

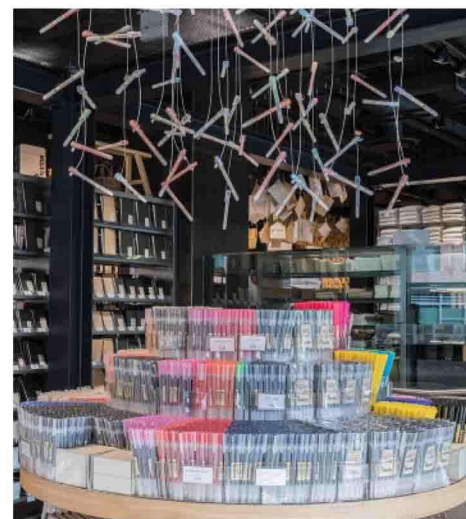
# BROOKLYN BOUND



LUCAS ROY, NEW YORK

Prolific Japanese apparel and home goods retailer Muji attests that less is more in its latest Big Apple locale.

*By Kaileigh Peyton, Associate Editor*



**M**UJI (TOKYO) STORES ARE places where product supercedes brand. Merchandise is free of splashy logos, and traces of international design influences, including Japanese wabi-sabi, Scandinavian minimalism and German Bauhaus, are apparent in the calming restraint of its depots' interiors.

Adding to its roster of six New York loca-

tions, the brand's latest store debuted this past September in Brooklyn, N.Y.'s ultra-hip Williamsburg neighborhood, where it sought to reach the borough's families and creatives. At 7300 square feet, the store has an expanded floorplan and will serve as a model for its upcoming U.S. locations in terms of size and increased offerings, including apparel, home goods, stationery, skincare and travel products.

*Muji uses thoughtful visual merchandising to set its logo-free products apart and forge a strong brand identity in store.*



Derived from the Japanese phrase *mujirushi ryohin*, its name stands for “no brand, quality goods,” and it practices this concept with pared-down store designs and what some may consider “generic” labeling. (Muji USA President Toru Tsunoda calls the company’s limited branding “one of [its] strongest assets.”) It’s a purposeful shift from commercialism, and instead, an emphasis on the products themselves, the users’ need for those products and the resources used to create them, exhibiting Muji’s core values of minimalism, sustainability and functionality.

“The focus has always been on the retail [journey] and allowing customers to experience Muji’s well-designed, high-quality products firsthand,” explains Tsunoda. “We strongly believe the products speak for themselves and that accentuating our goods with thoughtful merchandising is key.”

Its product-over-brand philosophy flies in the face of typical American merchant strategies that tend to value the brandishing of logos and promotional signage. Instead, the approach favors thoughtful use of subtle materials, as seen in a feature wall behind the cashwrap and columns throughout made from locally sourced pine; clean-lined glass and black metal fixtures that frame but don’t distract; signage that educates consumers on product sourcing and manufacturing; and artistic VM installations, like bottles of facial toner water suspended above a skincare display that reflect light at spontaneous angles.

“We wanted to bring in materials that were local and also allow for some unique design touchpoints in the store,” says Tsunoda. Case in point, the “Muji Yourself” embroidery station that allows shoppers to customize textiles with a selection of more than 300 designs is a special flagship element that Tsunoda refers to as “a way of expressing gratitude for the community’s warm welcome.” The store will also offer a workshop series hosted by local artisans and influencers.

While, for now, the retailer – which has more than 400 locations in Japan but only about 15 in the States – might be unfamiliar to many U.S. shoppers, that’s poised to change, as it plans to open several new stores over the next year, marking its 10th year in the country. ▀