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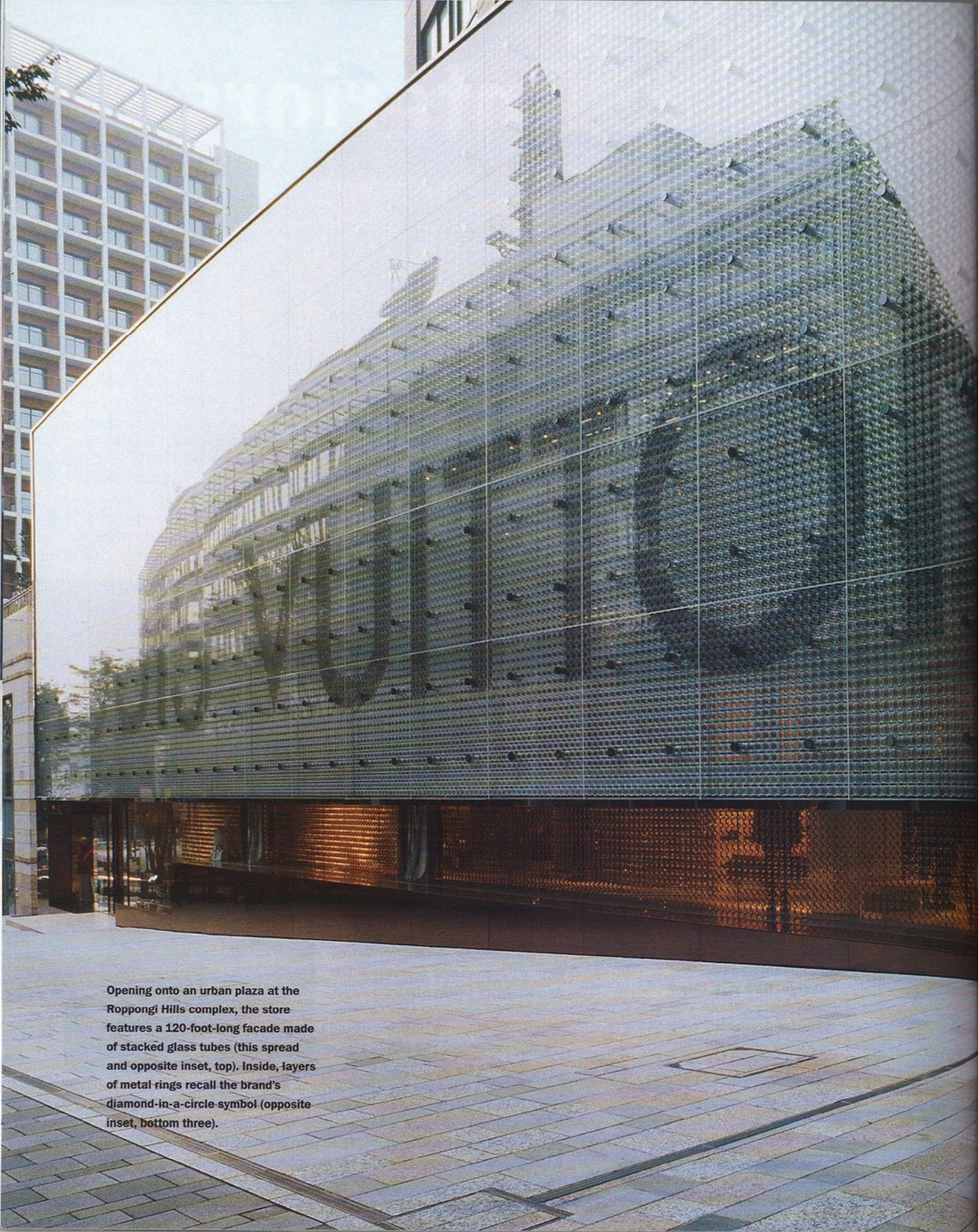
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## HARBOR LIGHT

Santiago Calatrava's  
Auditorio de Tenerife

FOCUS ON  
RETAIL INTERIORS





Opening onto an urban plaza at the Roppongi Hills complex, the store features a 120-foot-long facade made of stacked glass tubes (this spread and opposite inset, top). Inside, layers of metal rings recall the brand's diamond-in-a-circle symbol (opposite inset, bottom three).



