

# WWD Retail 20/20 London: The New Store Experience

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Among the big themes that emerged were authenticity and the importance of playing to one's strengths as a brand, and ensuring that the human contact between staff and shopper remains strong.

"Customers want to enjoy themselves when they are shopping – that's the first and most important thing," said Simon Burstein, chief executive officer and founder of The

Place London. "It's the experience: Shops are a theater, the sales staff are the actors and the clothes are the props. If you make your connection, you will have a success."

The week was busy in the run-up to the forum, with luxury jeweler Jessica McCormack and Colleen Caslin, the company's ceo, hosting a lunch and a cocktail in honor of WWD's editorial director James Fallon at the brand's flagship on Carlos Place in Mayfair, with guests including Michael Ward,

managing director of Harrods; Megha Mittal, chairman of Escada; Kristina Blahnik, chief executive officer of Manolo Blahnik; investor Eiesha Bharti Pasricha; Simon Liebel, founder and ceo of Entourage Collection; Roksanda Ilincic; Sagra Maceira de Rosen, chairman of Naga Group, and Massimiliano Binda, general manager of The Connaught hotel, which catered the lunch.

WWD also cohosted a dinner with The Palmeraie at London's Ham Yard Hotel,

with guests who included industry leaders and designers such as Anya Hindmarch; Emilia Wickstead; Osman Yousefzada; Henry Holland; Jenny Packham; Clare McKeeve, founder and ceo of Luxcite, and Anna Sweeting and Montse Suarez, managing partners of Vaultier 7. Retail was on the agenda once again, with designers and business leaders committed to driving their businesses with fuel from bricks, clicks, taps and swipes.



## All the World's a Stage: Simon Burstein Talks Shop Floor Theater

"SHOPS ARE A THEATER AND A STAGE, THE CLOTHES ARE THE PROPS AND THE STAFF ARE THE ACTORS," BURSTEIN SAID.

**BRICKS-AND-MORTAR STORES** have a lot going against them, especially in the U.K. where shopkeepers can be locked into onerous leases and battles with landlords, but retailers can rise up and make a change, said Simon Burstein, who's

spent his career close to the shop floor.

Burstein is a British retail blue-blood: His family founded the luxury designer haven Browns and eventually sold it to Farfetch, and for more than two decades he served as vice president of Soniia

Rykiel in Paris. He has gone on to open The Place London, a group of luxury multibrand retailers in central London. He is also the owner of Leathersmith of London, purveyor of leather-bound books and accessories.

He believes retailers need to polish their shop floor acts in order to keep the customer returning for more. "Shops are a theater and a stage, the clothes are the props and the staff are the actors," he said, adding that the performances have to be five-star every day.

Salespeople are key and need to be talented, motivated – and valued: "I think good customer service is timeless, and staff is the most important thing. They have to know everything about the products, and it's really important that they are engaged and they know what's online and in-store. They have to be trained, and valued more, and I think this is one of the areas that is definitely worth investing in."

Retailers also need to ensure that sales and markdowns don't spin out of control. "We know that sales hurt the bottom line and set a precedent for the customer. If you know that a shop is going to go on sale in two weeks' time, then why should we go shopping?"

Burstein called for more pricing transparency, and said that brands need to protect local retailers worldwide. "Geo-pricing is a price structure the brands should be enforcing. The problem is this: If a client can buy a designer product online, from another country, for less than the local retailers are selling it, the chances are they will. And you can be sure that you've lost a sale. Brands need to protect the local retailer, and set the parameters for online players by ensuring they respect those prices."

Keeping the shop floor seasonal is also key, Burstein said, adding that he's introduced two African designers in July, "because it's summer, it's boiling hot, and I don't want fur coats introduced in the shops."

It's crucial that retailers think about differentiation, bringing in novelty, maximizing opportunities to gain insights and anticipating trends.

"I think having a unique product is very important, and we all know the first thing that you look at when you go to a shop is usually the window. Make sure that it's attractive and grabs people's attention." He added that music and lighting are key, too, because "they really create a party ambience."

Spoiling the customer never fails – although Burstein is not keen on discounts. Instead, he added, gifts work a treat. "They say that most people who shop in luxury stores don't need discounts, they just want to be pampered. So we say: 'We'll give you a Leathersmith of London diary. Do you want your initials on it?' Usually, that does the trick."

