

STORE PRESENTATION & DESIGN

Branding the Store

No.2



Martin M. Pegler

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MOSCHINO BOUTIQUE

Via Sant Andrea, Milan, Italy



A CONVERSATION with SEAN DIX

Designer of Moschino Boutique

"My goal for the whole project has been that one's impression should be that it is a very minimal space—then one realizes that this 'minimalism' is built up out of millions of little elements, obsessively assembled"

—Sean Dix

MARTIN M. PEGLER: From what I understand, Moschino, the fashion designer, already had a shop on the Via San Andrea in Milan and he commissioned your firm, Dix Design/ Architects of Milan to come up with a new design concept for his boutique. In accepting this challenge what limits, boundaries or expectations did Moschino set for you?

SEAN DIX: The brief from Moschino was, as before, very open. It was agreed that anything could be possible, as long as I remained true to the spirit of irony and humor of Franco Moschino. They asked simply that I create what I believe to be the best solution, keeping in mind that they were very happy with the initial showroom project and wanted to stay near to that in feeling. No compromises were asked for or given, and their level of trust is very high. They are the kind of client that most architects only dream about—open to experimentation, enthusiastic, generous with their time and input, eager to do something new and personal, willing to take risks. Exactly the kind of company you'd expect, looking at the clothes they produce.

MMP: Your new concept was based on a showroom you had previously designed for Moschino. What was it?
SD: The overall concept for the space retains the same irreverent approach used for the initial project for Moschino—ironic juxtapositions between old and new, hard and soft, baroque and minimalism, materials

used in very unlikely ways.

MMP: What physical problems existed and how did you overcome them?
SD: Because the existing shop is relatively small, my first priority was to create, as much as possible, the impression of space. So I joined the very small existing space and two adjoining spaces





DESIGN: **Dix Design**, Milan, Italy

Sean Dix

GENERAL CONTRACTOR: **Sice Provit**, Milan

RESEARCH & TRANSPARENT LOGOS: **BISK**

"CROSS CHECK" CHAIR DESIGN: **Frank Gehry** for Knoll

ALL OTHER FURNITURE, ELEMENTS, LIGHTING AND DISPLAYS: **Dix Design**

PHOTOGRAPHY: **Santi Caleca**



to create one very open, airy, beckoning shop. For this, my first architectural project, I became almost the opposite of an architect—I knocked down far more walls than I built.

MMP: You also reworked the facade?

SD: The facade originally consisted of a tiny doorway and a closed shop window. We ripped out all of that and created a new facade which has three matching, huge arched modern windows, juxtaposing the traditional, refined wrought iron ornamental arches at the top. The left and center arches are wide open to the shop, allowing a view all the way to the backlit laser cut lace wall across the back of the shop and the third window is dedicated to the outrageous shop windows for which Moschino has become so

famous. These change every month. The logos are very discreet—a small “MOSCHINO” applied in transparent letters on each of the three shop windows. We have found that the company image is so identifiable INSIDE the store that big logos were redundant.

MMP: Did you save anything from the original shop?

SD: The polished brass heart handle is the only element retained from the previous project, an appropriate homage to Franco Moschino, for whom the heart symbol has become synonymous.





MMP: Tell me what you think is the Moschino brand image and how did you “visualize” it in your shop design?

SD: Moschino has built its much deserved success on its irreverent sense of humor. To get that across I have used Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Emperor’s New Clothes” as a predominant text element—a very ironic choice. It is the famous fable—the story of a vain king who is so enamored of clothing that he allows himself to be hoodwinked into buying “invisible”—non-existent—clothing from a couple of crooks.

MMP: In your description of the project you said that “Architectural materials are used to make fashions and fashion materials are used to make architecture.” Could you explain that?

SD: In this new concept for Moschino’s worldwide group of stores, there is an additional twist: we have used the materials usually associated with the “construction” of clothing—fabric, felt, ribbon, lace, pins—and used them as architectural building elements.

The central load-bearing column in this space, for example, is built out of a huge stack of fabric—three different colors of red, 40 kilometers’ worth. It is a simple form—though highly complex on inspection—and obsessively constructed. This immense volume of fabric becomes an important focal point to the whole shop, and it is impossible to pass by without yielding to the satisfaction of running one’s hand across the tight stack. The impact is that of a colossal stack of red fabric holding up the ceiling. Even the walls are fabric—

each panel printed with the Andersen fairy tale, raised white letters on ecru.