# An international trio of architects collaborates to give Louis Vuitton a new high-tech face in Tokyo

By Clifford A. Pearson

Since 1999, when it opened a radically new store in Nagoya, Japan, Louis Vuitton has been busy reinventing itself, turning a venerable, somewhat stodgy brand into an ultra-hip object of consumer lust. To execute this transformation, the company has used the architecture and design of its shops as a primary instrument, and Japan as its most important laboratory. With the opening last September of its 9,700-square-foot store at the Roppongi Hills mixed-use complex in Tokyo, the company has shown how far it is willing to push the retail envelope to explore new ideas of materiality, transparency, and display. Now Vuitton is applying what it has learned in Japan to stores back home in Europe and the United States.

Like some of its other new outlets, the Roppongi Hills venue brought together the talents of designers in far-flung parts of the world: Jun Aoki in Tokyo, Aurelio Clementi in Italy, and Eric Carlson, who led the company's design group in Paris until he opened his own firm this year. Aoki (who designed the Nagoya store, several others in Japan, and a new flagship location opening this month in New York City) and Clementi are part of a loose stable of talented young architects that Louis Vuitton has employed in recent years. (Others include Kengo Kuma, who recently completed an office building in Tokyo for the company; Kumiko Inui, who once worked for Toyo Ito; and David McNulty, who works with Carlson in Paris.) Instead of parceling different tasks, such as exterior shell, interior space planning, and display design, to the Roppongi Hills architects, the company asked the three of them to work together on the entire project. "It was a real collaboration," explains Aoki.

Although each new store serves as a unique expression, all address a set of common design goals and employ shared tactics. Perhaps the most obvious is the use of long-established Louis Vuitton symbols—its monogram, the checkerboard pattern identified with its Damier brand, a four-stemmed flower, and a diamond motif—as integral elements in the stores' design. At Roppongi Hills, Aoki and his collaborators incorporated the diamond and flower icons in a stunning wall of 30,000 horizontal glass tubes stacked like a honeycomb between vertical glass

**Project:** Louis Vuitton, Roppongi Hills, Tokyo

**Architects:** Jun Aoki & Associates—Jun Aoki, Ryuji Nakamura; Louis Vuitton Architecture Department—Eric Carlson, Marie-Eve Bidard; Studio Aurelio Clementi—Aurelio Clementi, Irene Antolini, Cettina

