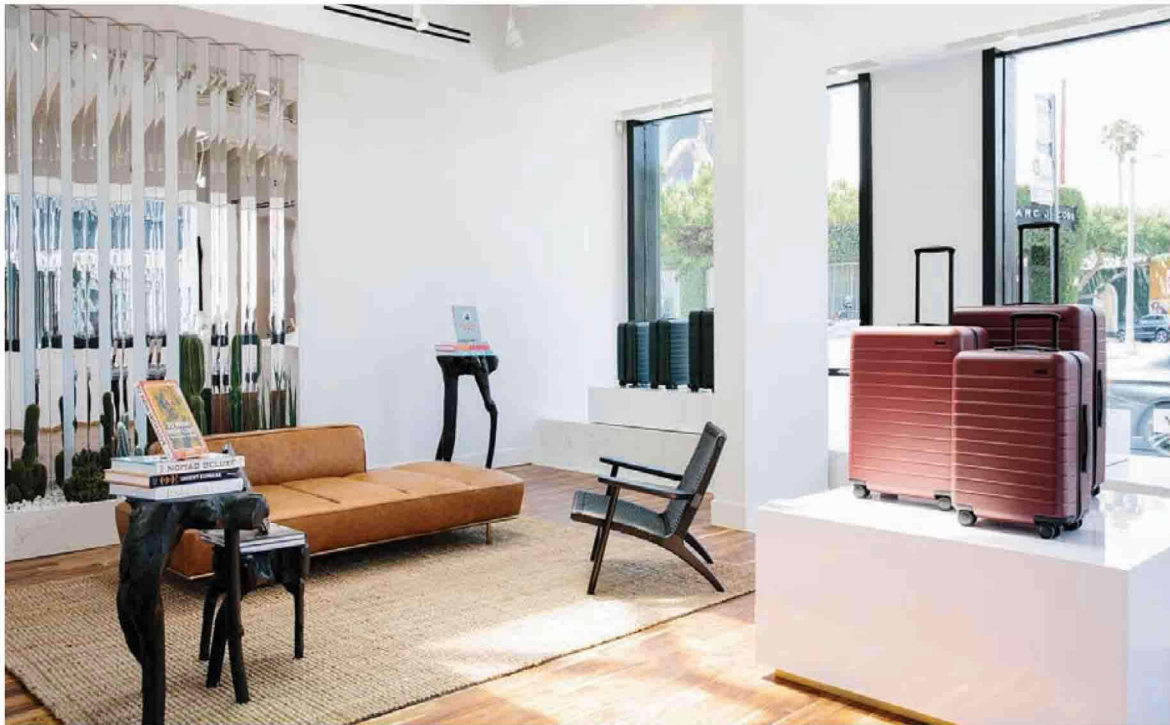


PORTFOLIO: Away, Los Angeles



THE FIRST THING YOU NOTICE about Away, a corner structure on Melrose and North Orlando avenues, in Los Angeles' trendy West Hollywood neighborhood, is its blue exterior. It's more than a design statement, says Stuart Henry, founder and creative director of London-based design firm JustSo, it's also a marketing move.

"Normally, retailers like to make their brand statements in the windows," explains Henry, whose firm designed the space, "but Los Angeles is such a drive-by culture that

you need a bigger attention-getter. The blue of the building is elegant, sophisticated and certainly noticeable."

Away, the New York-based luggage manufacturer that started as an online retailer, has been expanding its physical program for the past few years: pop-up stores in New York's NoHo area, London's trendy Shoreditch neighborhood, near Berlin's Alexanderplatz square and in Miami Beach. The Los Angeles venture is the company's first permanent store.

In each location, the strategy was to capture the cultural vibe of the neighbor-

COURTESY OF AWAY, NEW YORK



“We’re not just selling suitcases, we’re creating spaces meant to get people into a world outside of their own.”

Jen Rubio
co-founder
Away

“The design is crucial to that experience ... For each [store], we’re careful to consider how the location might inspire the look and feel. [Here] we kept the space’s original skylights, high-beamed ceilings and warm wood floors to maintain a sunny, LA vibe.”

The store is relatively light on fixtures. Double-sided windows allow merchandise presentation both to the street and the inside of the store. Tables, rather than shelves, showcase most of the product. “The owners didn’t want the typical luggage store, filled with merchandise out on the floor.”

There’s an ample back room, however, so shoppers don’t have to wait for deliveries – one benefit physical retailers have over online retailers. “The good thing about LA is that everybody drives,” says Henry, “so it’s relatively easy for them to go home with their purchases.”

Because the Melrose clientele is a destination shopper, the corner location provides plenty of window opportunities to grab the attention of passing pedestrians, creating a stage to tell stories not only about luggage but also about travel. The large windows are equally beneficial at night, shining brightly out to the dense traffic on Melrose.

And the brand hopes the bold navy blue exterior will be more than an attention-getter. A few blocks east on Melrose is the notoriously bright pink Paul Smith store, which Henry says has become selfie heaven for Melrose habitués. “It’s the fifth-most popular place in Los Angeles for taking photographs and selfies,” he says. “We’re hoping for that kind of buzz.”

–Steve Kaufman



hood. So, says Henry, it was important with this store to capture the cool, laid-back SoCal lifestyle.

“This is more a store about experience than about high-volume merchandising,” he says. “The interior of the store is light and airy, with high-finish materials. For example, polished marble and Statuario quartz are used throughout to highlight key areas of product display, accented by two custom-built, 45-degree-angled mirrored walls.”

“We’re not just selling suitcases, we’re creating spaces meant to get people into a world outside of their own: inspiring them to think about their next trip, their upcoming experiences,” says Jen Rubio, co-founder of Away.