– Samantha Conti



# Rapha's Leaders on Why a Cycling Life Is the Way Forward

DARREN READ AND CAROLINE CROSSWELL TALKED ABOUT THE CYCLING BRAND'S RAPID GROWTH AND HOW IT'S STAYING TRUE TO ITS MISSION.

**Premium British cycling** brand Rapha makes a strong case for putting community at the heart of a business.

"Our goal is to get more people into cycling; we want cycling to be the most popular sport in the world. And the Rapha clubhouse is the real embodiment of this, the place where cycling is most relevant," said Darren Read, Rapha's head of retail for the U.K. and Europe.

"When I first joined Rapha five years ago, the brand was just for the enthusiastic cyclist, and we worked out of a piano factory in North London," Read recalled. "Now we are a team of 600 based in 28 different locations all across the globe. Cycling has gone through what can only be described as a revolution over the last 10 years."

The label was founded in 2004 by former brand consultant Simon Mottram, who felt that the cycling wear available at the time didn't connect him to the sport. He soon learned that he wasn't alone.

Since then, Rapha has grown into a direct-to-consumer business and Read said the absence of any wholesale means Rapha "can completely own the customer experience and gain so much deep customer insight from data." Rapha's original mission

to be cycling evangelists remains at the heart of the brand.

The brand launched the Rapha Cycling Club in 2015 to create a global community of passionate road riders accessible to everyone, of all abilities, with service and support from the brand. There are now 7,000 members of the club who are invited to annual "summits," and who get early access to the latest products and events and free coffee in the clubhouses. They can also participate in organized rides in 17 local chapters based in cities including Singapore, Amsterdam, San Francisco and Seoul.

"We call our stores clubhouses because we're inspired to do more than just sell," said Caroline Crosswell, Rapha's director of retail operations and development, of the brand's 22 clubhouses. "They're a hub for events, they're a place away from home for our city members. We have cafés, we have localized food, retail, we just hang out and we chat."

They also have memorabilia in the store, she said, adding that Steve Jobs' bike will be displayed at the new Palo Alto, Calif., clubhouse.

The recently launched Rapha Travel sees cyclists jetting to places such as Patagonia



to ride. "Travel is really what we're about," said Read. "Our guests are expertly cared for with incredible local knowledge and local guides, and they take place in some really incredible places."

Rapha has been expanding by more than 25 percent every year and it reported sales in excess of 63 million pounds in 2017. Mottram still runs the business after the sale of a majority stake last year to the U.S.-based RZC Investments, overseen by Stuart and Tom Walton, the grandsons of Walmart Inc. founder Sam Walton.

Crosswell said Rapha's employees believe the team that rides together, stays together. "We practice what we preach. We believe absolutely in what we do; we all

get free kit, and we are all ambassadors for the brand," she said. "This is a crazy thing, but we close our clubhouses three times a year so that whole teams can ride together. We close our head office three times a year so that the whole company can ride together. Every Wednesday morning we all ride together and there is no one in our office."

Passionate, borderline-obsessive staff, whom Crosswell calls "unicorns," are a large factor in Rapha's magic formula. "We ask a lot of them, we ask them to be able to ride with all of our members, we ask them to retail, we ask them to talk and engage with our VIPs and, yeah, we also ask them to make a cup of coffee," she said.

— Julia Neel

# Ramdane Touhami On Sticking to Retail's Original Values

THE CEO OF L'OFFICINE UNIVERSELLE BULY BELIEVES THAT UNIQUE ARCHITECTURE, THE RIGHT SHOP STAFF AND ARTISANAL PRODUCT ALL COMBINE TO CREATE RETAIL THEATER.

**RAMDANE TOUHAMI**, chief executive officer of the perfumer L'Officine Universelle Buly, doesn't believe retail is undergoing a revolution, or that it should be impacted by the rise of all things digital.

He doesn't share his peers' fears that Amazon will take over the marketplace, and

— to top it off — he believes data will do little to change the way retailers operate.

"I'm the guy who stands against all of that. We don't ask for customers' emails in our stores, we don't analyze anything. People just want to come back," he said during a lively and amusing presentation that was

peppered with expletives.

