



The Perfume Genie

It is not everyday that you stumble upon a store where you can have your fragrance created right in front of your eyes. Ex Nihilo, which is Latin for 'out of nothing', spreads its aroma from the Rue Saint Honoré at the heart of the City of Love, Paris. It is a brand synonymous with luxury and which is a staunch believer in the art of personalization, innovation and experiment.

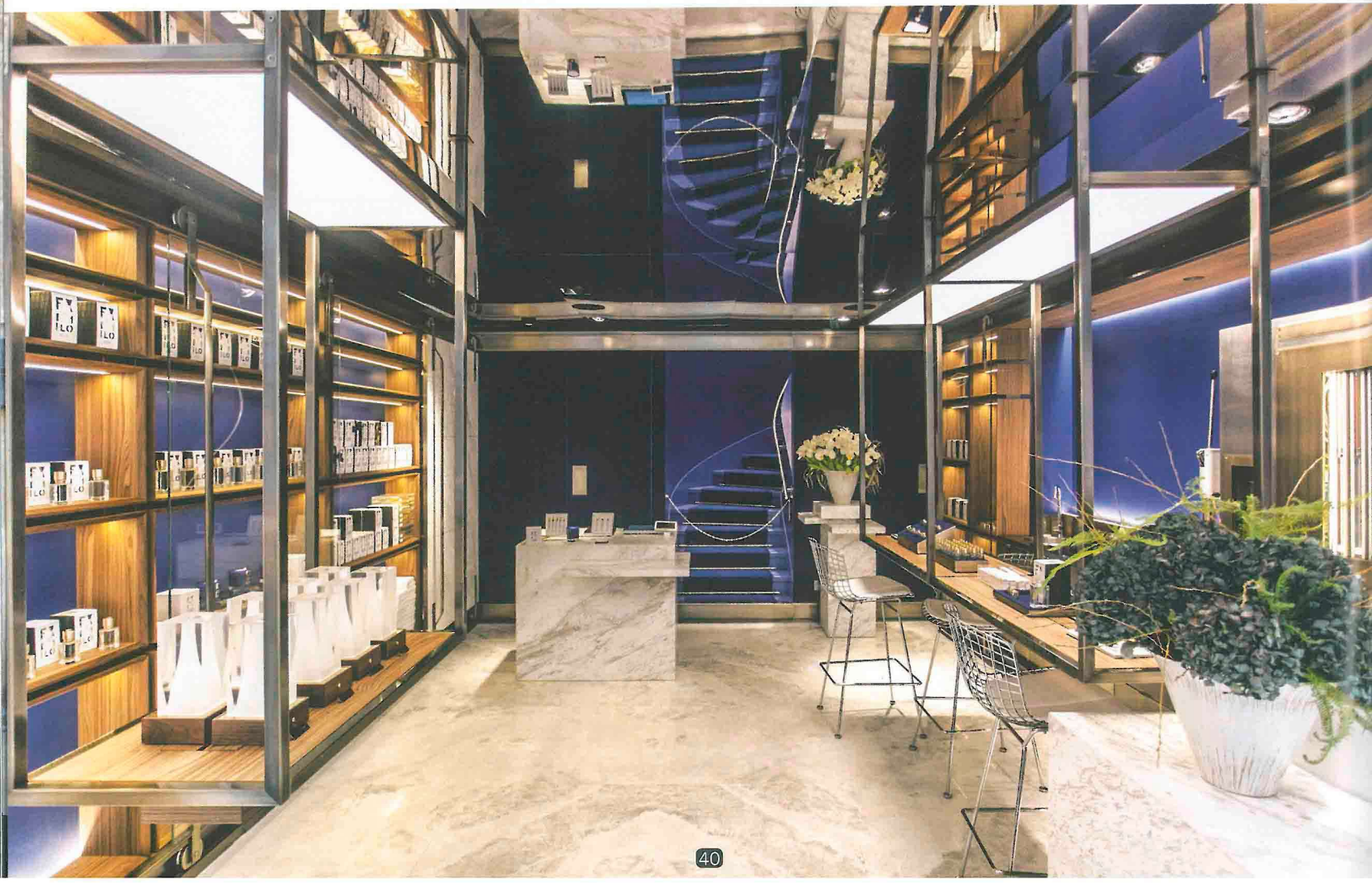
The Ex Nihilo store in Paris did not result from any design brief. Instead, brainstorming sessions reinforcing brand ideas in a physical format led to what we see as the house of fragrances today. A small space of about 40 sq. mts. has the power to transport you to a different zone of scents and mesmerize all your senses. The space was small and the idea was huge. "We decided that the most characteristic imaginary should be an expression of high-end contemporary craftsmanship environment made of an image of functionality precision, interpreted in a very accurate domestic elegant vocabulary," says Christophe Pillet, the designer brain behind the project.

The brand is a fusion of contrasting ethos of modernity and tradition, innovation and proficiency. The design of the space brings out this character through material use. It complements wood with blue felt and marble with metal. A synthesis of materials results in a cohesive arena where ideas bloom. Perfumery ingredients are experimented to their maximum limits and an attitude of daring brings about the most unexpected

combinations. Personalization is the brand's key principle and drives it to serving each customer in a better way. Client preferences are at the apex of creative decisions. A space devised to look like a kitchen-house has several points of interaction between the customer and the brand. The only concept was to experience the art of perfuming through a sensorial connect with the physical space.

Ex Nihilo offers a collection of exclusive, natural and pure perfumes in collaboration with seminal artists. The brand concept of personalization is reflected in the perfume mixing machine displayed in the store as the center of attraction.

The facade of the store radiates surreal tones to keep the effect mute. It is a mass-void composition of white marble and windows. The facade statement is underplayed to expose the interior language to the maximum. The Yves Klien-blue walls in the interior are the attention seekers in the muted colour palette. The store signage is a magnified replica of the package design. The facade material continuity lingers in the store with the flooring and





stand-alone display units concocted from the same white marble. The mirrored ceiling in the store creates the illusion of a larger store. It is quite in sync with the seed of the idea that the store should spell luxury.

With space restriction posing as a speed-breaker to a fluid movement, the displays were specially designed to be suspended to create more room for movement. The only furniture in the store are the metal chairs which are very functional in design and resemble simplistic chairs seen in kitchens. The metal goes with the language of the store and the gesture of having chairs in the store calls for an intimate experience which demands the customer to stay for a longer duration and revel in the store experience. The displays are made of American Oak wood with painted gold metal finish which is suggestive of luxury even at that level of detail. The walls recovered in the blue felt fabric provide the backdrop for the display units. The safety of products is taken care of with the sliding glass doors in the display units.

The entire space converges to a focal point where manifests the staircase to the top floor. It leads the customer to a private room where they can spend more time with an expert to customize their perfume to their exact needs. As for the zoning, Christophe Pillet says, "We did not consider zoning, may

be more "moments" leading into a hierarchic of these "moments". First step is discovering; second step is learning about the perfumes and third step is getting into customization of the perfume." As the store is more about experience rendering rather than a commercial transaction, the cash counter is kept hidden from the cone of vision at experience touch points.

It is quite an irony that 'the perfume store' has no signature smell of its own. Retail stores world over strive to indulge the customer in retail therapy using fragrance as a powerful tool. But Ex Nihilo has an air cleaning machine which helps keeps the smell as neutral as possible for the customer to make their unbiased decisions.

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