One huge wall, open floor-to-ceiling to the courtyard behind, is covered with small, interlocking pieces of wood cut into elaborate lace. These “puzzle” pieces have been cut with laser, and it is only as one comes closer that it becomes clear that it is not fabric but perforated wood that creates this effect. Sunlight streams through the tiny holes in the “lace” and creates beautiful lace patterns on the floor.

The floor is made from two types of Italian travertine—Savona and Romano. They have only the most subtle difference in tone, and are treated with a special transparent resin “stucco” to allow the millions of holes in the marble to remain visible. The tiles of alternating travertine are enormous—120



players and such?

SD: There are two types of display tables—rare, pure black marble into which has been etched the white pattern of a lace tablecloth, and a very simple wooden table with a gauze tablecloth. On the gauze tablecloth is printed an obsessive drawing of a exaggerated baroque table, but the cloth is so transparent that one can see the simple, minimal table underneath.

All of the different clothing rails and display systems in brushed stainless steel and white lacquer were designed by me especially for Moschino.

The mirrors are extremely tall—shallow, polished brass boxes leaned up against the walls.

MMP: What did you do about illumination in the shop? Any special concepts on lighting?

SD: Because generally I like to reduce the visual importance of spotlighting—what's important is the light—the spotlights in the ceiling have been concentrated into two tight slots that run down either side of the red column. There is a perimeter gap between the ceiling and the walls which is also illuminated. This approach has allowed us to keep the ceiling completely clear of extraneous detail. What's below, after all, is the important stuff.

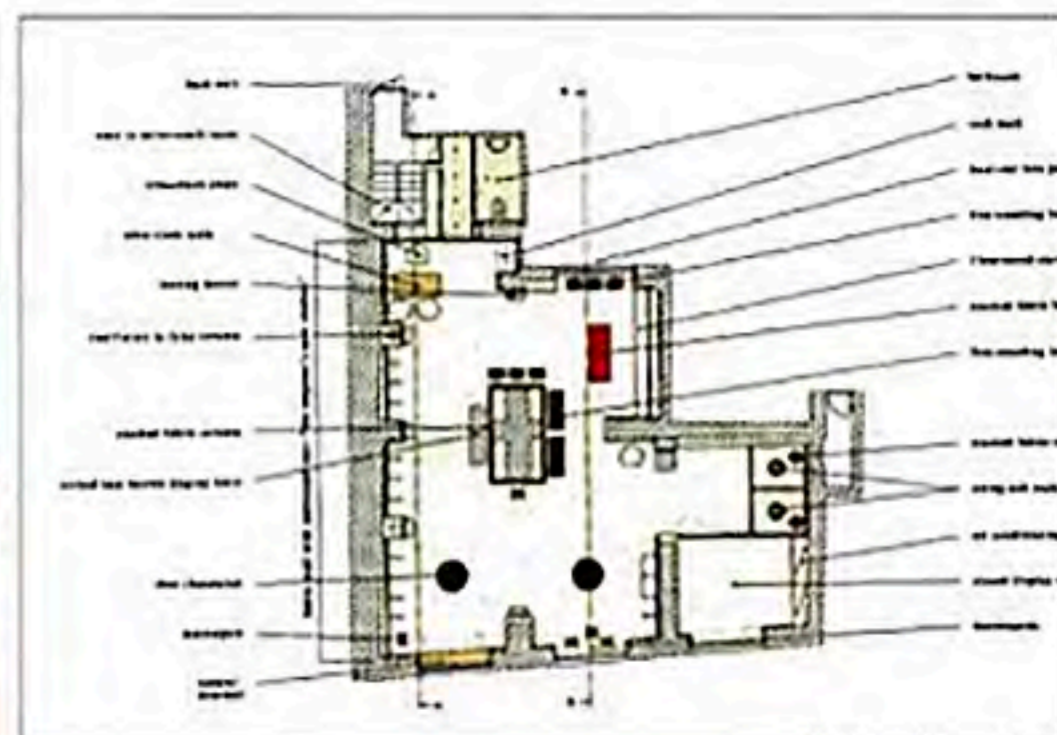
There are two enormous chandeliers made from glass "slippers" and each shoe is hand-blown by the same woman, a master Italian artisan. The lamps in the changing rooms are made of madly wound string, creating a fantastic play of light inside the mirrored room.

cm. x 120 cm.—it took six men to lay each one. They, happily still have all their fingers and their toes.

There is one enormous display wall that is completely illuminated, in front of that is a bench made from stacks of rectangular red felt. The stools in the changing room are also made from stacked felt—in this case, dark red discs stacked one on top of the next.

There is another wall, near the changing rooms, which is completely covered by gold pins—millions of them. The effect from a slight distance is almost that of gold fur—the lights from above throw the shadow of each pin diagonally across the wall.

