



IA Interior Architects' futurist store approach and entry. Sketch by IA's Ron Singler, design director, retail, and retail designers Michael Trenary and Caroline Beaulieu.

## BUSINESS

# Recasting Stores in a Pandemic and Its Aftermath

- The look and feel of shopping in stores is fast evolving in both temporary and permanent ways.

BY WWD STAFF

**Here's the dilemma:** Certain COVID-19-related adaptations to the retail setting might or might not be relevant in the future. It all depends on the impact of the pandemic on shopping behavior and whether it lasts a year, two years – or much longer. That means retailers must be innovative, agile and resourceful to navigate the challenges posed by the global health crisis and its accompanying economic fallout.

In any case, the playbook for store design and the shopping experience is being rewritten by the coronavirus, forcing retailers to make immediate adaptations for social distancing and sanitizing, while accelerating changes already in motion, such as buy online, pickup in store or curbside, and showrooming.

WWD asked experts in brick-and-mortar retail design to discuss their visions for the store of the future, whether it's retrofitting for right now, or dramatically rethinking the space for the next generation. For many, it's all about merging hospitality and retail, increased web functionality to link shoppers to inventory in local stores, easily cleanable surfaces, modified customer traffic flow, open spaces with less inventory on the selling floor, shopping by appointment, and flexible fixtures so product displays and shops-in-shop can be readily assembled and disassembled like stage sets.

### Peter Marino, architect

"A condominium project I'm working on specifies an elevator with voice command, so you don't have to touch anything metallic. It's very eerie. It's the touching aspect that's



Peter Marino

questionable. The reason people go to stores is presumably to touch and try on the merchandise. I think it's going to take a while to regain confidence in that.

"I think we'll want everything more modern. I don't want doorknobs to enter a fitting room – we should just be able to push the door. There will be a lot less touching of metal and small items, but architecturally the changes are not very much.

"After the Depression of 1929 and 1930, everything became simpler. All those gorgeous luxury apartments by Rosario Candela on Park Avenue were suddenly being built with no oak libraries, no oak trim around windows. There will be a significant drop in the use of luxurious finishes. It's not appropriate in the face of so many deaths and so much monetary loss. Everything we're doing or planning on will be much simpler, more elegant; we're even sardonically referring to it as 'coronavirus aesthetic.'

"I've always liked doing very sensual, textured walls. But you don't want people touching walls anymore, and people don't want to. There will be a much



Norman Roberts

simpler approach. Certainly less sensual, potentially a little simpler for trends in the next three to five years.

"Recently, I've been using cheerful colors including yellow, orange and

bright burnt amber for retail. I think that happiness factor will not change. People need to be cheered up." – Miles Socha

### Norman Roberts, design director, FRCH Nelson

"We are only partway into this so we don't really know the long-term and short-term impacts are," said Roberts. "But we do know that retailers will have to really satisfy customers when they come into the store. The hurdles to get people in become even greater than before."

Roberts envisions retailers creating more space to give shoppers elbow room and easier navigation, adapting the brick-and-mortar experience to accommodate those shoppers who want to come and go quickly, and those who prefer to leisurely browse through.

"People will have different comfort levels," observed Roberts, noting that some shoppers will be anxious in a large busy space and will want to get in and out fast; others will feel comfortable, and potentially shop like they did before.

"Part of this will revolve around communication and a lot of signage about express lanes, or full-service lanes – formats we have seen in gas stations and fast food. Retailers must have multiple ways to engage. You could easily drop a self checkout into any shopping environment. But you have to do a good job of communicating. You will see a lot more overt signage in stores, around the health precautions being taken and informing people about shopping options. This will impact the aesthetics of the space."

Roberts said retailers in the future will create more spacious environments, and retrofit by reducing the number of fixtures, displaying less merchandise, and even bringing some of what the store offers inside, to outdoor settings. "I could see retail starting to push out to the parking lots and sidewalks, restaurants extending outside, and stores opening up a little more to engage with consumers who don't want to go into the stores.

"I can see fixtures coming out to the street, and pop-ups in parking lots, depending on the season and climate. People are going to want space and fresh air. One of the big unknowns is HVAC systems. What role will mechanicals play in the store of the future? There is really not much information on the role they play in spreading the virus.

"Aesthetics-wise, retail is moving to a 'less is more' philosophy. Spaces will be minimal, simpler and flexible with open floor plans without designated aisles. An uncluttered, simple space feels comforting, from a cleanliness perspective, and it's easier to clean. There are a lot of stores that have don't have the right infrastructure. They need more flexibility.

