

2 BUSINESS: Retail Survey

Purchasing power *Global*

We celebrate the world of physical retail by visiting the pioneering boutiques, revitalised high streets and customer-facing vendors elevating the in-store experience.

How does a retailer known for offering value products elevate its design credentials without losing its core audience? What's a chairman to do when a bloated offering has diluted his brand? And how can you tell whether higher rents are a sign of a footfall magnet or that it's time to move on? All of these questions are ones facing retailers large and small in straitened times.

To chart a course through an era of inflation, labour shortages and shifting supply chains, we've found stories from around the world that tell you about the state of retail at large and in microcosm. Spoiler: it's in good health. From the global behemoth that is Spain's Zara Home pairing up with designer Vincent Van Duysen to a Tokyo bookshop that sells one title a week, via a retail renaissance for the Rockefeller Center, we've talked to the people who can tell you how the world of retail got to, where it is now and where it's going.

Shopping might have moved into a brave new era of stationery vending machines and staffless supermarkets but the bedrock of good retail has remained constant: a focus on bricks and mortar, and, just as important, putting the customer first. — DHO

Open house

Zara Home's apartment-style Madrid flagship sees the brand edge upmarket.

A serious-looking couple clasp the corners of an unfurled tablecloth and consider its future, while a pair of spectacled señoras fawn over a sourdough-making kit. Two children slouch in a corner chair, clearly resigned to this overtly adult frenzy for homeware.

We're inside Zara Home's new Madrid flagship, which opened last October in the refurbished Edificio España building. It unfolds like a house, with a kitchen, library, lounge and bedrooms, and it seems as if everyone has stopped by: young, old, bargain hunters and big spenders. The Spanish homeware giant's broad appeal is unmatched.



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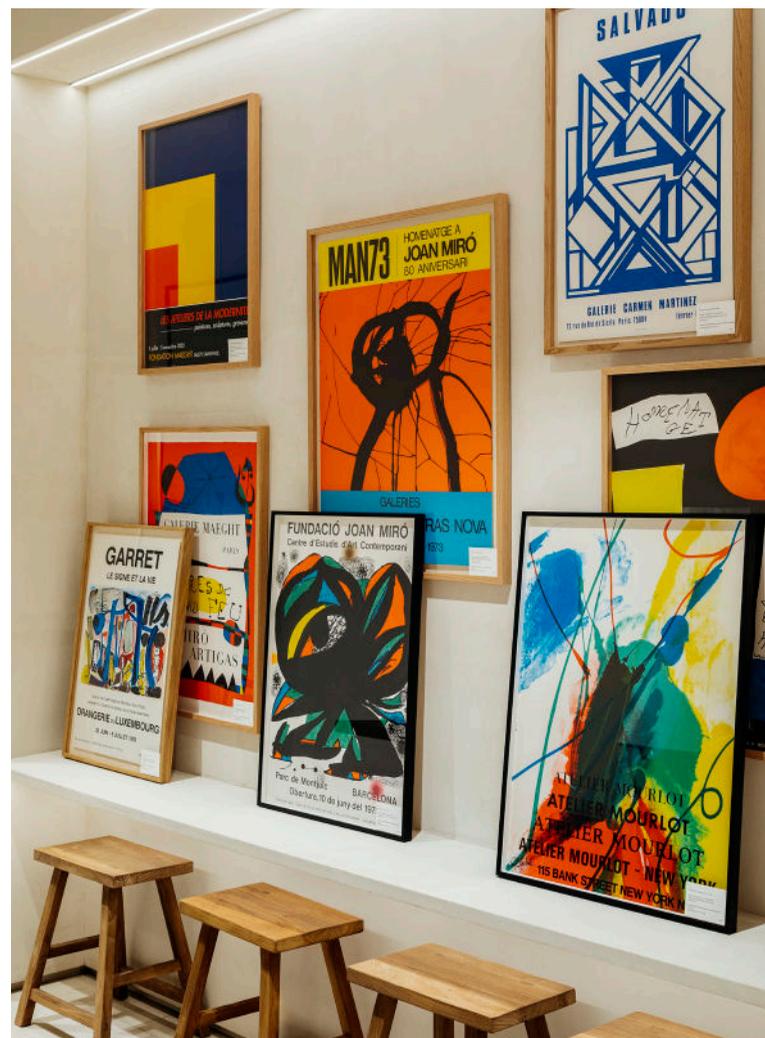


1. Zara Home's new Madrid flagship shop is presented like an apartment
2. Products are presented on homely, shallow shelving units
3. Sleek tills add to the experience

“Decoration trends are global and we reflect this with our collections,” says Lorena Mosquera, who, as general brand manager since 2018, has been elevating Zara Home’s image beyond the mass market. “Every new project is part of a push to make us more creative, agile, efficient and respectful of customers and the environment,” she says. First trialled in the company’s home city of A Coruña, Galicia, the new apartment-style concept will also be rolled out in Paris, Rome and Japan this year.