As for the change the industry has been undergoing and the declining footfall at brick-and-mortar stores, Touhami thinks that the rise of e-commerce isn't really to blame. "Why do people go online? Because shops have become boring and their product is s-t."

According to the French entrepreneur, the real retail revolution happened in the 19th century at Paris' Galerie du Bois, which was inspired by Arab markets. Different categories of products were sold under one roof for the first time and at no fixed price.

The values of retail, primarily the focus on quality and a personable customer experience, haven't changed much since then, said Touhami, who credits the success of his business — the brand has six stores worldwide and eventually sees no more than 30 — to those ideals.

"A shop is like a theater, but you have to write a play. Most retailers write about the product, but we start with the customer's experience," he added, pointing to the importance of investing in unique architecture, the right shop staff and artisanal product.

He's also sensitive to geography, and endeavors to capture the mood of a particular place with every shop fit. Buly's Paris outpost has a nostalgic feel, with 18th century references in the form of carved wooden cabinets, marble ceiling panels and patterned floors.

The New York store at Bergdorf Goodman has a more modern, Art Deco feel, while the Tokyo one has been split down the middle: One side is Japanese Zen with clean lines and white surfaces, while the other is more like the Parisian store.

"It doesn't make sense to create the same atmosphere; you have to adapt and pick up a bit of the city's DNA. You can't just destroy the city. New York didn't exist in the 18th century, so I was definitely not going

to copy and paste our 18th century store design there," said Touhami.

Investing in architecture and the creation of one-off retail concepts also makes business sense because it gets customers through the door. "The Bergdorf store cost 700,000 euros but because it's spectacular, it became a destination — and it works," he said.

He employs the same attitude when investing in shop staff. They all undergo training to learn about the perfumes and are taught to write in calligraphy, an essential part of Buly's branding and packaging. Staffers take weekly tests so the brand can identify any gaps in learning, and are offered weekly educational podcasts. But Buly isn't a complete anachronism — it does have a web site and an Instagram account, he stressed. "Of course we do. We aren't [expletive] animals."

Touhami said the process is part of building a strong foundation for the company.

"Everything has to start from the bottom, and staff has to be treated as the most important part of your company and paid fairly. If the people making and selling the product are happy, the ones producing it are proud and the clients buying it think that the price is worth it, then you have guaranteed success," he said.

Touhami said his stores' regular clients are addressed by their first names and the retail spaces are seen as places for conversation and storytelling. "It's just like going to your favorite restaurant; it's all about human interaction. That's also why we no longer have the kind of customer who is in a rush. In our stores, staff might look like regular shop staff, but when they start talking about the perfumes and doing the calligraphy, you start to see them as artists."

This type of interaction is what brings pleasure to retail, he argued. "There's no point in just selling products: Product is easy. The value is in meeting people and engaging with them." — Natalie Theodosi





## Arantxa Gómez On Creating a New Desigual

GÓMEZ OFFERED HER INSIGHTS ON TAKING THE SPANISH BRAND FROM “BIGGER TO BETTER,” AND APPEALING TO VERY DIFFERENT CUSTOMER BASES.

**HOW DOES A BRAND** refine – and redefine – itself for a new generation of shoppers without alienating an existing customer base? Desigual retail director Arantxa Gómez discussed the challenges of evolving a long-standing high-street brand for the 21st-century customer.

“When we started in 1984, we grew a lot and now we are present in more or less every single country. You name it, we’re there. But, at the end of the day, when you grow that fast, you don’t focus on anything because you are trying to focus on too many different things at once. In the end, when you want to be specific on something, you just miss it,” she said.

Now, she said, “We really want to move from bigger to better.”

The plan, Gómez said, is to create a new Desigual within the existing brand, and it’s based on three pillars: The brand-consumer relationship, an innovative product offering and unity across retail and communication channels.

The pillars are meant to reinforce the brand’s principles, including emotion, an unwavering focus on the customer and a quality product. Desigual’s plan is to evolve the collections to attract a younger

audience at a pace that won’t alarm the current customer base, which Gómez said averages between 45 and 55 years old.

The Barcelona-based label was founded in 1984 by then-20-year-old Swiss designer Thomas Meyer, who wanted to “inspire people to be themselves,” to feel authentic, and to express that authenticity with unique pieces.

