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# Temples of contemplation and inspiration

How and where do we want to shop in the future? Only online, from the sofa? Without human interaction, surprise, and inspiration? Unlikely, because there is so much more to experience than the digital world can offer.

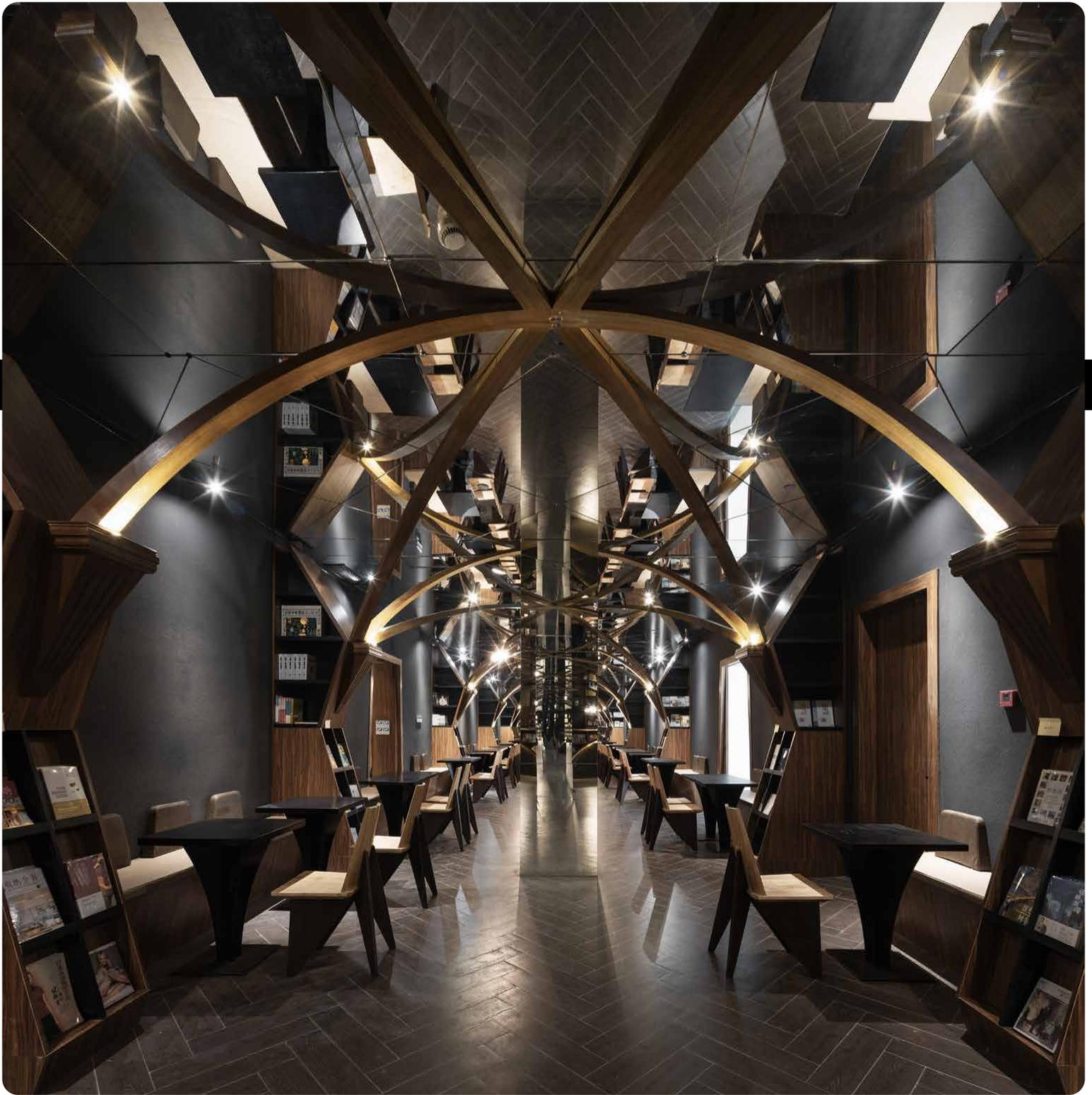


Photo: Zhongshuge Bookshop

Strict geometries: Bookshop Zhongshuge in Chongqing, China. The sharp design and architecture are further enhanced by reflective surface materials that multiply the symmetries.

Photo: Greenery



The founders of Greenery Unlimited in Brooklyn, New York, know how beneficial plants can be for us. Their positive effect on our mental well-being is undeniable. The team turn offices and residential homes into green oases.