"On a psychological level, for people coming out of their cluttered, chaotic homes, it's going to feel very satisfying. You want a big, open floor plan so you can move around, and if you have aisles, you can add directional decals," so people move in the same direction to facilitate social distancing.

Furthermore, "A minimal, simple space will be a much better canvas to communicate information on safety, distancing, cleaning, how you check out, where to find men's clothing, where to find the fitting rooms. There are a lot of new ideas retailers will have to communicate to people."

With the fitting rooms, "Retailers must make them comfortable. It's also all about sanitation. A lot of fitting rooms are not very well lit and feel a little icky."

"There's also a bad feeling around cash, that it can transfer the virus. People no longer like to touch money, or stand at the checkouts where people interact in close proximity, Roberts said. "The use ▶



Ron Radziner

of self- and mobile checkouts is going to accelerate. But self-checkouts need to be easier to use.”

With the country in recession, “retailers are going to have to be very efficient with their dollars,” said Roberts. “A lot of what retail design firms do is retrofitting” rather than completely renovating or overhauling the box.

“We also have to keep in mind that with the recession in general, there is a self-consciousness around flamboyance and extravagance. We are entering a minimalist time. Ten years ago, we saw that happen. The merchandise radically changed. People became self-conscious about being too flashy about what they bought and wore. It’s like what happened during the Great Depression. It killed a lot of Roaring Twenties flamboyance.” — *David Moin*

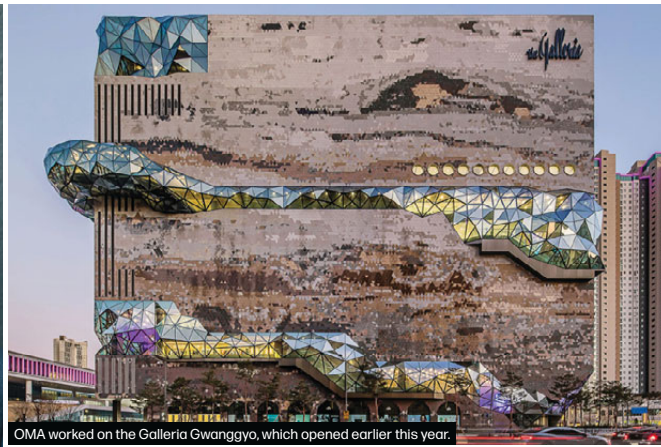
**Ron Radziner, design partner, Marmol Radziner**

“Retail will become even more gallery-like. You see the item of clothing but there is only one piece, or one of each color hanging, and if you want to try that on, the staff will go grab your size, and put it in the dressing room.

“My sense is the whole dressing room experience will also become more important. You could go online, to Tom Ford, and say, ‘hey I’d like to try on that suit, these shirts,’ and then you have an appointment and they have it ready for you, so there are fewer people in the same space at the same time. Maybe it’s your salesperson stepping in to what the clothes look like on you, and you do your whole transaction from there.

“In most cases, when you go into The Row or Tom Ford, even James Perse, there aren’t that many people in the store anyway. So to imagine a transformation like this doesn’t seem that hard. The store doesn’t have to get bigger, there will just be a little less open shopping space, and a bit more on the dressing room side. You’d create a better fitting room experience that doesn’t have the narrow hall with a bunch of rooms, but is something more gracious. You may see another person as you go in and out but barely, you’re within your great room, maybe it becomes three to four times the size it is now.

“We did the first stores for Vince, and that’s different; it’s really nice stuff, but it’s more stuff. I wonder if stores like that or a bookstore are going to have to say the direction of traffic is this way, like Ikea. It will be about guiding people visually with



OMA worked on the Galleria Gwanggyo, which opened earlier this year.



Glenn Pushelberg and George Yabu of Yabu Pushelberg.



Robin Kramer

“At the end of the day, retail is a form of entertainment. It’s an opportunity for something experiential, and I believe there will be a cautious movement back to retail as a form of entertainment.”

GLENN PUSHELBERG, YABU PUSHELBERG

how the shelving and the fixturing is set up. And certainly, in offices and restaurants, too, it’s about spacing between tables and counters. In L.A. we have lower density, but it will be especially difficult in a place like New York, where space is more of a premium.” — *Booth Moore*

**Chris van Duijn, partner, OMA**  
Shopping time slots. Open floor plans. One-way aisles. Less merchandise and subdivided stores for easier maneuvering. These are some of the adaptations stores are, and will be, making, according to van Duijn.

