

GLOBAL VISION IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

by JANET GROEBER

At a time when Walmart offers grocery pickup and delivery, Amazon drops packages inside the door, Kohl's stores accept Amazon returns and Nordstrom's newest concept includes no merchandise, one can imagine the competitive strategy talks taking place in retail boardrooms worldwide.

It's a good thing retail designer Heesun Kim knows retail on a global, national and local level. Her design work with Lladro in Spain and Hope in Brazil, along with projects for BlackBerry, Samsung, Luxottica and Coca-Cola in the United States, have contributed to Kim being named to design:retail's editorial board and a Retail Influencer in 2014 by the magazine.

Much of Kim's career has been focused on department stores such as Hudson's Bay in Canada, Lotte and Hyundai in Korea, Liverpool in Mexico and Siman in Central America. Stateside, she has worked with Kohl's, Macy's and Target in addition to Lord & Taylor and Saks Fifth Avenue.

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Her work on Saks Fifth Avenue Toronto helped the project win Euroshop Retail Design Store of the Year in 2017. Under Hudson's Bay Company's ownership, the retailer has been on a roll, rethinking what it means to be a bricks-and-mortar merchant as online gains traction. Kim and her team recently completed three freestanding women's fashion boutiques in Greenwich, Conn., known as The Saks Shops at Greenwich (near Saks' original Greenwich Avenue location).

Saks' Greenwich projects depart from more traditional retail store planning. How did you approach design?

We started by elevating the experience for the local [female] customer. We wanted to create a place where customers would feel comfortable visiting often, whether to browse, shop or be inspired — a local destination to gather and lounge with friends. This led to "The Collector's House," where fashion, art and lifestyle come together. We worked in collaboration with Hudson Bay Company's global store design team to transform the traditional over-scaled department store [model]. The Saks Shops are designed on a boutique-store scale.

The level of service is something that cannot be replicated online. We see the store's friendly service and leading selection of brand assortments as a true differentiator. Personalized service and amenities like concierge, personal stylists, bespoke tailoring and first-class, free delivery service make the entire experience feel more like hospitality than retail. The store can move merchandise easily and hold events after hours that allow their customers to lounge, browse, learn and be inspired.

Tell us about the shops.

The first of the three stores to open was 10022-Shoe in October 2016. Saks first introduced the name and concept 10 years ago to indicate the

shoe department, which it was expanding in its Fifth Avenue flagship. It was so big it needed its own ZIP code. Here, the first freestanding shoe store for Saks is 14,000 square feet with industrial elements like exposed brick.

The following February, The Collective opened featuring women's contemporary fashion. It spans two floors and more than 14,000 square feet. In May, The Vault opened as Saks' first dedicated specialty jewelry store. At 6,000 square feet, it was designed to offer multiple brands housed within in-store shops.

Each store is located within walking distance to promote an easy, seamless shopping experience. The goal was to celebrate the historic architecture of downtown Greenwich, but layer on the distinctively Saks expression.

What is Saks' design expression?

I can answer by going back to the Toronto flagship, which opened in 2016. The FRCH team worked in collaboration with Hudson Bay Company's global store design team. The design strategy was to deliver a customer experience that was distinctively Saks while honoring this unique location. It was not only Saks' first store in Canada, but also the first new flagship in 40 years.

For inspiration, we looked to the wilderness and weather of Canada, which is implied in material choices and design features. We also partnered with local artisans and fabricators to create memorable "moments" that would be meaningful to a local shopper. This philosophy of local celebration within the Toronto flagship became a strong driver for future Saks stores, including Greenwich.

While Toronto provided a full-service offering from the downstairs food hall to a men's lounge and spa room, the 169,000-square-foot, full-line store had something for everyone. Conversely with Greenwich, scale was replaced with creating a high-touch, personalized experience for each and every shopper.

Can you share examples?

10022-Shoe encourages guests to gather and relax. The design is residential style — the environment offers ample lounge space and opportunities to socialize by hosting seasonal, weekend and casual events throughout the year. Both the shoe boutique and The Collective have VIP fitting rooms offering preselected apparel and accessories to provide a holistic fashion from head to toe. The Collective showcases not only contemporary apparel, but curates the accessories to complete the look, including fashion jewelry, handbags, sunglasses, seasonal accessories and cosmetics in the form of the Tom Ford Beauty counter.



What are some trends in overall design strategy?

"Local Narrative" has been a noticeable movement for major international brands. As Greenwich is well known as beautifully unique in its suburban oasis, we embraced the historic atmosphere and the natural and sophisticated personality by introducing meaningful finishes celebrating local references, rather than applying branded finishes or furnishings found in a typical Saks.

This color and material strategy is to create emotional engagement between the brand and the local customer. Overall, the space is elevated by a soft color palette, gentle and organic textures and sophisticated furnishings that are inspired by Greenwich's four seasons while the general aesthetic still aligns with the timeless Saks brand.

What kind of technology is being used in-store?

The Saks Greenwich experience is a high-touch, personalized experience, so technology is not the hero, nor should it be. The environment still utilizes less-visible technology in order to uphold a high level of customer service, including phone charging stations for both employees and guests, stylist iPads for seamless offerings and special lighting in The Vault "Viewing Rooms" for the most accurate stone color.

But while other brands are implementing technology in-store simply for technology's sake, Saks Greenwich has put the focus on elevating the experience for the sophisticated shopper. **STORES**

Janet Groeber has covered all aspects of the retail industry for more than 20 years. Her reporting has appeared in *AdWeek* and *DDI Magazine*, among others.

