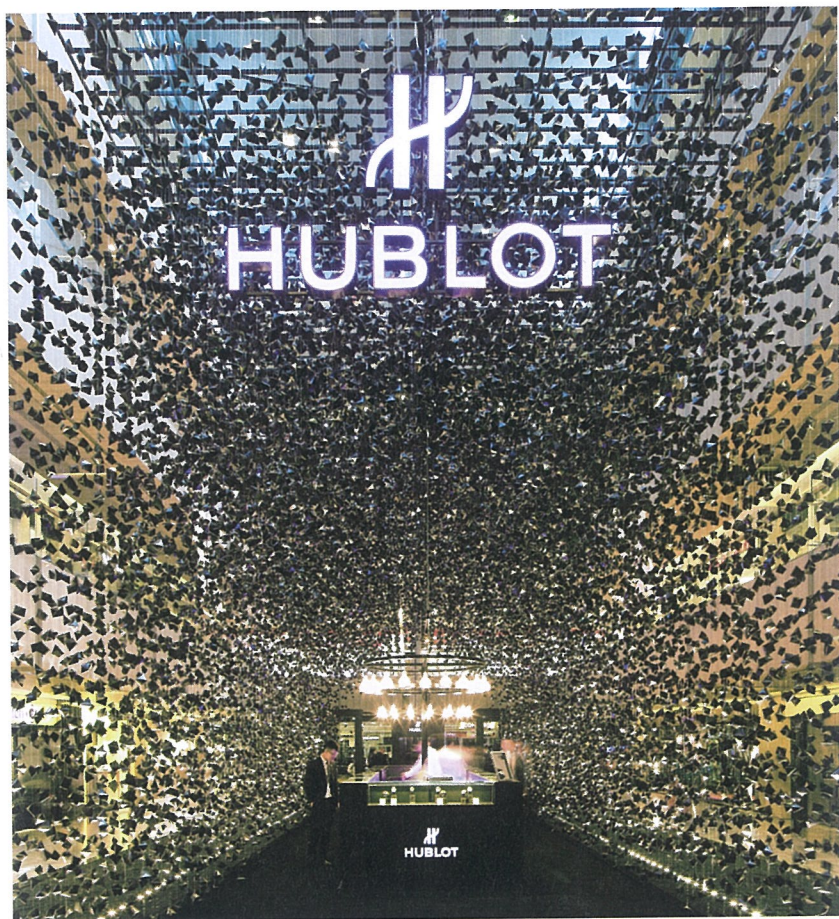


Holistic Retail Design

RESHAPING SHOPPING FOR THE DIGITAL ERA





Hublot
Pop-up store

Studio
The Asylum

Location
Singapore

Year
2012

Swiss watch brand Hublot ran its pop-up store for ten days in the Paragon shopping center, Singapore. It consists of over 35,000 black crystal shapes made of folded paper and suspended on fishing wire.



Exclusivity

Virtually unparalleled in the precise analysis of cultural consumption is the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. He characterised the dialectic game for individual distinction within society as a group dynamic: 'The classifying subjects who classify the properties and practices of others, or their own, are also classifiable objects which classify themselves (in the eyes of others) by appropriating practices and properties that are already classified (as vulgar or distinguished, high or low, heavy or light etc. ...) according to their probable distribution between groups that are themselves classified.'⁸⁶

86

Pierre Bourdieu,
*Distinction: A
Social Critique of
the Judgment of Taste*
(Oxon, 1984), 484.

Exclusivity is by definition a rare, scarce commodity viewed by ambitious middle-class individuals with envy. True exclusivity is de facto excluding, like membership in a golf club that maintains a waiting list generations long. The form of exclusivity that is relevant to retailing is emotionally inclusive, in that it brings precisely those consumers into the fold who do not belong to the exclusive, elite circles of their primary spheres.

Their shopping experience is defined chiefly by the idea of the purchase as a key that will give them a right of access to a sociocultural, exclusive circle – it will make them included. Luxury brands, all of which are also verticals with their own stores, interpret exclusivity as the maximum degree to which the brand can be stretched without diluting the price point. What the market can only just absorb is exclusive. Real scarcity in manufacturing is no longer equal to the postulated scarcity of an 'exclusive' product, so luxury brands must take the logical step of

creating visual scarcity and display their products in a way that suggests a value and uniqueness that justify the price. The real value lies in the brand performance, as the product itself is mass-produced and millions of bags away from exclusivity.

Viewed strategically, exclusivity is primarily an architectural challenge. The environment surrounding the product defines the context in which the product is perceived. The architecture's differentiation from the local surroundings marks its uniqueness. Store design as a whole, displays, visual merchandising and the customer's symbolic esteem underscore the impression of luxury just as much as models, fashion photography, fashion shows and the global public relations machine. But exclusivity has two sides: there are not only Goliaths, but also Davids that offer exclusivity in products without investing in a brand. In other words, there is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all answer for creating exclusive retail formats. But holistic retail design does have two terms it can use to guide its actions: innovation and self-reference. Logically enough, innovation is the clearest indicator of true exclusivity. It delivers a brand new solution and is unique for a certain period of time, which I can belong to by becoming one of the first movers, or first customers. That in itself confers a fragile, temporary exclusivity which on its own would offer no stability without the historical dimension. Exclusive brands should be backed by heritage, and heritage is based on repetition and variation as the key principles in a time-stable, brand-specific, exclusive form.