

# A GRAND OBSESSION

Cuesta Blanca weaves  
a sultry tango between old and new motifs  
in a historic Buenos Aires landmark.

By Carly Hagedon, Associate Editor





*Blending the gutted interior with the historical exterior of this 11,000-sq.-ft. store presented a challenge for the designers. High-end materials were used to strike a balance between the landmark's structure and Cuesta Blanca's modern motifs.*

**H**oused in a landmark Buenos Aires building, renowned for its Gothic/flatiron-style architecture and grand façade, which for years served as home to the Gath & Chaves department store,

Cuesta Blanca brought new life to the space after a series of business and banking tenants had permanently altered its once-glamorous interior.

The project came to fruition when Daniel Botner, of Botner-Pecina Arquitectos (Buenos Aires, Argentina), received a call from long-time friend and business partner, Sergio Saban, owner of Cuesta Blanca (Buenos Aires, Argentina), who was smitten with the historical 11,000-square-foot space. And, despite the obvious and

immediate challenges resulting from 40 years of design adaptations to accommodate a variety of occupants, Saban was determined to give new life to the structure as a flagship for his women's fast-fashion brand.

The task was formidable. The interior had been gutted, and a major hurdle was "retrieving an internal atmosphere where there was nothing to preserve – everything had been destroyed in previous renovations," Saban says.

Still, Saban and Botner got right to work, with designs rendered and finalized within 15 days. Four months





later, the store was complete, and opened July 2014.

"The challenge was blending the interior with the exterior – but not in a novel way," Botner says. "[It's difficult] to create a new interior for an old, historical building and not compete with the building [itself]. People walk into the space now and think, 'Ah, [this] was a very nice renovation.'"

A primary concern was creating a sense of intimacy in such a large space. With 13 windows and a total property area of roughly 20,000 square feet, the vastness of the interior was curbed by its L-shaped layout. "When you enter, you see the magnificence of the space, but then you have to turn to the left to see more – [it's] kind of a surprise when you're inside the store," Botner says. "The other [Cuesta Blanca] stores are smaller spaces, so they're [shaped] more like a box. This plan tries to capture [different] perspectives."

Respecting the upscale materials on the exterior

*LEFT* Roughly 95 percent of the capacious store is lit by LEDs, which help reduce energy consumption.

*ABOVE* To create a sense of intimacy in the expansive interior, an L-shaped floorplan was implemented to reduce the visual vastness of the space.





*Missing elements on the grandiose façade were recreated by casting molds of existing parts to replace those that were degraded over the years.*

meant creating a seamless look outside-in, beginning with the façade.

