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RETAIL

15 — Shops can LOOK LIKE ANYTHING but

Guillermo Santomà and Diego Ramos prove you don't need to scream 'retail' to pull off an eye-catching store design.

BARCELONA — Occupying a street corner in Barcelona's vibrant Gothic Quarter, the MAM Originals flagship raises the value of a bricks-and-mortar establishment by offering something money can't buy: the art of individuality. The brainchild of Barcelona-based designers Guillermo Santomà and Diego Ramos, the shop looks like anything but. Marrying art with retail, MAM Originals breaks conventions to bring the unexpected to the table. 'The idea was to create something that stands outside traditional notions of what a shop should be,' says Santomà. 'It's more of an installation than a retail space.'

Comprising a few simple elements, the accessories store offers little in the way of furniture and materials. 'It's very simplistic,' says Santomà. 'We designed the whole thing in a day.' The flagship took a mere 60 days to complete. For months, the 90-m² space didn't even have a door. 'We wanted to open it up to the city.' To deter shoplifters, a glass door was eventually put in place. Nevertheless, two large windows unobstructed by logos or merchandise provide views to and from the interior. 'The store is like a big window,' says Santomà. Outlined by a bright blue frame, the new door could also be mistaken for such an aperture.

'The shop is meant to mimic the experience of walking through the city, through a kind of urban landscape,' says Santomà. At the front, four large rocks double as display tables. Slender steel rods sprout from each boulder to present the brand's line of wooden wristwatches and eyewear, items that are easy to remove and replace, thanks to a special modular component. Weighing between 1,000 and 2,000 kg each, the rocks provide an inexpensive — though perhaps not terribly practical — alternative to traditional display furniture. Industrial partitions and shelves made from perforated steel steer visitors through the space, while a translucent screen of orange-tinted glass forms a solid quarter-round arch — a reference to the sun, perhaps — adding a pop of energy to an otherwise blue backdrop. 'The shop is a play between nature and artifice,' says Santomà. 'Somehow you always find nature at MAM Originals, even if it's artificial.' — MEO

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