MMP: How about the merchandise presentation—the fixtures—the dis-



MOSCHINO

Paris, France

MMP: What was your design approach for the Moschino boutique in Paris?

SD: The overall concept for the space retains the same irreverent approach used for the boutique in Milan: using materials in a very unlikely way.

MMP: I see you included the columns built of stacks of three different colors of red fabric as well as the chandelier with the glass slippers. What is new?

SD: There is an enormous glowing display wall in front of the which is a bench made of stacks of rectangular red felt. The stools in the changing room are also made of stacks of felt—in this case, dark red discs stacked one on top of the next.

MMP: I notice that you used the same clothing rails and display system you created for the Milan shop. You also repeated the Emperor's New Clothing theme.

SD: Yes! Even the walls are fabric covered and each panel is printed with the Andersen fairy tale: raised white letters on the ecru base.

MMP: In the Milan boutique you did



extensive architectural renovation. What did you do here—architecturally?

SD: For this project we created a completely new seven window façade—the all glass has been pushed forward to the sidewalk, eliminating completely the support structure.

MMP: What about that large—really large—piece of furniture up front?

SD: The first thing one sees, even from outside the store, is a remarkable piece of furniture. This huge, illuminated display case—an exaggerated four meters long—is covered with 600 small, interlocking pieces of steel cut into an elaborate lace. Also, the display cases are minimal cubes of mirror-polished stainless steel with photographs of antique 18th century furniture applied to every surface.

MMP: Now that this project has been completed and adapted to other Moschino boutiques what do you think you have accomplished that makes the design unique?

SD: Our goal for the whole project has

been that one's impression should be that it is a very minimal space. Then one realizes that this "minimalism" is built up out of millions of little elements—obsessively assembled.

MMP: Many thanks for your time, your effort and for sharing these projects and your thoughts with us. We look forward to seeing and printing more in the very near future.

Sean Dix, the creative and guiding spirit behind Dix Design & Architecture is an American industrial designer who was raised in Fiji, Saigon, and the Philippines. He is a graduate of the School of Art Institute of Chicago where he studied sculpture and industrial design as well as literature. He has been working in Europe since 1994 with such design luminaries as Tom Dixon, James Irvine and Ettore Sottsass. Dix established his own design firm in 2000 and Moschino was one of his first major clients. Dix's design for Byblos, in Moscow, appeared in our January issue.



