

design:retail



PRESENTER OF
GLOBALSHOP 2015

MARCH 2015 VOLUME 27 NO.3

DESIGNRETAILONLINE.COM

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A tea store for a
new generation

The GLOBALSHOP ISSUE

See It, Feel It



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IF YOU WERE attending a recent class of mine at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) in New York, chances are the topic of “design terminology” would be introduced. A few key terms, like composition, contrast, proportion, line, balance and repetition, might be highlighted for their value in learning how to describe one’s own design plan, or comment on someone else’s. Texture is one in particular that is significant to visual merchandising and store design. Without it, the experience of the retail space and brand would be thoroughly diminished and less engaging.

With today’s consumer locked in a love affair with flat glass screens both large and small—everyone compulsively staring into and “touching” the smooth surface with the swipe of a finger—texture is more important than ever. Stores desiring to be an integrated 3-D expression and touch-point for customers need the use of texture as an important way to ensure that the customer’s store experience is unique and memorable in a manner different from their online experience.

Texture as an aspect of “brick and stick” retail should be at the top of any successful design plan. It creates the excitement for both customers and designers, as well as for the manufacturers and vendors offering a wide range of materials and finishes used in retail environments. Knowing what textured materials feel like, how they wear and what they can evoke is vital for any designer.

So, what exactly is texture?

Texture (noun) can be defined as the feel, appearance or consistency of a surface or a substance. Texture (verb) can describe an action, as in the act of giving a surface a rough or raised texture. From the Latin word *textura* (weaving), texture in art refers to



the tactile quality of the surface. In literature, it is the quality created between the combination of the different story and character elements. And in music, texture is the way in which the melodic, rhythmic and harmonic materials are combined in a composition, thereby determining the overall quality of the sound in a piece.

As store designers and visual merchandisers, we constantly employ texture to trigger a range of sensory associations related to the featured display theme, product message or store brand experience.

Textures can be suggestive. Soft and satiny are seen as feminine, while velvet feels rich, mysterious, elegant and expensive. Rough textures are viewed as more masculine, natural, outdoorsy, rugged and wholesome. The use of contrasting or opposing textures with product can be intriguing and add interest and dimension to a display—with

both scale and light reflection being important additional considerations.

Using texture for both visual (optic) appeal and the tactile relation to the sense of touch (haptic experience), store designers and visual merchandisers are able to trigger a range of emotions and brand clues to a customer. And while customers tend to first be drawn by color, it is pattern and texture that capture their attention next.

Decisions regarding interior finishes that reinforce associations with a particular brand or product create the “language” that leverages associations between a texture and memory and experience—a form of visual and tactile encoding. Be it matte or shiny, coarse or fine, rough or smooth, different textures have the power to convey a lot of information to the customer.

The range of both traditional and non-traditional textural materials is constantly growing. Trend reports and emerging themes continue to forecast a vibrant interest and use of dimensional surface materials—including earthy materials, such as stone and reclaimed exotic woods, to the still strong industrial chic use of antique brick, concrete and metal. And even wallpaper is making a comeback with a fresh new look incorporating embossed and finely texture surfaces.

The upshot: integrating texture within the retail environment and visual presentation adds an essential visual and tactile value to the store experience.

Keep an eye on it.



BASED IN NEW YORK, PETER-TOLIN BAKER IS ACTIVELY INVOLVED WITH RETAIL DESIGN AND VISUAL MERCHANDISING VIA P-T B DESIGN SERVICES (OWNER), THE FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY (ADJUNCT PROFESSOR), RETAIL DESIGN INSTITUTE NY CHAPTER (BOARD PRESIDENT) AND AS A REGULAR CONTRIBUTOR TO DESIGN+RETAIL.