals, including retailers, marketers and designers, needed scientific knowledge that could help them move forward. Not much later, the demand to apply the knowledge, very concretely on a particular case, came. And so our consultancy services were born. We have served both brands big and small and retailers alike. Many consultancy projects, doctorates and research later, we decided to give what we were doing so far a face and a name. Thus the Retail Design Lab was born. Today, we are a small expertise cell at the Faculty of Architecture and Arts of Hasselt University. It is not a company or an independent entity, it is simply a part, or say a brand, of the faculty that bundles all the activities around retail design.

The Retail Design Lab's ambition is to make all available scientific research published in academic journals (not available to the general public) available to practitioners in a relevant and applied way. Surely our main contribution is our platform retaildesignlab.be where a lot of knowledge and tools that came out of these academic insights are available to anyone interested. In addition, we still give training to professionals and provide our services to retailers and designers. I myself also still teach our interior architecture students who can choose a specialization in retail design in their master, as well as master students from the Faculty of Business Economics who are taking the elective course 'customer experience management'. Of course, through research, such as PhDs and projects large and small, we also continue to develop knowledge that then flows back to practice and our students. But we also gather insights the other way around. By working with students, we gain insights and knowledge. These in turn also flow back to the Lab and to practice. We also learn when we work with retailers and designers. So it is a continuous process, a constantly flux of knowledge from different angles coming together. Indeed, also flowing back to the different angles. You can see it as an small eco-system. And now this is shared with you.

...its academic grounding...

So I am constantly in between practice and research. This is also something you will notice in this book. The book is a collection of academic knowledge, insights from practice and a dose of experience. It is therefore not a typical academic book which is full of scientifically based statements and accompanying references. I chose to write a very accessible book that is in line with the ambition of the Retail Design Lab: to bring scientific insights in a way that is relevant to practice. Still, this book is full of scientific insights, only they are interwoven into a story and brought together and told from my specific expertise. And although the book is not purely academically based, I still hope that academics will use the book as well. I have tried with this book to nonetheless make a theoretical contribution to the relatively young (academic) discipline of retail design. The book is written in such a way it can also serve teaching purposes. It is not the typical handbook, but I do use rather typical models and graphs to illustrate the theory. Also sketches are used to illustrate certain statements. They are sketches that serve as examples in which I try to extract the essence of what I want to say. That is why certain parts are colored and others are not. The chosen examples mainly contribute to depicting knowledge rather than inspiring. Therefore, the chosen examples are not the trendiest examples or the latest new stores, but examples that serve the purpose of the story.

...from a Western European perspective...

A large part of the insights in how to design a store are generalizable but we should not forget cultural differences.

One last thing in framing this book I would like to share, is the context in which this book was written. My story stems from a very Western perspective, say Western European perspective. And although people are human beings and thus a very large part of the insights in how to design a store are generalizable to other parts of the world, we should not forget cultural differences. To give an example, in Europe, there is a rich architectural history. We have been building the way we build for relatively a long time. Cities have been steadily developing and building on the past. This makes Europeans generally very respectful of historical architecture and the build environment. This is very different from some Asian countries such as China. Chinese cities are developed very differently. The population explosion has caused large cities to build at a record pace. The former architecture no longer sufficed and was largely replaced by new, high-rise architecture. For the same reason, retail has also grown differently. The leap from markets and street trading has been converted into built-up shops at a record pace, leaving almost no legacy in large cities. Add to this the fact that, despite the diligent building efforts, large cities are still struggling with a shortage of space. For sure, all this contributed to embrace the online story, in which 'space' is unlimited. There are a multitude of other reasons too, but that would lead me too far. My point is that much quicker than Europeans, Chinese people have adopted the online world in their shopping habits, leading to differences in stores and store design. If I make a quick comparison with another large part of the world, America, also here cultural differences play a role. Geographically, America is very different and people rely more on shopping malls, Walmart and Amazon because of the great distances. In Western Europe, everything is 'around the corner'. Something Americans who do not live in cities cannot say. So, America literally has more space than our crowded Europe so stores are bigger, sometimes even huge in my perspective, again leading to differences in store design. Nevertheless, as mentioned, we are humans and a large part of how we behave in a space, how we orient ourselves, and how we make certain choices is comparable worldwide.

