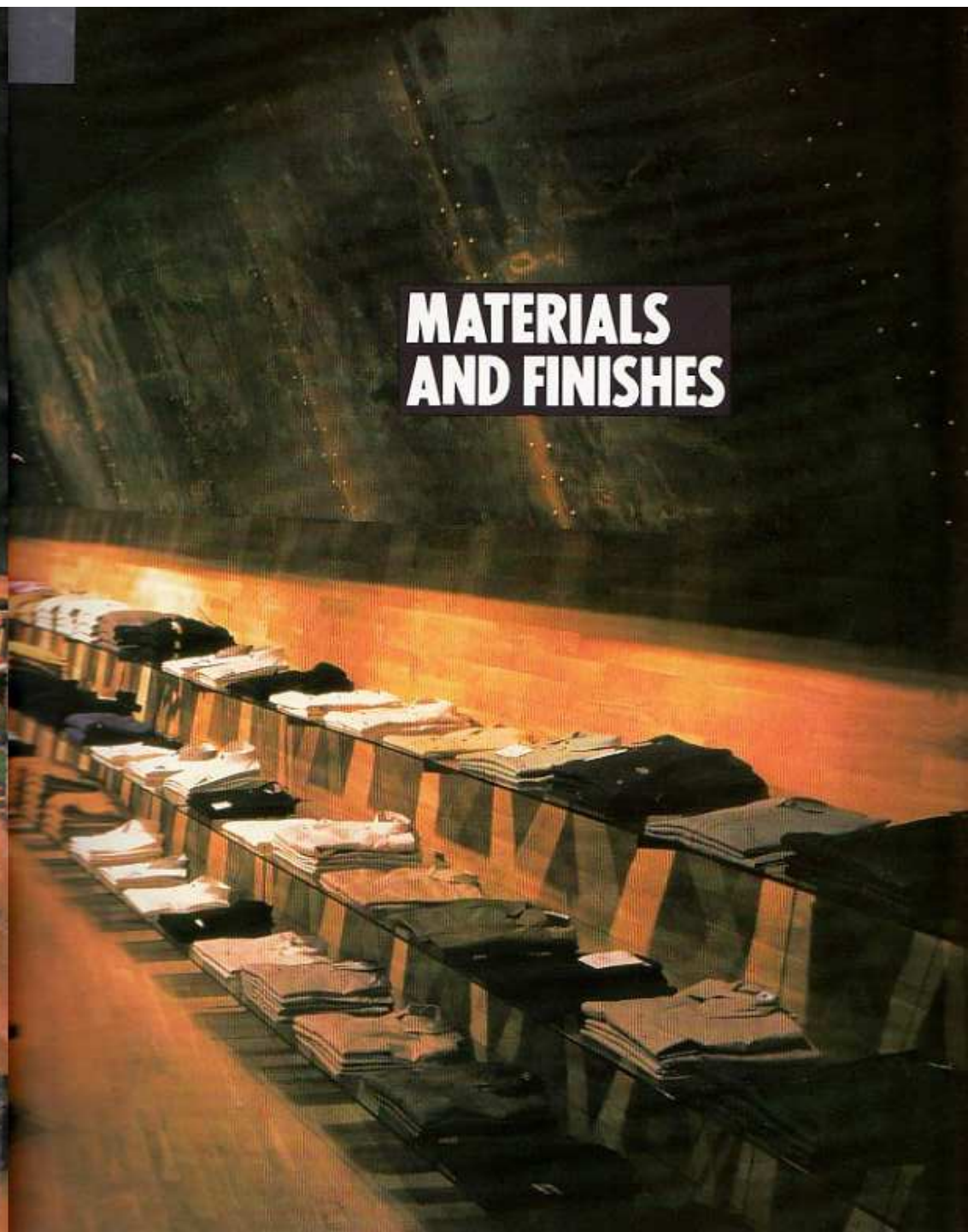


# RETAIL DESIGN

A photograph of a modern retail store interior. The scene is captured from a low angle, looking up at the ceiling and down at the merchandise. The ceiling is white with recessed circular lights and track lighting fixtures. A prominent feature is a large, illuminated sign on the wall that reads "RETAIL DESIGN". The store is filled with clothing racks, mannequins, and various garments. The lighting is a mix of warm and cool tones, creating a dynamic atmosphere.

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## **MATERIALS AND FINISHES**

