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- stories from my journey  
— christopher benning

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## Evocative Retail Interiors



DCA Ahuja Sons (Photo credit: Andre J Fanthome)

The success of a retail design lies in the efficiency with which one is able to profess the idea and the concept of the brand...



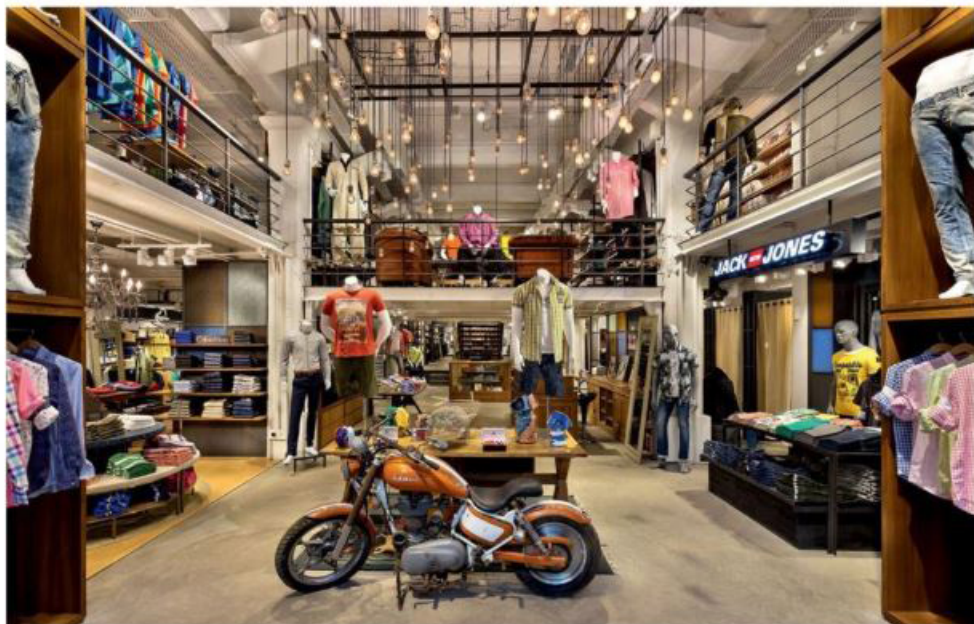
Amit Aurora and Rahul Bansal

Text by: group DCA

Elegant design decisions can catapult the fate of any store. The opportunities to introduce novelty are limitless in retail design. From head-turning window displays to signage prerequisites, one can let the ideas fly when it comes to a retail store design. In order to thrive in the market and keep garnering the users' attention, one must look at the various design approaches

and techniques to make the appeal of these spaces more attractive, and at the same time, make these capable of providing the customer with an immersive ambience. As an architect/designer, that is where the challenge lies to enable engagement and not merely redo a space to improve aesthetics. The primary idea however remains the same- to generate more sales for business.





Akbarally's (Photo credit: Kunal Bhatia)

Noted American business tycoon Aerin Launder has rightly said, "Luxury is anything that feels special. I think luxury doesn't necessarily have to mean expensive". Similarly, the architects from group DCA believe that luxury needs to be an experience, which need not always co-relate with the expression of economic extravagance.

The expertise of the architects in retail design in India gives it the much-needed edge required to craft an exemplary immersive environment for the customer—the brand owner is provided with the opportunity to showcase their products in the deserved realm of opulence and finesse, thus attracting the most distinguished clientele for the product. Over the past 19 years, the firm has conceptualised retail identities of various brands, luxury stores and boutiques. With a mantra of 'Dream Design Discover Deliver', the architects provide services in architecture, interior designing and design co-ordination across a wide range of spaces including offices, residential, retail, luxury retail and hospitality on a pan-India basis.



Da Milano

Retail space is all about functionality and the experience of shopping, and in India, it is difficult to put this domain within one defined parenthesis. The retail idiom is so multi-layered that there can never be a set of textbook challenges for designing retail space. Not only are there various economic retail verticals for the youth and the masses; there are also countless varieties of retail space— clothing, jewellery, accessories, etc, with each vertical having its own set of challenges.

With the recent influx of e-commerce globally, the job of a retail space designer has only become harder. There is so much available online that the design has to offer an enriching experiential quality so as to excite the user to walk into the store and engage with the products on display over ordering them online. This means juggling with multiple design options within a short window.