After the shutdown, people will be more inclined to enter stores with long sight lines and full overviews for a direct path to what they want, rather than going through narrow spaces putting people in close proximity to each other. Shopping malls and developers could incorporate social distancing by dividing one store into two to easily organize the goods on display.

“If you look at retail from where you are today, you could imagine less quantity, less occupancy [for shoppers], less physical interaction, less social, less vertical and maybe more quality and a more personal experience.

“How this works in the long term, I am a bit skeptical that people will really change their habits too much,” van Duijn said. “People are social animals and I can see them going back to their original habits.”

The OMA partner noted that in Asia, where shopping malls and stores have reopened, people wear masks and “that’s basically it.” Whereas in Europe, there will be greater physical change to stores, with layouts and how people circulate. “In Asia, the masks basically compensate for the social distancing. People are used to them. In Europe, it’s still very new. There is not that level of comfort with masks that there is in social distancing. It will be interesting to see how this behavior affects the coronavirus infections again and whether there will be more waves.”

Given the need for social distancing, the social aspect of shopping is changing. Consumers may not bring family members or friends along. “It’s no longer a social experience that you enjoy and hang out,” van Duijn said.

Having designed The Galleria, a department store that opened in late March outside of Seoul in Gwanggyo, the OMA partner said changes have not been requested. At this point, the pandemic has changed consumer behavior and the amount of goods being produced and those factors may change retail layouts, he said.

“Brands will probably produce fewer goods. Some of the luxury brands have already said that for 2020, we won’t do any more. We will see you back in 2021,” he said.

With fewer designs and less production, developers, department stores, specialty stores and shopping malls will need to adapt, van Duijn said. “What’s interesting is the urge to buy things became much less in a very natural way. People, obviously, shop more online. That’s logical. But you shop for what you need and not so much for fun. Morally and ethically, that is good but at the moment that will not help our economic system. There will be many victims there.” — *Rosemary Feitelberg*

**Glenn Pushelberg and George Yabu, Yabu Pushelberg**

“As a result of social distancing, the scale of stores will remain large or grow larger, made possible by what will be affordable real estate. In a multibrand store, I believe there will be more compartmentalization, going from room to room in a graceful way that simultaneously controls traffic and creates intimate brand experiences. La Samaritaine, a department store we designed for LVMH in Paris, is by circumstance well suited for this new future of retail. The aisles aren’t deep, and they don’t have the traditional floor plates of a department store. Aisles are narrow as a result of the heritage atrium building that houses the store. Subsequently, traffic flows in an upward ring, moving guests vertically from one shopping area to the next.

“At the end of the day, retail is a form of entertainment. It’s an opportunity for something experiential, and I believe there will be a cautious movement back to retail as a form of entertainment.

“It won’t be the speed of shopping or the efficiency of it, it will be the form of it. There have been some retailers such as Maison Kitsune, for example — they’ve built a café, where they produced the music. To me, the next step is a place you can sit down and have lunch, buy the music, leisurely look at the clothes or have the clothes come to you in a larger restaurant.

“Restaurants in their traditional sense aren’t going to work well either because people will need to be spread out, but if you can add more experiences and add on to the purchases, you can actually make something that works. To me, there will be more blending.”

**Yabu:** “People want to return to stores and make purchases knowing how and why something was made the way it was. Perhaps at some point with the way real estate will be changing, allowing for more expansive retail spaces, the start-to-end experience can be a little more drawn out and people can also experience the craftsmanship behind what they’re purchasing in this multifaceted destination.

“Years ago, we were working on the VIP rooms for some of the Louis Vuitton shops and they took us through their workshops, and to us, the workshops were fascinating. I was almost expecting a store or restaurant to be part of the workshop. To me, that whole thing can be combined.

“We designed a store for Lane Crawford in Beijing for a family looking to essentially create their own small-scale shop in the sense that it would allow for semi-private shopping. Even though the store was open to the public, there were times the client wanted the option to invite friends to shop without other guests sharing the space. We created subtle ways of closing off shopping areas with the use of folding doors, similar to those which may be found in a graceful European home. You get a sense that there’s a room beyond where you stand; however, you must be invited to enter. A similar concept could be put in place moving forward to orchestrate traffic flow whilst still enhancing the shopping experience.” — *Miles Socha* ▶