In lockstep with parent company Inditex’s longstanding policy of minimal marketing, splashy campaigns are sidelined for a focus on the customer experience. Apart from refining the look and feel of shops, big names have been recruited to spruce up the product offering. With more than 5,000 different items every year, there’s much potential for collaboration.

1. Framed lithographic prints
2. Apartment-style concept shelving
3. Madrid’s Edificio España building
4. Graphic notebooks and desk calendars
5. Zara Home fragrances have minimalist packaging



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The most remarkable of these found Zara Home teaming up with Belgian architect and designer Vincent Van Duysen for a new living-room collection in 2022 – an unequivocal coup. “I embrace the same social message of democratic design for everyone,” Van Duysen tells MONOCLE from his Antwerp studio. Describing the collaborative process with second-generation CEO Marta Ortega, appointed chairperson of Inditex in 2021, Van Duysen praises the brand’s quality and short production times. All new furniture is made in Spain. Expanding with a second dining-room range in June, the collection is turning heads. “It’s a repositioning,” says Van Duysen, who, at 60, was attracted by the chance to revisit iconic pieces. The new premium offer, he says, “is intended to reach all layers of society”.

Mosquera has also been consolidating global retail locations (from 507 in 2021 to 425 in 2023) by shoring up bigger shops and managing the retreat from the Russian market. Online sales represent a sizeable share of purchases but a push to digitisation and self-service checkouts is balanced with real employees and in-store browsing paired with home delivery. This is a house that encourages customers to see and touch its products.

And if the couple who were inspecting the tablecloth – now walking out with a full linen set and some new plates – are anything to go by, those visiting this impeccably tidy apartment-style shop seem more than happy to welcome the brand back into their homes. — LA

Making a scene
French studio Nocod tells luxury brands’ stories via vivid interior installations.

Interior designer Baptiste Dosne met his wife, architect Floriane, in 2006 while studying in Paris. The duo (pictured) have been creative partners ever since. In 2015, they established their own studio, Nocod, which has made a name for itself globally thanks to its scenographic approach to luxury retail design. Nocod builds scenes for its clients, rather than completing shopfits, helping to create narratives around products and brands. Its clients include Cartier, US clothing label Amiri, Atelier Swarovski, Japanese jeweller Tasaki and Louis Vuitton. For the latter, it created a “time capsule” showing a cross-section of the Italian fashion house’s historic collections.

In 2021, Floriane and Baptiste relocated from Paris to Lille. Over waffles at Lille institution Pâtisserie Méert, the duo explained to MONOCLE why luxury retailers need to offer full experiences to customers. — ABC

Why did you launch Nocod?
BAPTISTE DOSNE: Our studio’s name comes from the words “no code”. Earlier in our careers, we repeated brands’ [style and design] codes and learnt how to use them. But the time came to forget them in order to innovate and offer a new perspective.

What do today’s luxury retail spaces need to offer?
FLORIANE DOSNE: A sense of community and to resonate with customers. Today, people go to physical shops to experience something new, not just the act of buying. Shops need to be flexible enough to offer unique experiences.

Why is it important to create scenes and not just build interiors?
BD: Brands want visitors to be immersed in a story. We look for the story in the brand’s heritage and then deploy it in a space. If visitors have only five minutes to spare, they need to understand the big picture [about a brand] immediately. Our job is to make it light and quick but also memorable.

How do you create these scenes?
BD: By placing old objects alongside new ones. It immediately gives visitors a sense of the brand’s history.
FD: We like to play with mirrors too. They are magic tools; they can be used to de-structure a space, which offers visitors an immersive experience.

What was the idea behind your ‘time capsule’ for Louis Vuitton?
BD: To present the brand’s future using the treasures in its archive. The brand wanted an instrument that would be extremely strong in visual terms.

What about Amiri’s Tokyo flagship?
BD: Amiri is a young brand, so we built an architectural vocabulary. We created a space open to the city, to invite people in. It was Amiri’s first shop in Japan, which made openness important.

What’s next for Nocod?
BD: Amiri is opening a vast shop in Chicago this spring, for which we designed the interiors. We are also redesigning its flagship in Beverly Hills.



Nocod’s top tips for creating luxury retail experiences

1. Don’t write off the power of a pop-up. Ephemeral spaces are an opportunity to pack more punch visually and try things out.
2. Bricks-and-mortar matters more than ever. Luxury brands increasingly want to offer experiences that require a physical space.
3. Make local people want to come to your shop. Root it in the area and the community.

PHOTOGRAPHERS: Victor Garrido, Julien Liénard