



RETAIL

AËSOP cohabits with a neighbourhood institution in Manhattan



NEW YORK CITY – Walk through the streets of Manhattan with a born-and-bred New Yorker, and you can expect your companion to grouse about urban gentrification, pointing out the new shops and trendy cafés that occupy what used to be mom-and-pop places. Anel French Cleaners was one such neighbourhood institution. The family-run operation dry-cleaned for ‘the Central Park fancy-schmancies’ since the 1960s, Robin Saltzman told *The New York Times*, before the Saltzmans chose to retire and shut up shop. She maintains that the decision wasn’t due to rent increases; her father, Leo, bought the plot years ago. In fact, the family still owns and resides in the building, and they selected Aēsop as its street-level tenant.

‘The Saltzmans were pleased that we honoured their father’s legacy by restoring the sign and working within the existing context,’ says Tacklebox Architecture’s Jeremy Barbour, who led the redesign, his studio’s sixth collaboration with the personal-care brand. ‘Anel French Cleaners has been a landmark and an integral part of the community for the last 60 years, so we crafted a design that sits within the existing storefront and speaks sensitively to the heritage of its predecessor through materiality, form, and colour.’

Locals may understand the site’s significance, but will those unfamiliar with the Anel French Cleaners institution be confused by the store’s binary branding? Although Aēsop doesn’t advertise, and its outlets aren’t branded in the traditional sense – each store responds as well as possible to local culture, history and neighbourhood context – Barbour believes that his New York project is the first Aēsop that offers passers-by no hint of what’s inside. Perhaps it’s a sign that the Australian company is enough of an institution in and of itself. – TC