Having designed the best and foremost jewellery, watch and other lifestyle product showrooms in the country, some of the design essentials lay utmost importance on the following:

**Façade:** The façade of any showroom is the very first impression of the brand. It is one element, which needs to reflect the

aesthetics and individuality of any brand and also engage with the outside. Needless to say, it needs to be exemplary. Due to its importance, a façade goes through intense design development stages.

Starting with inundation of ideas and brand vision, the design practicality, material selection, the design proportion, originality, longevity, and adherence to budget is given sufficient thought. After a series of design developments, presentations, approvals and amendments, the resultant design is one that is unique to the brand and to the streetscape.

**Spaces:** The spaces inside a showroom often flow into one another. These spaces should create or allow engagement for the user so that s/he moves from one part to the next, and experiences the range in totality before leaving the store. In addition to this, the spaces are designed with opulence, bordering towards warmth and cosiness— so a customer feels special and comfortable being around the product at the same time, which eventually fuels the desire to own the product. This also fosters good relationships with the customer.

**Lighting:** No part of the retail design exercise can ever underestimate the importance of





Da Milano

lighting. It is a crucial aspect that reveals the materiality, depth, expanse and warmth in a space, thus, it is extremely important to have good lighting within spaces, which enhances user experience and can make or break the beauty of the overall space. The fact is, the impact of this medium can bring about a drastic and dramatic change in the quality of space and its function. While working out all this, it is imperative to consider health and well-being of the employees. Lighting helps communicate workplace standards and brand standards better, which in turn enhances well-being. Endeavouring to put together the right narrative to craft engaging experiences, the deliberate process of light selection and customisation to create the perfect lighting ambience forms a crucial part of the design ethos.

**Other Elements:** Utilisation of small spaces and corners, maximising display areas, ease of movement within the space, ease of entry and exit (even to the extent of working out the parking facility), multi-functionality of elements and spaces, are some other design essentials that add to the virtue of the showroom, the

brand, and the product.

Let us take the argument by focusing on some design strategies first hand. The Ahujasons's retail store at Khan Market houses traditional, luxurious and hand-crafted products across varied segments from casual daily wear to high-end heritage shawls. With the interesting interplay of half arches and maintaining the overall balance of the canvas with white background and dark toned display settings, the store houses traditional products in a contemporary avatar for the modern discerning customer, and appeals to both young and old to enhance with an attempt to make traditional products fashionable in the modern-day context.

However, the Akbarally's Men in Fort, Mumbai has been done in a trendier and youth-centric manner. This has been done to target the attention of the younger lot among the audience. The Jade Blue Store in Ahmedabad, Gujarat unfolds all its display like a story. Starting with the smallest paraphernalia to the exclusive formal wear collection, the position of the displays have been strategised methodically keeping in mind the circulation pattern one intends to create for a user inside the store. The challenge while designing the retail outlet for Da Milano, Noida, was to exhibit the brand's wide range of products in a small premise. The interiors are filled with colours, thereby creating a bright, youthful space. The store portrays a vibrant exuberance to offset the classic accessories and products and gives its customers an experience to cherish right from the time they step in that focuses more on engagement.

The success of a retail design lies in the efficiency with which one is able to profess the idea and the concept of the brand. Every brand is unique and has its own selling point. But, it is also popularly stated that a function or a notion of something can only be productive only when the space it is placed or conceived in, allows it to. The architects strive to achieve this by striking the perfect symbiotic relationship between branding, spaces, products, and most importantly, customers. ❧

*group DCA is a Delhi-based architecture and an interior design firm formed in 1996.*



## Embodying modern, classical style...

**Project:** Jade Blue, Ahmedabad  
**Architects:** group DCA, New Delhi

The project is a multi-brand outlet within which an exclusive lounge has been fabricated essentially to provide service to the high-end customers. The lounge is designed with a lavish and contemporary ambience befitting the high-end clientele of the brand that only

showcases its premium bespoke clothing linesported by many celebrities. The showroom combines a modern design language and rich materials to define a larger than life space. They create designs for the prominent and aims to cater to individual taste whilst providing exclusivity.