“We don’t sell clothes, we don’t sell fashion, we don’t follow the trends. What we make sure to do is sell emotions so that people feel different when they wear Desigual. That, for me, is imperative,” she said.

It’s an ethos Gómez hopes will win over a Millennial audience. “Reaching that audience is very difficult for all retailers. All brands want to know how to get new customers,” she said, adding there is an added barrier to that lucrative market. Millennials associate the brand with their mothers’ wardrobes, but not in a good way.

The company is working on more coherent social media and communication strategies that reflect the brand’s evolution and is actively working with influencers to build its social media visibility. Desigual is taking its extensive customer research and developing products spe-



cifically for this market. It has developed a new store concept and put a focus on in-store experiences.

She said the brand wants to create an army of passionate ambassadors out of its 4,500-strong employee base in the hope that their loyalty will be transmitted organically to new customers.

Gómez said the company has invest-

ed in making its people feel valued and regularly throws parties for the staff and hosts creative talks at its Barcelona headquarters. It has set up a sports club and a swimming team, and runs yoga classes.

“This is a company that was made with people, by people, and we need to make everybody feel a part of it,” she said.

– Julia Neel

Spencer Wallace and  
Amie Witton-Wallace



## Beast Cofounders On Changing How Men Buy Beauty

THEY’RE AIMING TO EDUCATE AND INSPIRE MEN FROM BEAST’S COVENT GARDEN CONCEPT STORE.

“**WE ARE CHANGING** the way men buy beauty,” said Spencer Wallace, cofounder of Beast, who realized a few years ago that no brands or retailers were catering to the men’s market in the same way that beauty halls targeted women. In late 2016, Beast opened its doors in the Seven Dials area

of London’s Covent Garden to address the issue.

“Places like Kiehl’s or department stores like Liberty and Selfridges catered brilliantly for fragrances, but they were going through a revolution themselves,” said Wallace, who also runs Nirvana, a

creative production house. “They started to make their beauty halls much more shop-in-shop so you couldn’t get the same staff to move from one counter to another counter with you. You didn’t really have a joined-up experience.”

Capitalizing on that disconnect – and a simultaneous increase in annual consumer spend in men’s beauty – the Beast team set about doing their homework. “When we looked at the competition, it was all woman-centric. You know, big department stores with large spaces all had beauty halls but they were allocated mainly for women. They were brilliant for buying gifts for men, but not for men to engage with, in any form,” he added.

The brand’s other cofounder, Amie

Witton-Wallace, said the team also tried to simplify the purchasing process, categorizing the offer into body, hair, shave and face. “Essentially, it’s a new way for men to buy beauty,” she said.

Their concept, of grouping products by the job they do rather than by brand, was a tough sell to bigger companies, but Wallace said that his experience of working at Nirvana with brands like Burberry had trained him to push them to embrace new ideas. As a result, products in-store and online are laid out by category, for a variety of reasons. “We wanted the shelves to feel exactly like a web page, making it easier to find a product,” said Witton-Wallace.

Beast focuses on brands that Wallace believes bring something new to the market, and the store deliberately targets a wide age demographic. Service and experience are a big part of Beast’s offering, too, and finding staff to handle that duty of educating a variety of customers was a big challenge.

“It wasn’t easy,” Wallace admitted. “We didn’t want someone straight off a beauty counter, but we wanted that knowledge. So we’ve mixed the team: We have got people who’ve worked in department stores, and people that have just worked for standalone brands.”

There is also a show space beneath the store dedicated to creating experiences for Beast’s customers. The British brand Haeckels has been in residence, and Beast has run partnerships with Globetrotter and American Express Centurion Card. With the latter, an expert talked about men’s experience with scent throughout their lives.

“We’re not just trying to push products into customers’ hands and saying, ‘Buy this!’ We’re creating an experience so that men feel educated, which is a large part of what we’re doing,” said Witton-Wallace. – J.N.



# Dirty Lemon's Zak Normandin On Retail as a Marketing Channel

THE WELLNESS BEVERAGE COMPANY IS FOCUSED ON SELLING ITS PRODUCT VIA TEXT AND SEES PHYSICAL RETAIL AS A MEANS OF STORYTELLING AND CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT.