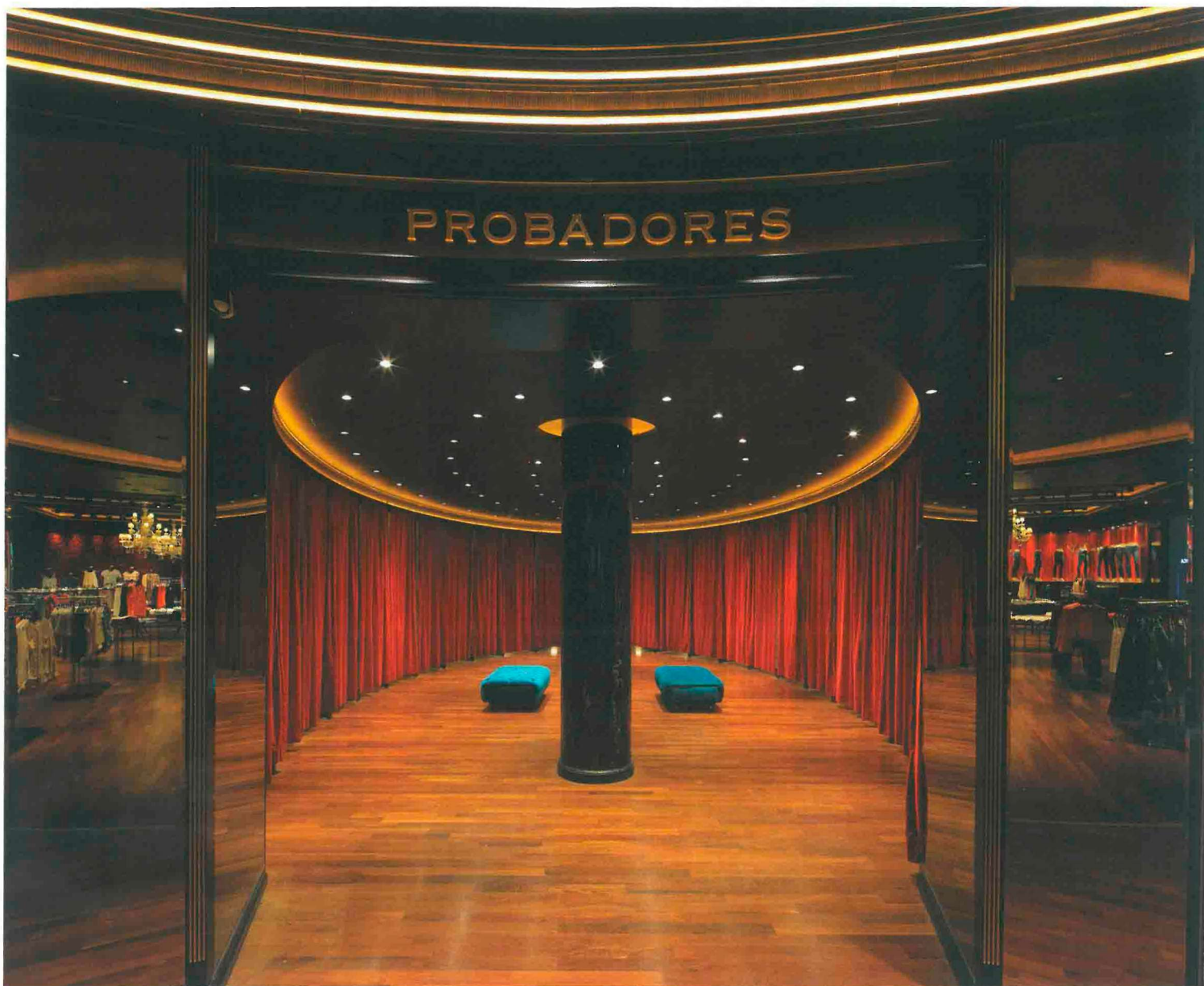
Over the years, brass decor featured in the once-breathtaking entrance had been stolen or irreparably damaged. Using the remaining pieces and taking the time to learn old techniques, Botner and his team were able to create molds in order to recast the missing brass for the exterior. Marble was used to rebuild other destroyed areas.

"It was important to respect the historic character of the façade and repair the mistakes made in previous renovations," Saban says.

To create congruity between the interior and exterior, Botner's team used the molds to create brass details for the furniture and some fixtures. Other high-end materials were incorporated, such as marble, gold leaf, stucco and real wood floors. "We tried not to imitate," Botner says. "If it looks like brass, it's real brass ... People will feel the quality of the materials inside – it's not like a movie set. We tried to be real in terms of materials and sensations inside the store."

Lighting enhances those sensations: Roughly 95





*ABOVE* The dressing room area is designed to capture the old glamor and classic aesthetic that the fabled Gath & Chaves once possessed.

percent of Cuesta Blanca is lit by LEDs, for two primary reasons, according to Botner. One, LEDs produce less heat and thus the store requires less air conditioning (a must in a hot climate). Second, LED energy consumption isn't as high as traditional lighting, and a good amount was needed for the illumination-detailing in the ceiling. Says Botner, "The lighting is important to maximize the feeling and richness of the materials."

This richness is showcased in the dressing room area, meant to emulate a luxurious hotel lobby, where deep red colors in the divider curtains are highlighted by gold-colored lighting. Even the mirrors in the space feature a bronze hue, allowing the customer to "feel

like [their] skin is a little bit tan," Botner says.

The women's brand stays fresh by frequently changing out the graphics on its curving interior walls and by introducing new apparel lines on an almost weekly basis. And though the clothing isn't upscale, Botner maintains that the atmosphere should be – not only to make the shopper feel special, but to pay tribute to the building's history.

"The [greatest challenge] was to respect and give a rebirth to this building. The old one was beautiful, so for me, it was an honor," Botner says, emphasizing that in 2014 – the year Cuesta Blanca opened – the building turned 100 years old. "We [wanted to] commemorate the old [Gath & Chaves] glamor." ▴