The interiors of this lounge are stylish and customised



LAYOUT PLAN

to resonate the ideals of the people who showcase their collection. The space is a reflection of their own personality and thoughts. Connected to a larger store, with an artistic intent and contemporary aesthetics, the design of the lounge is exclusive, classy and stylish. The elegant use of materials and the extravagant planning of spaces aim at providing a sumptuous and leisurely experience.

A classical spiral staircase designed in a rich language of wood and wrought iron takes one to the entrance of the lounge leading into one of the four distinct quadrants. A central cross-display panel orients the visitor into four spaces out of which the two diagonally opposite ones house seating areas. Each seating area with an attached fitting room is designed to address the individual requirements of the private customers. One of the four quadrants is used as an accessorised entry with a large back lit logo on the wall. Two of these spaces house lounge seating to enjoy the ambience and the experience of shopping. The fourth quadrant along the axis of the entry is a large open space with display panels on each wall. This space is specifically designed as a transition and an area for displaying the exclusive collection.

The project is conceived as a lounge for the

discerning client looking for a personal and bespoke experience. It is equipped with plush seating to enable the customer to leisurely watch the collections offered. Brass screens with intricate patterns serve as partitions between the various pockets created. They ensure privacy and help in maintaining the homogeneity of the lounge. This splendid pattern of *jaali* is inspired from the Yemen Sufi Saint—Siddi Sayyed.

Display elements are vital to any retail store because they attract its connoisseurs. The architects have used large classical cupboards with glass panels to display their range. Mannequins at various corners of the store ensure a panoramic vision to the assemblage. The arched niches of the walls are finished partly in wood and gold paint to create display shelves. Lighting is customised to focus on the exhibited apparel. Finishes and furniture are interwoven into the look and feel of the retail space, ensuring an effective operational lounge. The wooden flooring is elegant and keeps the décor grounded.

In this debonair lounge, various elements are interestingly designed. A distinct striking feature is the salvaged, antique ceiling with intricate and decorative motifs cut in brass work. It creates an uplifting effect





SECTION



ELEVATION

making the area extremely vibrant and rich. Numerous broken mirrors have been placed between the actual ceiling which gives the perception of a larger space. Cutouts were made to execute the brass work ceiling. These cutouts were then replicated and wood painted to provide conformity to the entire space. The drop-down cross beams with a lit-ceiling behind, is well combined with arched portals in wood and camouflage the low hung beams and columns, whilst becoming the defining elements for the four spaces into which the entire store is driven. The arched portals exemplify the beauty of the arched niches on the walls and frame the double panels of the jaali. Further drama is created by the low height ceiling that runs through the space covering the four quadrants,

establishing continuity with the use of mirrors on the beams. Mirror with its inherent property makes the space seem large and also makes the beams almost disappear. The dusky and beautiful pattern of the brass ceiling in stark contrast to the wooden floor gives a feel of deep theatrics, exemplified by the ambient lighting within.

Contemporary lighting creates a balanced ambience by cove recessed lighting and task lighting which is hidden. Spot lighting on display and select garments directs the attention where necessary. Though minimalistic in its approach, the lighting between the two panels of the jaali brings a dramatic element into the space. The sanctity of the ceiling is maintained with no glare while the visitor can enjoy the drama in the ceiling. Hidden lights in the





recessed arches accentuate the design. Vintage artwork and framed photographs on the arched walls, the art deco brackets on the display shelves and the antique earthenware pots together create an atmosphere that is elegant, sophisticated and very characteristic of this studio. While most finishes and accessories are classical and antique, the grey rugs and the leather furniture are contemporary, but compliment the antique look of the lounge well.

This private lounge of the Jade Blue brand is not aimed to create what one may call the regular showroom for selling fashion labels, it is more of a lounge used by the artist to showcase the exquisite collection to a select clientele. The lounge provides one-of-its-kind experience

where one can enjoy the idea of dressing up in a luxurious and fashionable set up. The interiors explore the idea of stylish, chic, contemporary yet extremely rich but also set in deep traditions of cultural expression. The design of the lounge is paradigmatic of the high-end brand that it houses, with strong cultural tones, modern sensibilities and dramatic design quotient. ✚

#### Factfile

**Client:** Jade Blue Lifestyle India

**Design Team:** Amit Aurora (Principal Architect), Kajal Thakur, Marinder Kaur (Design Team)

**Built-up area:** 600sq ft

**Year of completion:** 2016