WHEN ZAK NORMANDIN set out to create Dirty Lemon, the wellness beverage company, he wasn't only thinking about the most in-demand health ingredients to incorporate into his drinks, but how to deliver them to his customers in a more efficient, up-to-date way.

The answer was "c-commerce," or conversational commerce, which entails selling product and communicating with consumers via text message.

"We became the first brand to sell products via text in 2015. The idea was to connect with customers and offer innovation faster. We quickly realized that this way of doing business has incredible promise in the retail space, particularly as grocery stores are becoming obsolete," said Normandin.

Since then, the company has gone on to gather more than 25,000 members who pay for their monthly deliveries. It has expanded its offer to eight organic beverages featuring some of the trendiest ingredients in the health space, such as collagen, charcoal, matcha and rose.

According to Normandin, the concept has resonated because modern-day consumers want products delivered to them, and appreciate the ability to ask questions directly about what they are buying.

As the brand grew its audience, Normandin leveraged the momentum by building a broader sense of community around the



Dirty Lemon products. He did so by going into physical retail and using brick-and-mortar locations as a means of marketing

rather than selling.

Instead of buying shelf space in grocery stores like traditional food and beverage

companies, he chose to place his drinks at members' clubs like Soho House and gyms in the U.S.

"We want to be where customers spend their time. If we are not delivering to your door, we want to be where you work, play and spend the rest of your day," he added. "We've always explored retail as a marketing channel; we're not looking to make money from it."

The company took a similar approach when it came to opening its own retail locations. Its first store concept, opened in Manhattan's NoLiTa neighborhood, took the form of a nonalcoholic bar called the Drug Store. It showcased the craft that goes into creating the beverages and aimed to engage customers old and new.

"In the mornings, the store became a place for people who hadn't heard of the brand before. In the evenings, we reserved it for VIP members to host live music concerts or panel discussions. It offers a new level of connection with the brand," said Normandin, adding that he plans to expand the store concept to other cities across the U.S. A launch in London is in the works for later this year.

Retail has proven an efficient communications tool for Dirty Lemon's new products. When it was debuting its rose water beverage, the company opened its own rose flower shop on Valentine's Day and invited customers, via text, to visit for the chance to receive a complimentary drink.

That strategy was in line with its policy of never texting customers to sell a new product, but to offer them something instead. Opening pop-ups has also proven fruitful on the data front. "Collecting data at retail and using technology to drive people to retail is a very meaningful part of the business," added Normandin. — Natalie Theodosi

# Away's Jen Rubio on Direct-to-Consumer Brands

THE LUGGAGE BRAND IS USING ITS BRICK-AND-MORTAR STORES TO CREATE ENGAGING EXPERIENCES AND STRENGTHEN ITS TIES WITH MILLENNIALS.

JEN RUBIO CAME up with the idea for her luggage brand Away – which she developed alongside Steph Korey – when her suitcase broke and the options for a replacement were all "either old, or too expensive."

Away set out to fill the gap in the market by offering sleek, modern luggage designs at affordable prices, achieved by maintaining a direct-to-consumer model and keeping margins higher, just like Korey and Rubio's former employer, Warby Parker.

"Warby Parker paved the way for the direct-to-consumer model and realized the power of selling your product with an experience," she said in a conversation with WWD's London bureau chief Samantha Conti.

The company stuck to its commitment to sell direct-to-consumer only – even when major retailers came knocking. "We got calls from everyone from Amazon to Saks. It's tempting when you want to make your first million dollars, but that's not the way to build your business. You have to make it about the consumer."

The strategy has paid off, according to Rubio, especially when the brand decided to go into physical retail, having grown a substantial online audience, made up mainly of Millennials living in big cities.

"When we opened brick-and-mortar stores we weren't measuring sales per store, we weren't trying to get like-for-like sales. The only number we are trying to grow is that of the business, and that's a luxury we can have because we don't wholesale," she said.

The company has opened five locations across the U.S. – in New York; Los Ange-

les; San Francisco; Austin, Texas, and Chicago's O'Hare International Airport. Some five to 10 additional doors are in the works for later this year, starting with London.

"Brick-and-mortar wasn't a new path for the brand; it was just another model to sell our product. When we opened our first store, we realized how profitable it was

and how important it was for our customer to have the offline experience, so we went ahead with it," added Rubio.

