

Shops

In the Cologne store, industrial details perfectly match the brand's Raw culture (right) and stools from the Prouvé Raw collection for Vitra serve as display units.

A wall in the Cologne store sees a row of jeans displayed in front of their cast-in-concrete equivalents.



... doors in December. 'It's precisely this sort of high-street location that requires exploration into the essence of retail,' says Kool. 'Ultimately, it's a machine. You have stock, you have racks for hanging clothes, and you have to present your product so that people get the message you want to convey. Finally, you have salespeople, who help customers make their selections and finalize their purchases. On Oxford Street, we deconstructed that machine and came up with the most logical and efficient procedure for each retail function.'

The most eye-catching of these functions is a glazed stockroom at mezzanine level in the middle of the shop. Kool: 'No other jeans label would do that. In most of the shops, you see an enormous denim wall with clothes stored behind it. A salesperson climbs a ladder and gets your jeans. It's a show of sorts, but the confrontation with all that denim can also be regarded as visual interference.'

In G-Star's new retail concept – launched in London – nothing distracts the eye from the relatively modest display of clothes. 'At the moment, we're focusing hard on explaining the product,' says Kool. 'The internet gives people nearly unlimited access to denim. They're not going to choose your product unless you can show them exactly what makes it unique. Everything that diverts attention from that goal has been eliminated from the shop.' By combining this strong focus on the product with personal service, knowledgeable staff and a mobile form of payment – G-Star's next step is the roaming cash desk on wheels – the company foresees a dynamically innovative shopping experience.

Isn't Kool worried about shoppers walking straight up the stairs to the glazed stockroom? 'I don't see that happening, but it wouldn't be a problem. I don't like secret rooms that are off limits to customers. It's so depressing to walk into a chic boutique and catch a glimpse of some pathetic, practically bare kitchen cubicle with fluorescent lighting and a table lined with lunch boxes. Absolutely horrible.'

Kool also mentions the sense of theatre evoked by many stores in an attempt to immerse their clientele in an 'experience'. He admits that the steady growth of e-commerce is making it increasingly important to provide entertainment. But there's more than one way to have fun. 'Not everybody wants to step into a bubble that makes a big impact but is also clearly artificial. An interesting environment can also emerge from a retailer's close

'I don't like secret rooms that are off limits to customers'

examination of the *function* of a store.' One example is G-Star's travelling denim studio, which invites customers to have a pair of Red Listing jeans made to order. They have a choice of buttons, labels and rivets, and the garment is made while they wait. It's retail theatre with a functional twist.

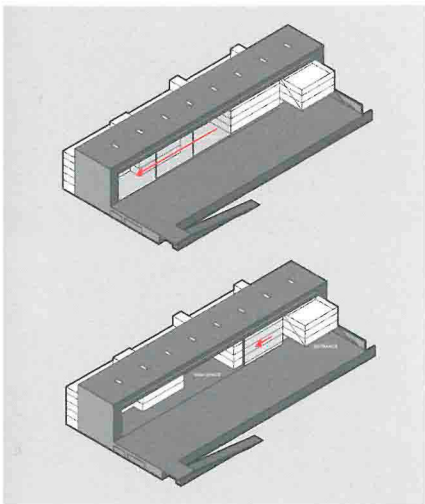
G-Star sees trade fairs as a platform for such experiments. After all, fairs are temporary events, and they offer a chance to get instant customer feedback. For Kool, fairs are *the* place at which to explore the farthest-reaching boundaries of his brand 'Once we painted the whole stand white, in an effort to discover what G-Star could be if we didn't go for dark-grey shades and didn't use concrete. For our last stand, we explored what would happen if G-Star went up a notch on the scale of exclusivity. Fairs provide an opportunity to look at things from different perspectives as we continue to rethink the future of our brand.' The accompanying experiments are also a way for Kool to try out prototypes for new shop components. The development that goes into translating a trade-fair concept into ...

New HQ by OMA

In early 2014, G-Star united all its activities – previously spread over three Amsterdam locations – within new headquarters designed by OMA. The creative departments, now consolidated, occupy the glazed core of the 27,500-m² building. Administrative and service offices surrounding this nucleus are executed in dark concrete. 'We wanted a building that would be as light and open as possible,' says Pieter Kool, 'so that no matter where you are, you can see what's happening. Everything, from furniture to lighting, reflects G-Star's vision.'



The headquarters features a glazed plinth used for parking and drop-off access, and as a stage for events.



Enormous hangar-style doors open and close a multifunctional space.



The building, located next to the ring road around Amsterdam, was nearing completion in November 2013. Photo John Lewis Marshall

... a physical retail space can be incredibly swift. 'All those stands generate a large R&D pool,' he says. 'Viewed from that angle, fairs push retail, instead of the other way round.'

Trade-fair experiments sometimes produce surprising results. When G-Star wanted to show its customers a new retail concept, Kool was asked to develop a poster

'Retail is a machine'

wall. Because bustle and chaos are what make a fair a fair, Kool opted for a minimalist space. The object he designed especially for the occasion looked like a stamp collector's loupe – but much, much larger. Peering through the magnifier, fairgoers saw photos of the new concept. Kool says it 'forced visitors to focus'. The loupe was such a huge hit that G-Star ended up using it as a promotional gift. 'Liv Tyler, who featured in our campaign, was so fascinated by it that we had one shipped to her. She uses it to display pictures of her children. Super cool, right?'