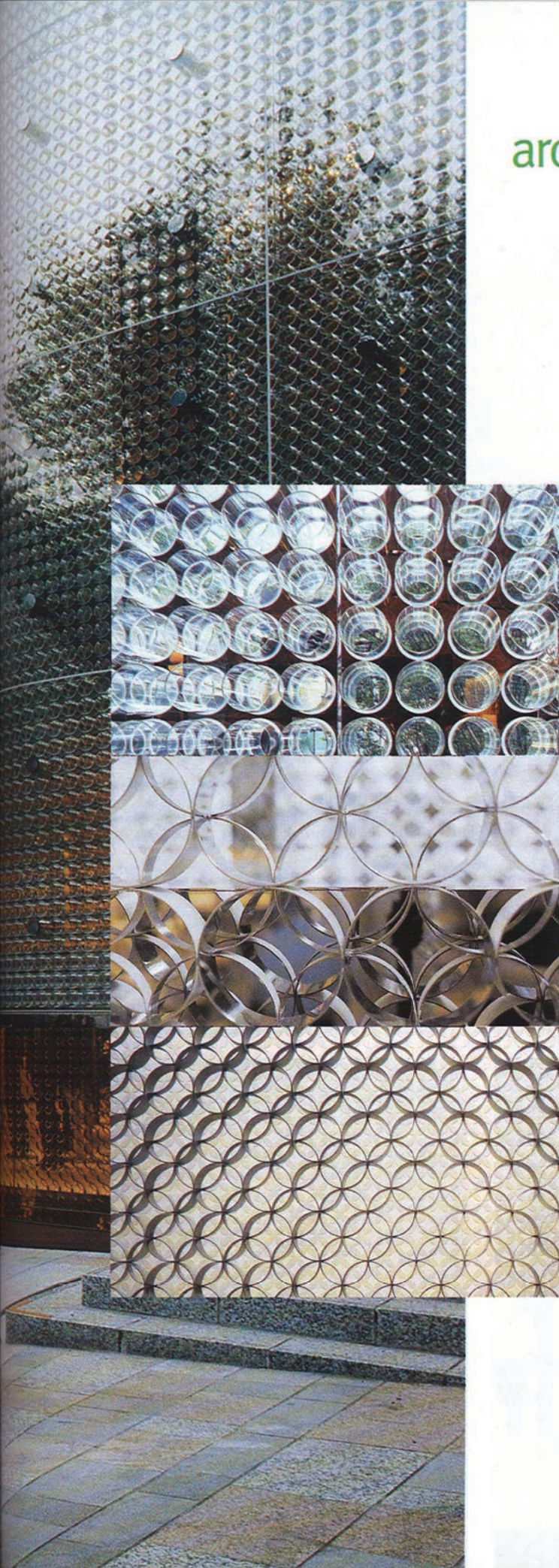
Schepis, Nestor Gonzalez

**Consultants:** George Sexton Associates (lighting); FLAME (graphics); Sun Design, Hiro Konoe (floor images); Nuno (fabric design)

**Interior contractor:** Takashimaya Space Create

**General contractor:** Shimizu

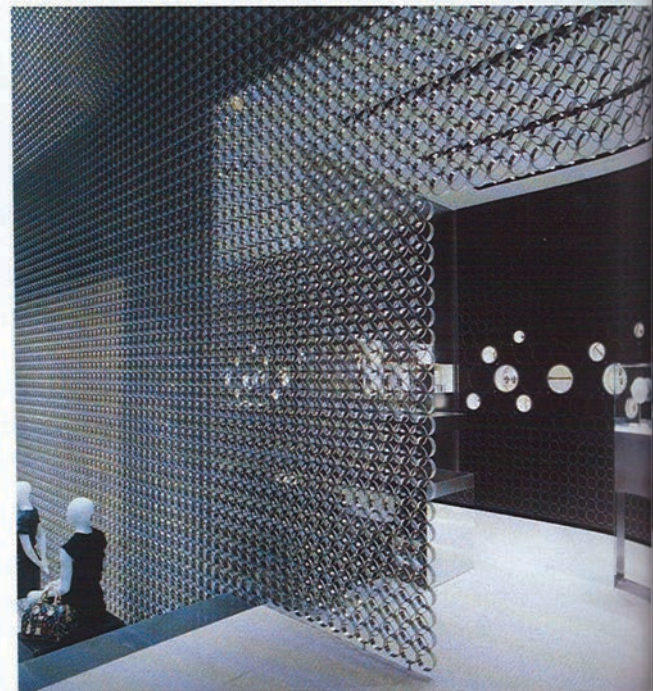
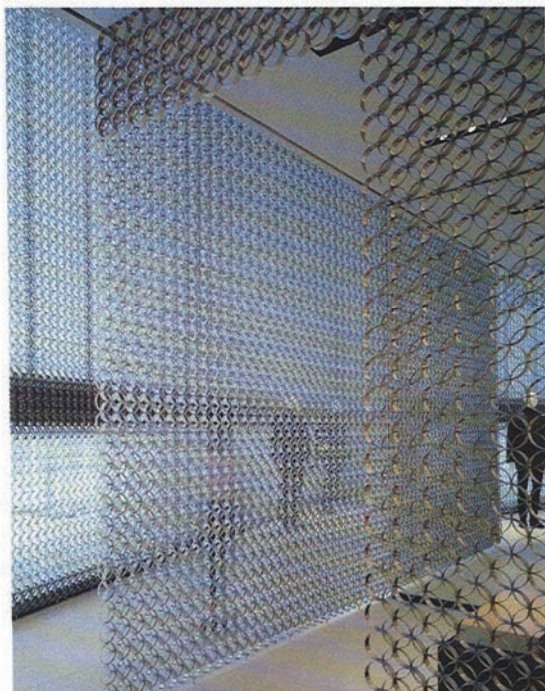
PHOTOGRAPHY: © JIMMY COHRSEN, EXCEPT AS NOTED; DAICI ANO (INSET, TOP AND BOTTOM)







The architects wrapped the store's "nave" with an interior skin of metal rings and glass (above) and hung the same materials from the ceiling to create translucent partitions (right and far right).