The success Away has achieved in its physical spaces reflects the brand's overall ethos of creating a community around its product and "turning luggage into a fashion accessory," through collaborations

with the likes of Suki Waterhouse, Julia Restoin Roitfeld and Margherita Maccapani Missoni.

The brand relies on a constant injection of freshness in the form of bold, new colorways and the publication of its own podcast and travel magazine, called Here.

Similarly, the company sees its stores as "profitable billboards," and in addition to stocking its luggage collections, it uses the spaces to create experiences that are tailor-made to the locals' taste.

In San Francisco, there's an array of workshops and talks, while other locations host a range of events, from tequila tastings to live concerts.

"It would be too boring to just have our luggage sitting in store. For our first opening we created a space inspired by Stockholm and Tokyo, and it gave people the urge to travel. We sold 50 times more suitcases than expected," added Rubio.

Other advantages of the direct-to-consumer model include building stronger customer relations. That has come particularly in handy in the age of social media, where young people are eager to travel more and share their experiences on Instagram. It also means that the company can rely on customer feedback, with testing groups to help it determine new designs, colors and store locations.

That's not to say Away has completely ruled out the possibility of wholesale. "Something to think about is how to partner with retailers in a nontraditional way. Growing a direct-to-consumer business allowed us to open up the conversations to that," said Rubio. — N.T.





## Foreo's Paul Peros On Being Nerdy — And Innovative

THE CEO BELIEVES THAT TECH WILL BE A CATALYST FOR TRADITIONAL BEAUTY INNOVATION GOING FORWARD.

IN A WORLD BURSTING with gadgets for body, home, kitchen and garden, the Swedish firm Foreo has layered on even more, including at-home facial devices, tooth and tongue fixers, acne zappers and eye massagers. Foreo specializes in selling products that have never existed before, wooing consumers with a cocktail of innovation, quirkiness — and technical expertise.

The five-year-old company has also taken an unconventional route to retail, shunning distributors and working directly with stores, relying on influencers rather than traditional advertising, and reaching out to the wider medical community to promote its brightly colored sonic facial orbs, toothbrushes, tongue cleaners and, most recently, its UFO Smart Mask Treatment.

Paul Peros, Foreo's chief executive officer, has a background in science, with a degree in physics from UCLA and managerial experience at Watery, a water



and environmental technologies firm. It's no surprise, then, that he's committed to keeping research and development, distribution, marketing, visual merchandising and design in-house at Foreo, and said it's proven a winning strategy.

"We tend to be private people and, yes, we manage our industrialization and manufacturing in-house. We really take the utmost care to make sure that our products are right for every single design. We're very nerdy, very techy, and we engage with our customers," he said.

"We are also very dedicated and playful at the same time, and we are trying to stay on top of a world that is spinning really, really fast and with the technology of today we can do things that were unimaginable before," Peros added.

Once Foreo develops a product, the real work comes on the downstream, he said, with the company "selling objects that nobody has ever tried to sell — or buy — for that matter. So, for us, a lot of the work is linking it with the consumer."

Foreo started by teaming with Huda Kattan of Huda Beauty, and relying on influencers like her — and on word of mouth — to promote the brand, which now boasts 3,000 employees in 20 offices around the world.

Over the past five years, the brand has also involved consumers in its campaigns, and has always insisted on using local language, content and influencers. Peros likes

to keep things simple — and move quickly.

He recalls four years ago arriving at Heathrow Airport in London with four suitcases of products for Selfridges, and selling them from a space around the stairwell on the lower ground floor — and watching them fly out of the store.

In London, before selling at Harvey Nichols, Selfridges, and Fortnum & Mason, Foreo was working with professional skin-care experts on Harley Street in order to spread the word about its technology.

When it opened its Paris store a few years ago, Foreo ran a schedule of biweekly events and engaged with local communities, from designers to influencers to dentists and pediatricians. "Basically, we used the store opening as a platform to engage and work and learn together with consumers," Peros said.

In addition to the Facial UFO, which aims to reduce the time it takes for a face mask to work, the company has developed a device that will allow the consumer to measure the key areas of the face, and automatically adjust the density and duration of treatment, depending on skin tone, season and geography. Peros said he likes the idea of consumers using diagnostic tools for themselves.