As most materials used in retail design are for interiors, and, as such, unaffected by the elements, the choice available to the designer is bewildering. Which materials and finishes to use is generally determined by three factors: the image they convey, the practical considerations, and cost. Image is a complex issue where materials and finishes are concerned – a wood floor, for example, could signal both a high-class retailer or a bargain, no-frills environment. Banana Republic uses a wooden floor to promote its “primitive” identity, while the smoothly polished floor of Marisa Lombardi in Milan denotes elegance. An image cannot be simply determined without regard to the surrounding context, and, most crucially, to the other materials used. Practical considerations include availability, durability, fire-resistance, and ease of replacement. Legislation plays a considerable part in the choice of finishes. Paint might have to be fire-retardant and therefore could be restrictive of colour or texture: steelwork might need to be concrete-clad and, as a result, could look harsh; doors might have to be solid rather than framed or open; staircases might need to be in steel rather than wood. Also, since all materials do eventually reach the end of their useful life, it is as well to choose those that age respectably, acquiring something like the patina on well-used bronze or antique furniture, rather than giving the appearance of wearing out. But designers should be wary of choosing materials on the basis of an anticipated short life. A carpet with a “three year life” can look awful after one year. Cost is a less obvious consideration than it first seems: to arrive at a “true” cost, both initial and lifecycle costs must be considered. Paint, for example, is inexpensive as a finish, but usually requires frequent repainting that may disrupt the retailer’s business. And choosing materials that can easily be replaced can sometimes be a false economy – it may be difficult later to match paint colours or carpet tiles. For instance, if original batches go out of stock,

Designers will always have to consider when choosing materials the balance of effect versus capital cost and maintenance. But any attempt to solve this equation is complicated by the question of flexibility. Nothing in retailing is permanent – modification is inevitable and often desirable, ranging from constant small changes over several years as the identity evolves, to a complete redesign every so often. Materials must be chosen that allow retailers to be flexible, without compromising the design.

Although choice of materials and finishes will enter every aspect of retail design, particular attention should be paid to three of the basic elements of any interior – the floor, walls, and ceiling.

## FLOORS

The choice of floor can do much to determine the visual character of a store. Different floor finishes will help to create different atmospheres, zones, walkways, and even departments. In larger stores, a design may use a wide range of floor finishes. Such variety both contributes to and restricts flexibility. Variations in surface, for example, can present problems where they abut, making some sort of masking or parting strip essential. Other problems can occur during maintenance: polishing wood might spoil an adjacent carpet; washing tiles might stain them. Careful thought needs to be given to floor colour. Generally speaking, the floor should be neutral, a passive element whose colour should not dominate the interior. Designers also need to consider the particular characteristics of the floor surface: marble, for example, although it looks luxurious and is hard-wearing, can create a noisy environment. Some surfaces need to be more durable than others: because stairs are very heavily used, stair carpeting should generally be of a high quality and will probably need replacing more often than other floor areas. Local legislation may insist on



Contrasts of materials are central to the design of Marisa Lombardi, Milan, by Semer Assouan (above left). The leaf’s-eye maple drawers contrast with the dark wood floor, which in turn contrasts with the marble columns supporting display areas and dense terrazzo walls. (Photo: Santi Calero)

Materials of the US chain store Banana Republic (above right) are a key part of the identity: worn wooden floors, suggesting a tropical environment; tan-quart parking seats for display, and roughly plastered, half-timbered walls. (Photo: John Harkin)

Hard, industrial materials are favored at Jones, London (left), designed by Peter Mullins and Luke Walton. But all the materials have been finished with a care and attention that reflects the designers’ admitted debt to minimalist artists such as Richard Serra. The concrete screed floor has been varnished, and has insets of leather and Belgian fossilized granite. The walls have a rough rendered finish. The service counter is made of sheets of 1 inch (25 mm) thick solid plate steel, propped together. (Photo: Peter Cook)

The original Zim two in Barcelona, designed by Fernando Soto (previous page), rebrands contemporary accessories of a removable clothing store through its use of dark, sandy materials. The dark hardwood floor and wall is treated over by the presence of the rusted and riveted steel plates. (Photo: Hans Sonnik)



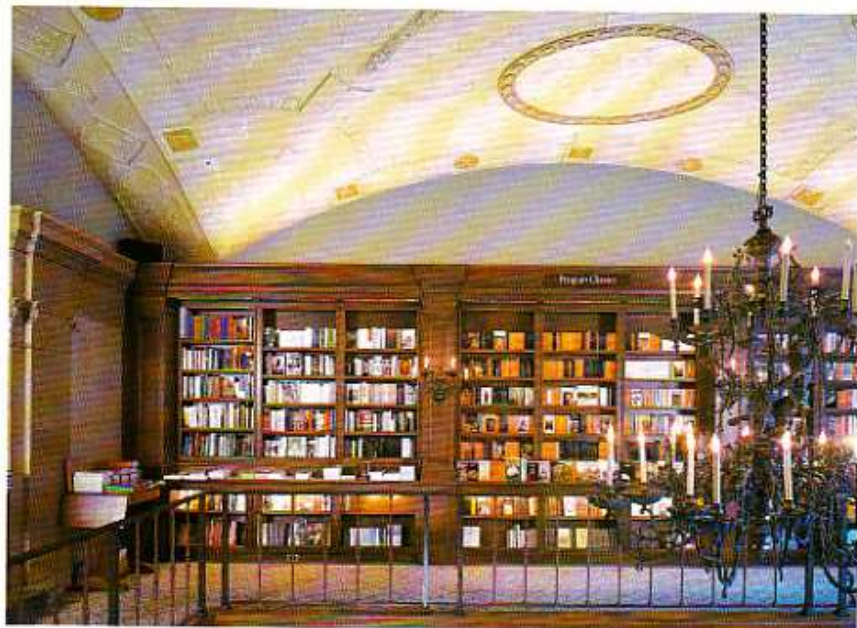
The original Zay Taw, Barcelona, designed by Fernando Soler, used concrete stairs in cast metal, with the name of the shop to act as a striking entrance, as well as to impart the store's identity. (Photo: Richard Bristow)

noings of fiber, rubber, or aluminum. These are useful in any case for defining the tread and for nonslip purposes, as well as for preventing wear. At entrances, special matting is essential to clean customers' shoes on entry. Coir matting, rubber matting, fiber carpets, or combinations of metal, rubber, and fiber are all useful.