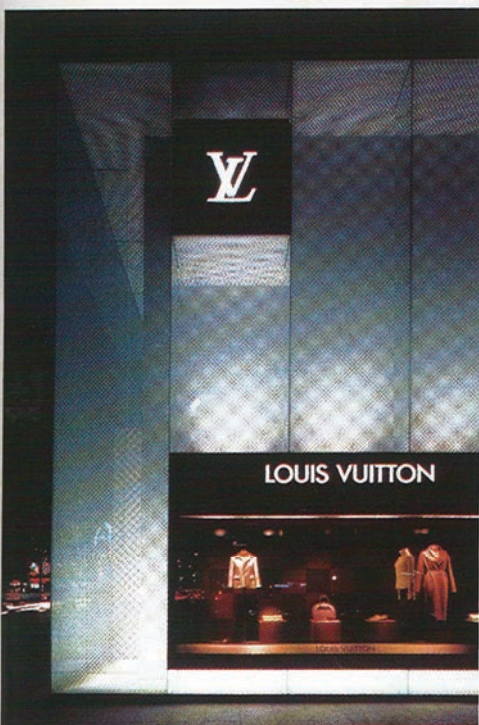
## Creating a modern design vocabulary so a multinational brand can say many things

Multiplicity and brand identity are the key ideas driving Louis Vuitton's program of opening innovative stores worldwide. Although the concepts may seem contradictory, the high-end retailer of luggage, handbags, shoes, and leather goods has discovered that one-off store architecture can actually reinforce its image as a company concerned with quality and design. And by hiring young, edgy architects, the company has been able to expand its customer base to include younger, trendier shoppers.

Change in the company's approach to store design began in 1997, when it introduced ready-to-wear fashion and initiated a program of opening new outlets around the world. In 1999, it opened a store in Nagoya, Japan (below left), that presented a radically different face for Louis Vuitton. Designed by the Tokyo-based architect Jun Aoki, the store dazzled shoppers with a double glass skin whose misty appearance seemed to dematerialize

the facade and set it apart from its chaotic urban context.

Aoki then designed a six-story building for Louis Vuitton on Omotesando Avenue in Tokyo (below center), playing on the company's origins as a luggage retailer to devise a scheme based on stacks of "trunks," double-height spaces that inform both the facade and the store's floor plans. His latest design is for a flagship store in New York City on Fifth Avenue and 57th Street (below right), where he has created another remarkable skin that challenges traditional notions of boundaries. The glass facade rises 11 stories to encompass the entire corner of a 1930s stone building, even though the store occupies just the bottom three floors. Varying the size of the Damier checkerboards applied to the skin's glass layers and the amount of their overlap, Aoki was able to blur the boundaries between opaque and transparent sections as well as between store and office floors.



plates and a layer of perforated stainless steel. The idea was to create a "mirage," something that would be mysterious and shimmering, says Clementi. Stretching nearly 120 feet long and 43 feet high, the tubular-glass facade appears almost like a "pixelated screen," explains Carlson.

Since the store is part of a new \$2.2 billion development with an eclectic array of buildings—including an office tower with an art museum on top [RECORD, January 2004, page 106], apartment buildings, shops, restaurants, and a headquarters for a television network (see page 88), the Louis Vuitton architects wanted the facade of their store to quickly set it apart from its much larger neighbors. "We designed it as an alien within an alien," says Aoki.

The designers' innovative use of materials addresses another of the common themes found in all of Louis Vuitton's new stores: setting facades in motion. At other locations, including the new flagship store in New York, Aoki applies shifted and overlapping Damier grids to layers of glass, creating fascinating moiré patterns that seem to dance as visitors view them from different angles. While each store has its own way with materi-

als, all explore an architectural language of transparency and translucency that challenges established notions of indoors and out, solid and porous.

Inside the Roppongi Hills store, the designers clad the two-story-high space with a "skin" made of intersecting metal rings, again recalling the company's old symbols in a strikingly modern way. Veil-like partitions made from the same metal rings establish a sense of layering without

### THE DESIGNERS OF THE STORE ENVISIONED THE INTERIORS AS AN EVOCATION OF ROPPONGI'S ACTIVE NIGHTLIFE.

blocking views through the space. Treating metal in this way, as if it were a fabric, creates an intriguing analogy between architecture and fashion, a strategy used at other Louis Vuitton stores, as well. At the one in the Omotesando area of Tokyo, for example, Aoki used large expanses of metal mesh as interior partitions and incorporated it in the building's facade.