G-Star also takes advantage of trade shows to train personnel. They arrive in great numbers – mostly young people from multibrand shops and department stores – to learn the origins and philosophy behind the label and to brush up on product knowledge. The idea is to deepen their passion for the brand. 'For two years at Bread & Butter Berlin, we flew in 750 of our top clients for a full day's training session. It really triggered a burst of testosterone.'

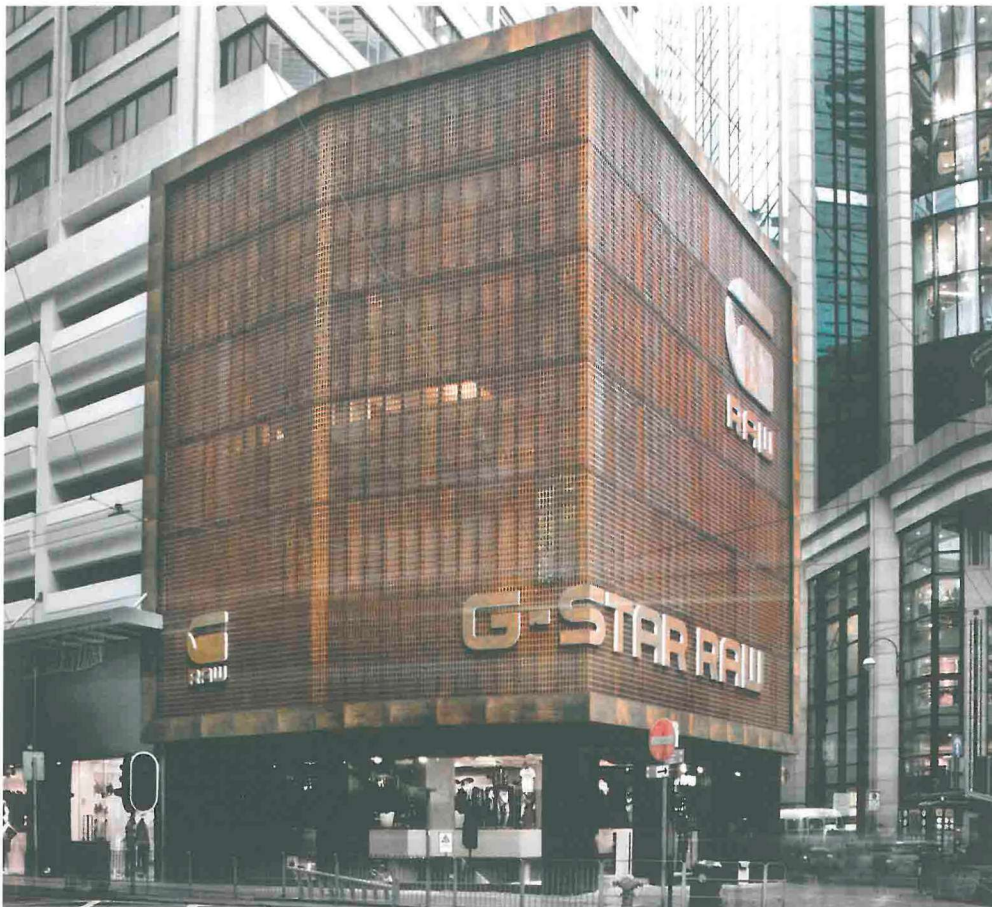
Good retailers understand that a good workforce is the key to a good shop. The importance of this piece of wisdom has only increased since the enormous growth of online consumerism – the monster motor behind all the changes in retail. 'Look at the big cities,' says Kool, 'and you'll see that specialty shops and major department stores are doing well, while everything in between is struggling. The really specialized denim shops are okay, too, because there's such a thing as understanding your business. Solid product knowledge, personal advice – it's not so easy online. Amazon can't look you in the eye.'

The positioning of staff within the shop has also gained in importance. G-Star no longer has a manned cash desk to the left ...

G-Star Raw in Figures

- 1989** Founded in Amsterdam as Gap-Star
 - 1991** Start collaboration with French jeans designer Pierre Morisset
 - 1996** Introduction G-Star Raw and G-Star Elwood
 - 2000** First flagship store in Lyons
 - 2004** Start collaboration with Australian designer Marc Newson
 - 2007** Launch footwear
 - 2009** Campaign by photographer Anton Corbijn
 - 2011** Launch Prouvé Raw in collaboration with Vitra
 - 2014** New HQ in Amsterdam
- G-Star** has 36 offices, 113 showrooms and approximately 6500 points of sales in 68 countries. The company employs almost 1400 people with 42 nationalities

Shops



G-Star used two layers of Corten-steel sheeting to achieve the rusty look of the Leighton Road store façade in Hong Kong. The project marked the Hong Kong debut of the material, which features a custom-designed G-Star motif.



Watch the G-Star atelier at work with Layar



A travelling denim studio invites customers to have a pair of Red Listing jeans made to order.