

# FROM CONCEPT TO STORE: A TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION PROCESS

With the amount of technology at our fingertips today, creating a reactive, collaborative working approach between retailer, interior designer and shopfitter has never been easier.

Text: Lindsey Dennis

Visitors to EuroShop 2017 will be familiar with The Village, presented by Ansong, Vitra and Vizona - a huge immersive plaza-like setting featuring five fictional stores, each designed to address some of the current challenges facing the retail industry. Conceived by architect and designer Joanna Laajisto, The Village incorporated a fashion store, a cosmetics shop, a consumer electronics store, a car showroom and a grocery store, which each centred around a new Vitra shopfitting system, with tailored lighting concepts by Ansong.

Vitra, whose roots lie in the shopfitting sector for more than 80 years, has now rebuilt The Village on the Vitra Campus in Weil am Rhein to showcase four individual retail concepts, which address the challenges and options facing the shopfitting business today.

The company has recently worked alongside Molton Brown on the fit-out of its Westfield Stratford store. Vitra's shopfitting systems for walls, ceilings and mid-floor areas provide a solution for every need and can be continually reconfigured with a wide range of merchandise supports. Powered systems facilitate the use of monitors, backlit signs and electronic price tags, and can enrich the customer journey with digital elements.

Across the city, fit-out specialist Portview worked alongside Tiffany & Co. on the brand's latest opening in Covent Garden. The 200 sq m Style Studio features Tiffany Blue wooden crates displaying whimsical Everyday Objects accessories, a personalisation bar, and a Tiffany fragrance vending machine. The open 'Everyday Objects' crate displays are juxtaposed with the

traditional jewellery glass counters to help strike a perfect balance of contemporary design touches with more traditional components.

'The concept store was particularly exciting, as it offered an entirely new design concept with plenty of interactive features and quirky décor that's unlike any other Tiffany store we've worked on,' says Simon Campbell, managing director of Portview. 'The overall look reflects Tiffany & Co.'s dynamic and whimsical approach to high-end retail, without the formality that's typically attached to upmarket brands. The space encourages shoppers to think outside the little blue box and engage in various forms of self-expression, personification and product innovation.'

The boutique encourages visitors to explore, personalise, create and self-style, thanks to the design and fit-out of the space. 'We've integrated uniquely playful displays that reflect the wit and humour of Tiffany design to create a one-of-a-kind experiential destination,' says Richard Moore, vice president, creative director of store design and creative visual merchandising at Tiffany & Co.

In any business we are all aware of the importance of communication and collaborative working. 'Collaboration is critical and without it I'm pretty sure that no project would succeed. It's a two-way process: whilst a designer's role is to bring strategic, creative thinking and to challenge the brief to deliver new, engaging environments, the client needs to be invested in the design and to have supported, scrutinised and contributed to the process to deliver success,' says Owain Roberts, design director >



Left: The Village at the Vitra Campus in Weil am Rhein showcases four individual retail concepts. Above: Myn't's ongoing work with Nike provides moments of intense collaboration, particularly those projects with shorter timelines.



and senior associate at Gensler, speaking about the importance of collaborative working between interior designer, shopfitter and retailer.

Gensler worked with C&A to deliver a new store concept that could be applied across various sizes, formats and locations within 12 months. 'This included both a fully functioning prototype store (used solely for testing and research), a flagship store, and store implementation guidelines ready for roll-out. Within these constraints, clear responsibilities and solid lines of communication between Gensler and the client was critical. Through strategy, development, testing and implementation, C&A identified individuals that partnered with their Gensler counterpart's, driving the decision making and approval process,' says Roberts.

He notes the importance of weekly face-to-face and client meetings and workshops with quick approvals and decision making as imperative on such a fast-paced project. 'We were also able to scale the Gensler team from a small, agile core at the beginning of the project to a much larger multidisciplinary team - including a group seconded to work alongside the client in their offices in Germany for three months - enabling us to deliver a comprehensive package of information within a tight schedule.'

Ollie Patterson, marketing director at Mynt, echoes these sentiments: 'When possible, we encourage our clients to work with us in our studio and we like to visit their offices often throughout the course of a project. We become an extension of our clients' teams during a project; we never work in isolation. Working this way is the best way to ensure our concepts are as successful as possible. With the world more connected than ever, it's easy to find ways to regularly collaborate and update clients with work in progress presentations, no matter where they are based. With project timelines generally shortening in response to the need to constantly

update and refresh spaces with new campaigns, it's vital to adopt a reactive, collaborative working approach between ourselves and our clients, but also between ourselves and our suppliers.'

Mynt's ongoing work with Nike provides moments of intense collaboration, particularly those projects with shorter timelines. 'It's really important for us to establish a clear brief and understanding of deliverables asap in the project process, so regular collaboration - particularly early on - certainly helps the working process. For example, working on the Wimbledon 2018 retail campaign, alongside a Back to School campaign and a Running-Category design concept, required multiple and regular levels of dialogue with many individual clients at Nike, some of which are not in the UK. It was also important to adopt clear communication strategies between the client, Mynt and our partners,' says Patterson.

'I think if you go into projects with the mindset of "details in the brief may change late on, requirements may alter, but as long as we're working collectively as a team, particularly with our suppliers", then there's nothing we can't achieve. As stores are becoming a reflection of a brand's digital channels (where content is updated so regularly), as an agency you have to be reactive and embrace the speed of these changes,' concludes Patterson. **RF**



Top Left: Portview's fit out for Tiffany & Co. in Covent Garden, designed to encourage creative interaction and play.

Above Left: Gensler has worked with C&A to deliver a new store concept that could be applied across various sizes, formats and locations within 12 months.

Above: Vitra's latest shopfit for Molton Brown at Westfield Stratford.

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