At Roppongi Hills, the designers envisioned the interiors as an

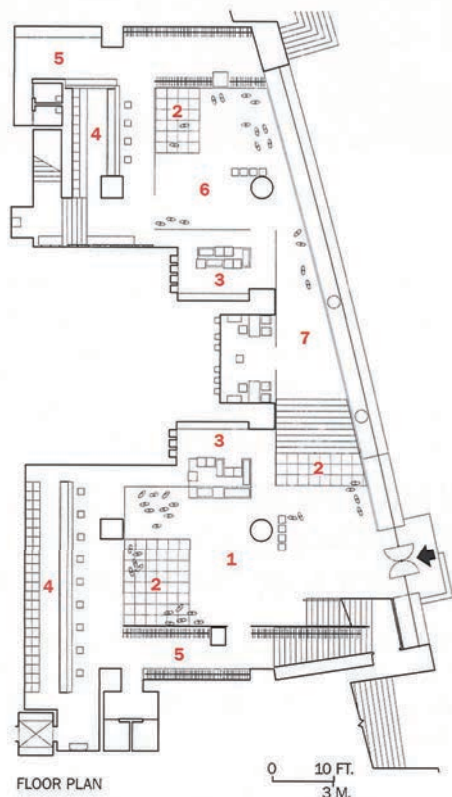




On entering the store (below), shoppers encounter an interior that alludes to Roppongi's active nightlife, with parts of the floor equipped with fiber optics to evoke a dance hall (left), as well as bag "bars," luggage "lounges," and shoe "salons" (left in photo at left).



1. Women's shop
2. Image floor
3. Shoe salon
4. Bag bar
5. Fitting/dressing
6. Men's shop
7. Unisex



evocation of the area's famous nightlife. So they created "bars" for buying handbags, "lounges" for checking out luggage and leather goods, "salons" for shoes, and "dance floors" embedded with tiny fiber-optic lights that can generate moving images. They also installed MP3 jukeboxes on the first and second floors, where customers can download selected songs from a DJ mix playing in the store.

Organized like a dumbbell with the women's department at one end and the men's at the other, the store keeps its long axis mostly free of merchandise and furniture. Aoki calls this long, processional element the "nave" and says its spare, open space—punctuated only by a set of wide

**"WE WANTED THE STORE TO BE TRANSFORMABLE, SO IT COULD EVOLVE SEASONALLY OR EVEN DAILY," SAYS AOKI.**

stairs and a series of mannequins—is perfect for special events. By keeping the nave free of all furniture and display cases and drawing attention both to the large scale of the space and to the detailed texture of the vertical surfaces, the store's designers eliminated almost all references to a medium scale. As a result, it has a dramatic quality quite different from traditional retail spaces filled with familiar objects such as chairs, sofas, and vitrines. Polished stainless-steel risers act as mirrors, dematerializing the stairs and adding another subtle layer to the spatial games at play here.

In the smaller spaces devoted to merchandise, the designers created more familiar environments using the palette of materials found in Louis





Vuitton shops worldwide: anigre and wenge woods, leather, plaster, limestone, and teak. But in a break with the company's stores of the past 10 years or so, this one does not use furnishings designed by Peter Marino. Instead, the project's designers created a new collection of furniture, adapting the company's signature materials, such as brown leather, to more contemporary shapes. To reduce visual clutter, they treated display furniture and shelving as extrusions from the walls and floors. The simplified system of furnishings and product displays should allow greater flexibility in terms of merchandising, explains Aoki. "We wanted the store to be a transformable design, so it could evolve seasonally or even daily and reflect the pace of style," he adds.

Change is what Japan has been all about for Louis Vuitton, allowing the company to assume a younger, trendier identity and attract a new segment of the market. "You can push things a lot more in Japan, in terms of design and innovation," states Clementi. "What we've done in Japan is try to bring art, architecture, and fashion together in a way that hadn't been tried before." Taking what it has learned in Japan, Louis Vuitton is revamping its stores in other parts of the world, starting with its 18,000-square-foot location in New York this month and then pushing on to the Champs Elysées in Paris next year. ■

#### Sources

**Lighting fixtures fabrication:**

*Yamagiwa*

**Fiber optics:** *NTT DoCoMo*

**MP3 jukebox:** *NTT DoCoMo*

**Speaking picture:** *Jerome Olivier*

**Fabrics:** *Nuno*

For more information on this project, go to Projects at

[www.architecturalrecord.com](http://www.architecturalrecord.com).

Mirrored risers (above) help dematerialize stairs and add to a storewide strategy of floating space and suspending see-through partitions. The architects used traditional

Louis Vuitton colors and woods to create new furniture and display cases in the leather-goods "lounge" (below) and handbag "bar" (top of photo below).