DESIGN: Dix Design, Milan, Sean Dix
PHOTOGRAPHER: Benoit Teillet

MOSCHINO CHEAP AND CHIC

Via Spiga, Milan, Italy



DESIGN: **Dix Design, Milan**
Sean Dix
PHOTOGRAPHY: **Ramak Fazel**



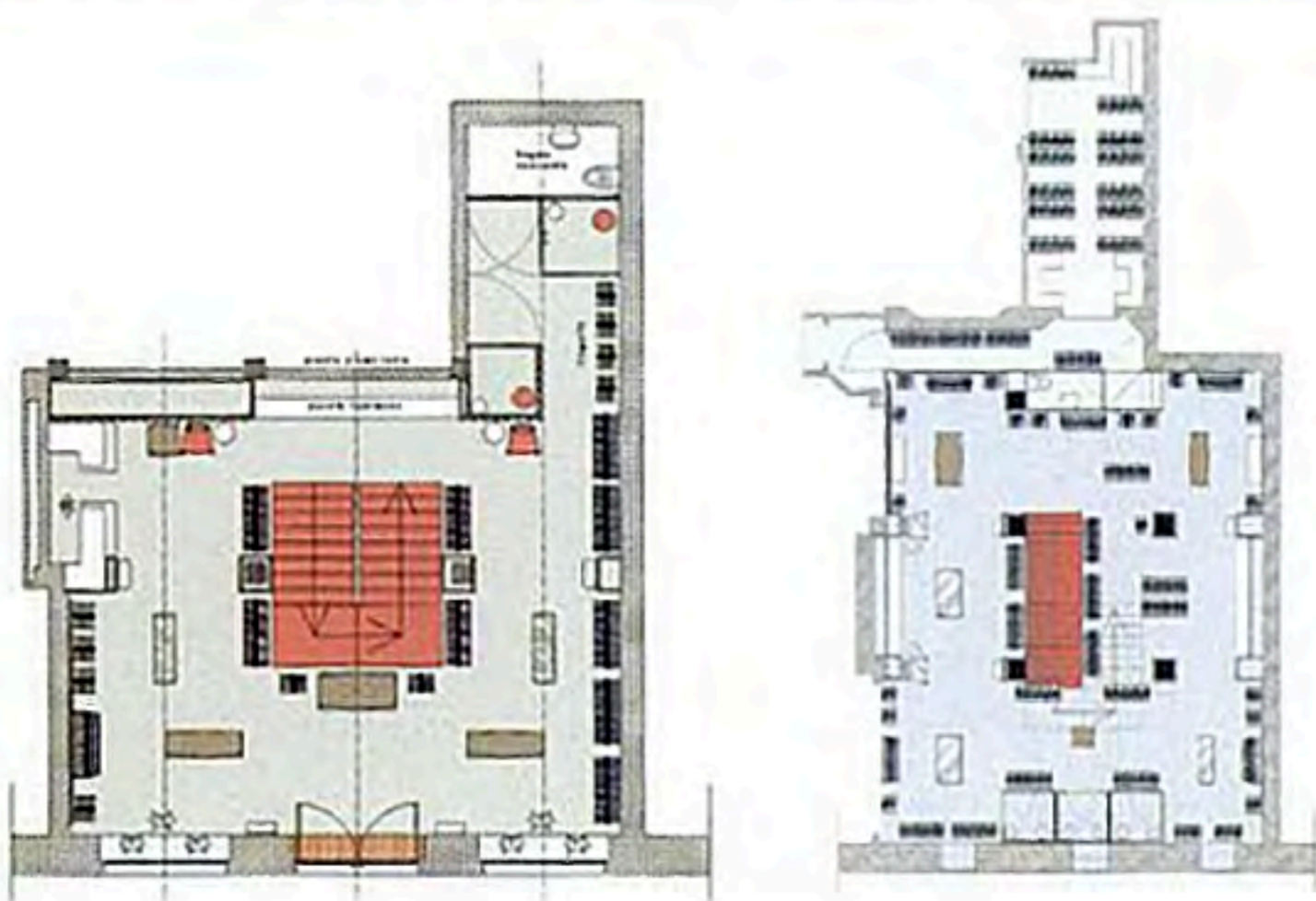
"The overall concept for the space retains the same irreverent approach used for the initial projects I've done for Moschino: ironic juxtapositions between old and new, hard and soft, baroque and minimalism, materials used in very unlikely ways." Thus speaks Sean Dix, designer of this Moschino CheapandChic shop on the Via Spiga in Milan.

It all starts with the new, enlarged and enhanced street presence with a new facade consisting of three matching, huge modern openings. The cen-

tral one serves as the entrance into the shop while the other two become "the outrageous shop windows for which Moschino has become so famous." Through the central opening the shopper can see back to the 13 ft. illuminated shelving across the rear wall of the shop. As in the other Moschino shops, the updated, mirror-polished chrome heart handles are used "as an appropriate homage to Franco Moschino for whom the heart symbol has become a potent symbol." The new space is on two levels:

CheapandChic on ground level and Uomo, Jeans and Bambino on the lower level. The two levels are connected by a red-carpeted stairway—"a high impact element which allows an extensive view from one floor to the other." Also unifying the two floors are the two load-bearing columns that are now covered in mirror-polished stainless steel.

Though the designer again references the Hans Christian Andersen tale of *The Emperor's New Clothes*—as used in the boutiques, here he adds





a new twist. "We have used the materials usually associated with architecture—steel, marble, wood, stone—and used them in ways that refer to the 'construction' of clothing—as 'fabric': pleated, woven, and draped—as silk, moiré and lace." One full wall is "dressed" in high-gloss, polished maple—the flame of the wood mimicking silk moiré. The diagonally-laid, statuary marble tiles on the opposite wall gives the effect of a "woven tapestry"—13 feet by 48.75 feet. A "curtain" of lacquered corrugated sheet metal—across the back of the ground floor space—is drawn back to expose 13 ft. of glowing display wall. The floor is made a palladiano "a subtle joke of 'cheap and chic.'" The fine marble is broken into pieces and then care-



fully positioned" again, a beautiful, labor-intensive technique largely forgotten for decades."

As in the boutiques, the display tables are minimalist cubes of mirror-polished stainless steel with photography of antique furniture applied to all surfaces. All the clothing rails and display systems, in brushed stainless steel and white lacquer, as well as the furniture were designed by Sean Dix for Moschino. Also, relating back to the Moschino Boutiques, the mirrors are extremely tall, 13 ft., and are set in shallow polished steel boxes that lean up against the wall. The approach to lighting is also the same in concept and execution and here the chandeliers are made from glowing cylinders of polished stainless steel lace—"light sparkling from the tiny gaps in the steel."

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