...aiming to shed some light in the complex world of retail design

Anyway, with this book I want to give insight into the discipline of retail design, which is much more than designing a nice interior. It is a transdisciplinary design

discipline that originated from interior architecture and has grown into so much more. Why so much more? And why is designing a nice interior not enough? Well, the world has become digital at a rapid pace, and while the importance of a physical store is clear, we have to realize that, among other things, that digitalization has made it much more complex to fill out and shape this physical store in a meaningful way. Another reason why it is not getting any easier, and this sounds a bit contradictory, is that we have never known so much about man and earth and even the universe as we do now. But knowing more also means that it becomes more difficult to navigate all this knowledge. Indeed, many more choices can or must be made. The evolution in product design illustrates this quite well. Where once a device contained an on and off button, it has now changed to ten buttons, or a digital screen with legion options. This can be compared to people and their place in this world. With less knowledge, and thus only a few buttons to play, it seems easier than with more knowledge and thus more possibilities. But, if played well, the result is more made to measure. With more knowledge, the desired result can be obtained better and the chance of success can therefore be increased. And this is exactly what I want to do with this book, I want to teach you the buttons you need to get a better result. A customized result, based on scientific insights.

Enjoy reading...

PART

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From retailing to retail design

The field of retail today only started to make sense to me when I had a look into the past. Indeed, I strongly believe that to understand today's ways of working, how people trade and buy, how stores need to function and how they look, one has to understand the past. This goes beyond understanding design. It is about understanding people and the society at large, understanding the evolution of brands, understanding how people have cultivated space, and how all these things are intertwined.

Did you know that retail design as a profession, or as a discipline, only really has been known since the 1970s? Earlier, it was more an intuitive expression of commercial acumen. It was only then that people realized that designing shops required expertise, and that as a designer you could make a business out of it, with one of my mentors and one of the great retail design gurus, Rodney Fitch, leading the way. I have seen it happening; the more global the world became, the more complex, so the design agencies had to follow to be able to serve

global brands. They too became bigger and more complex, meaning that they became more than a group of interior architects. Disciplines such as branding, trend watching, graphic design, product design, packaging design, and later, web design, made their appearance in design agencies with one main purpose in mind: creating one consistent and coherent brand story. If you look at design agencies today, they are a melting pot of different disciplines where even psychologists find a place. This is no coincidence. Almost every societal change can be linked to a change in store typology. Psychologists or sociologists offer great insights into linking such changes to design. So you can link the Industrial Revolution to the heyday of department stores, and the technological revolution to both the rise of multi-channel and the expansion of design expertise at design agencies. Obviously, retailing does not function in isolation; it is deeply embedded in the cultural, economic, geographic and social aspects of its environment. As Rodney Fitch once said, 'Retail is the mirror of society. If you locked the door of a store each decade and left the store as it was, you could learn from that store, many decades later, what the society at that time was about.' In other words, it reflects the transformations and changes, or offers a platform to communicate those transformations. Indeed, where retail is today also reflects the current society, but more about that later.

Also today, understanding how people interact with technology, how the pandemic has changed our ways of shopping and all the knowledge and insights on the human brain that have rapidly developed during the last decade are valuable to designers dealing with these humans. Such insights on the human brain also help to understand the past better. Although it seemed more 'simple' in the past because they knew less, departments stores seemed to understand customers all too well. In the following chapter, I would like to take you back to their heyday and how I, as a designer, look at them. I will also discuss some other evolutions, such as the evolution of self-service, the role of the Industrial Revolution on store development and what retail branding has to do with it. This chapter was created by bringing together various books and papers that described the past often from an art historical or architectural background or from a sociological perspective. My favorite book definitely is Dion Kooijman's 'Machine en Theater' (written in Dutch) which describes the architectural and urban development of retail buildings. I looked at the literature with a retail