



Retail Theater

RETAIL AS THEATER? Been there, done that.

Recently, Baltimore-based athletic apparel maker Under Armour asked New York-based Marc Thorpe Design: “What is the architecture of Under Armour?” The short answer: action, vigor and endurance. The longer, more cerebral one: “A highly tuned, striking geometry giving a presence of visual weight, intensity and unique style.”

Going beyond rhetoric and straight to a bricks-and-mortar response, Under Armour is launching a global retail expansion in the form of the Under Armour Experience, located in the new Jing An

Kerry Centre in central Shanghai. The 2,000-sq.-ft. space is divided into three distinct experiential zones culminating with a retail space.

The idea for the Under Armour Experience, which opened last October, started with a creative brief from Kevin Plank, its CEO and founder. As Steve Battista, Under Armour’s senior vice president of brand creative, puts it: “We wanted to start with something totally unique and innovative, and literally wrap our arms around the consumer.”

And it does. Visitors travel through a 30-ft.-long “light tunnel” entry designed to prepare the human retina for the “experience room.” It’s a massive space featuring exaggerated scale,

and a 270-degree panoramic film designed and directed by Brooklyn, N.Y.-based Hush Studios Inc. The film envelops the viewer and tells the Under Armour story through its elite athletes (think Michael Phelps for one) and its latest innovations in product design. As the film ends, visitors are encouraged to continue into the retail space, where mannequins showcase the latest gear and the architecture becomes a more intimate and, some say, “temple-like” space.

We’re not all professional athletes, but this immersive theatrical experience sure makes you feel like you could chuck a discus at least a mile.

—Janet Groeber