Carpet, or "soft flooring," is popular with many retailers, and it is easy to see why. With modern carpetmaking technology, specially designed carpets are easy to create at relatively low cost. This can aid the establishment of a store's identity, helping to differentiate one retailer from another, even though the basic woven construction of the carpet is identical. Carpet design and colour can be coordinated with fixtures and other elements of the overall store design (see below). Additionally, the feel of carpet underfoot is welcome to weary shoppers, and the noise reduction caused by carpets is often advantageous. Cleaning is also easy—usually this is a simple vacuum-cleaning task. The different types of carpet fiber used need some consideration. A wool/nylon blend is highly durable, but tends towards the more costly range of carpets. Nylon or other synthetic carpets, once associated with a "cheap" look, have improved enormously in the last few years through the introduction of new fibers that allow better colours, avoid shininess, and have the wear and soiling properties of more expensive natural fiber carpets. It is worth bear-

ing in mind, however, that manmade carpet used in conjunction with metal equipment in a dry atmosphere will almost certainly give rise to static electricity. However, there are special coatings and new fibers now available, designed to minimize this effect. For all types of carpet, a proper padding or underlay will extend the carpet life, as well as improve the feel underfoot.

When choosing carpet, some particular aspects should be borne in mind. If, during the life of the carpet, the store is going to be rearranged—during sales, for example, or when moving displays—unworn areas of carpet may be exposed (as bad are sections of carpet damaged by heavy counters or display equipment). Hence it may be necessary to confine carpeting to areas of the store where the planning rules out significant change. Carpet can be laid over a hard floor, a solution which may appeal to the retailer who wants more flexibility. In whatever situation, if carpet is used, its laying is of paramount importance, since this will have a significant effect on its life and wear. Some carpet is, of course, designed and laid broadloom (the full width of the manufacturer's loom), but more expensive carpets are laid as body carpet (one meter—thirty nine inches—wide), which requires stitching. The stitching is likely to be the weakest point when it comes to maintenance, so designers often arrange with carpet contractors for what is known as a "make, lay, and maintain contract." Alternatively, carpet tiles



At Rizzoli, New York, the patterned carpet is consistent with the use of traditional materials throughout. The carpet floor adds an appropriate "library" look to the atmosphere. The plasterwork of the original Solares Plaza Shopping Centre has been retained and the chandeliers and ceiling artwork were brought from the Fifth Avenue store. These original features have been integrated with new custom-built shelving, fabric wallcoverings, glazed bookcases, and muted colors, giving a gracious ambience free in distinctly Rizzoli. (Photo: © Norman McGrath (1985))



The original design of Paronon, New York, by Harry Farnow, shows how, for advanced store design from Tokyo and Paris to London, the design initially used a variety of basic materials. Rough concrete slabs and plaster walls provided a foil for the smooth maple wood floors, while the cast-iron columns were part of the original cast-iron construction of the building in the Union Square district. In 1996 this was redesigned with paneled concrete floors and concrete display platforms but nevertheless retaining the original character. (Photo: © Paul Wachtel 1994)

may be used: these have the advantage of flexibility and are easy to replace, although there can be problems matching the colours of old and new tiles. Some retailers arrange for their carpet tiles to be moved around periodically to give even wear across the whole installation.

Wood floors are seemingly more durable than carpet, but, as many well-worn wooden floors attest, levels of wear, and particularly soiling, need to be considered with this material as well. The best wooden floors look even better after some usage, because they take on a coloration and patina that are entirely natural and that stop scratches, bumps, and variations in colour from hurting the overall look. Some wooden floors come with prefinish, and are relatively maintenance-free. Wood can also be stained so that it has a colour of its own, impregnated into the

grain, rather than just a surface finish like paint. But wood can be expensive—as a rough guide, an average quality wood floor will cost as much as an expensive carpet. Wood floors are available as single boards, sections of boards, or parquet. Because of the wear on floors, hardwoods are naturally preferable in most instances: beech, maple, and oak are common. Strip floors, which form parallel, herringbone, basket-weave, or other patterns, are the most expensive, and expensive-looking, of wood floors. In general, timber strip floors should be laid with the line of traffic rather than across it. Feet moving across the grain tend to gull the fibers out of the wood and destroy the surface. The rich patterns, and the quality of the wood itself, are well suited to particularly traditional, more exclusive environments. Straight boards create a more old-fashioned feel. They can be especially effective in a