The future, he said, will be about beauty and tech working hand-in-hand, and believes that tech will be a catalyst for the traditional beauty brands to innovate and experiment. — *Samantha Conti*

## Lauren Bitar on Retail's Growing Pains — and Overcoming Quick Fixes

BITAR SPOKE ABOUT THE DANGERS OF RETAIL BUZZWORDS AND EMPLOYING THE RIGHT METHODS.

LAUREN BITAR OFTEN has to act as a mediator — and hold interventions — for retailers who are looking for umbrella solutions to their retail woes. Like addicts, the head of retail consulting at RetailNext argued, they need targeted help and a patient approach.

Data analytics, innovation, e-commerce and technology may not be suitable for every retailer, yet these have become trendy "addictions" that brands are keen to employ. "The first step is to admit that there is a problem," she said, adding that

brands can take a variety of approaches to overcoming their challenges.

One of them is to use analytics properly. Bitar claimed that retailers aren't setting up proper tests or engaging with a large enough consumer sample to pinpoint their particular issues. "There will be someone with a clipboard at a store for two days and they're going to use this data to decide whether to spend millions of dollars on fixtures in their stores," she said.

Retailers also tend to view e-commerce as the be-all and end-all, Bitar said, but



then pointed out the cost and challenges of relying on digital sales as a quick fix to drive revenue. "It's easy to get those initial evan-

gelical customers, but to acquire a broader base, it's really expensive," she said.

"We might see our stores as dotcom, social media, or wholesale. Shoppers just see the brand, and we have to think about every way you're engaging with them, whether it's a profit-generating stream or not."

Bitar also believes that retailers need to beware of innovation. While innovation is much needed, she said, companies should ask themselves if they are taking enough risks and if their current customer base will be receptive to change.

"Walmart's Scan & Go, a cashierless checkout similar to Amazon Go, ended up being pulled because they couldn't make their current consumer base use it or adopt it," she added.

Change will happen and being honest is key, said Bitar. "Be honest with every level of your organization, from the top all the way down and involve every single level because collaboration has to come from all areas." — *Fiona Ma*

## Transcendent Retail Lies at Core of Sybarite's Design Code

SIMON MITCHELL ABOUT CREATING EXPERIENCES FROM A DOOR HANDLE TO A POP-UP SPACE.

Simon Mitchell, cofounder of Sybarite Architects, doesn't agree with the narrative that retail is dead. Instead, he believes that now more than ever, people are looking for spaces that encourage shared experiences and that stores should meet this demand by focusing on "transcendent retail."

"People will come if the offer is right and the experience is good. I believe that design and buildings have a soul," said Mitchell.

"People naturally gravitate toward buildings: It could be to pray, for a concert, a football match, and this is why retail will never die. People love congregating to have great experiences," he

added, pointing to buildings ranging from the Pantheon in Rome to the Guggenheim Museum in New York.

According to Mitchell, creating a successful transcendent retail space relies on a few core ideas: Being inclusive, having a sense of self and being authentic.

Brands such as Joseph and Marni, with which Sybarite has worked, take into consideration their locale and incorporate cultural details. "We intentionally implemented design coding that relates to Marni's location and their consumer," Mitchell said. "For their London store, there was a red and white color theme like the St.

George flag and the London bus."

Brands also need to project a sense of self in their physical spaces. "My daughter chooses H&M over Zara, even though she prefers the designs of Zara, because of their Conscious Campaign and their recycling initiative. Not only that, but they will offer you a voucher for your next purchase," he said.

For larger retail spaces like SKP's Shin Kong Place in Beijing and Xi'an, for which Sybarite was awarded the Queen's Award for Enterprise for Innovation and Export, the firm said it's driving experience through consistent design coding that caters to every touch point in the customer journey.

"From the logo, the weight of the door handle, the button you push on the lift, it all makes the customer feel wrapped up and immersed by the depth of detail and curation of the brand," Mitchell said. To create another layer of experience for the customer, pop-up spaces have been placed in high-traffic areas or meeting points so that brands can heighten their own narratives and provide continual newness for customers.



"We must not forget the fundamentals of retail: The transactional social experience, the choices, the services have to be amazing and the quality of products has to be sublime. And it all needs to be convenient," he said. — *F.M.*