**Sensory experiences and concepts that reflect the zeitgeist, trigger feelings, inspire fresh ideas, and allow us to create new worlds. Precisely the task of retail designers. They keep injecting fresh ideas into brick and mortar retail; they have the ambition to lure an increasingly demanding clientele and the growing community of lazy online shoppers off the couch. We investigated the latest and greatest new retail concepts from around the world. Join us on this journey of discovery.**

If one looks at the latest store concepts that enjoyed hype and attention in recent months, reflection and contemplation, sensitivity and closeness to nature, artistic or philosophical messages, and a strong focus on the essential appear to be important trends. In China, spectacularly furnished bookstores pop up everywhere; from Brooklyn to Barcelona, you can embrace nature in plant stores that make you feel like you're in a jungle. And, while people in Korea and Dubai increasingly rub shoulders with art, Manhattan's focus is on wellness and health. In Tokyo, similarly, the trend is physical well-being, but this time combined with expressive packaging.

It seemed obvious to anyone who observed the astonishing boom of online bookstores that the days of the high-street bookshop were numbered. And indeed, high-street book

sales are struggling in most countries. Astonishingly, however, in Asia – and in particular China – bookstores are currently experiencing a boom. Reinvented as reading temples, architecturally bold and with daring interior designs, they present oases of calm and contemplation.

Qinhuangdao in northern China recently opened its 450-square-meter large, minimalist Sanlian Public Library. Situated on the spectacular beachfront surrounded by nothing but sand and sea, the stark concrete building is nicknamed 'the world's loneliest library'. In China's southwestern metropolis Chongqing, a 1,300-square-meter book paradise opened its doors in the Zodi Plaza shopping center. Extending over the third and fourth floors, the Zhongshuge Bookshop is arguably a reasonable and seemingly profitable size given the 30 million residents of Greater Chongqing.

Shanghai-based design bureau X+living made a name for itself as a specialist for these excessively sophisticated and well-designed bookstores, in the Middle Kingdom. Founder Li Xiang furnished the rooms of the Zhongshuge library with floor-to-ceiling shelves in dark brown tones. A striking arrangement of stairs giving access to the vast walls of books reminds of the Penrose Stairs, also known as the 'impossible staircase' from the surrealist M.C. Escher.

**Long corridors with meter-high shelves create a real pull.**



Green, greener, Greenery Unlimited. In New York, people are keen to rediscover nature. And, of course, in the land of superlatives and unlimited possibilities: bigger is always better.

Visitors should imagine themselves in a private study when they pick up their books under the warm light oozing from the Chinese lampshades. Long corridors with meter-high shelves create a real pull that draws bibliophiles deep into the world of literature and knowledge.

The icing on the cake is a strict geometry enhanced by reflecting surfaces that multiply these symmetries.

Seoul, the capital of South Korea, also counts an impressive 9,000-square-meter bookstore filled with thousands of books as one of its shopping attractions. The talk of the town and around the world, however, is the South Korean eyewear label Gentle Monster with its unique 'art gallery meets eyewear store' concept. It blurs the boundaries between commerce and art. Eccentric and refreshingly unpretentious art installations take over the shop floor, attracting an astonishing number of curious visitors. Luckily the avant-garde glasses take up comparatively little space. What counts are understatement and nonchalance.

The young clientele appreciates the brand's exuberant creativity, and therefore the concept works for the target audience. Gentle Monster has been expanding into all parts of the world since 2011 and, to date, opened around fifty stores in total.



Somewhat out there, fantastic installations attract plentiful curious visitors with their unpretentious do-it-yourself look to the Gentle Monster stores. One of the latest additions recently opened in Dubai.

And the creators don't run out of ideas. The most recent opening in the Dubai Mall is a fertile green oasis ruled by a retro-futuristic fantasy robot – a kinetic installation that contains an artistic message: It is a symbol of hope for a future with an intact agrarian society in which man and nature exist in harmony.

In general, nature is an important source of inspiration for store concepts. Beautiful examples of nature-inspired shopping experiences can be found on both sides of the Atlantic. L'Hivernacle d'Horta in Barcelona is a family-run garden center in a building built by the Catalan modernist Josep Amargós i Samaranch for the 1888 World's Fair. Well worth a visit purely for its visual impact, the blending of the stark steel and glass architecture with the lush and opulent shapes and colors of the plants has made L'Hivernacle d'Horta a popular meeting place. Locals and tourists alike come here for a coffee and a chat, and it would be unusual not to walk away with at least a new idea for your garden, if not a plant.

The ambience at Greenery Unlimited in Brooklyn, New York, whose makers see themselves as ambassadors of botanical art, is also close to nature, although a little less rustic. In their jungle-like store, proof is given that plants can radically change the appearance of a place.



In numerous micro showrooms, shoppers at Showfields discover and experience brands from the wellness, health and household sectors.



Photos: Showfields

At Showfields it's not about presenting as many products as possible. What counts is the experience per square foot. Gallery-like rooms reinforce this vision.

Founder Rebecca Bullene explains her approach as follows: "In a world that is becoming more and more permeated by technology, I think it is essential to maintain the connection to Mother Earth. Nature teaches us mindfulness; it makes us pause, perceive the present – it is the best antidote for many people that feel stressed working in front of a computer screen all day." Greenery Unlimited is more than a shop. The team transforms other retail spaces, residential homes, and office buildings into green oases – what they do is literally in their nature.

**A concept that ingeniously interlinks online and offline trading.**

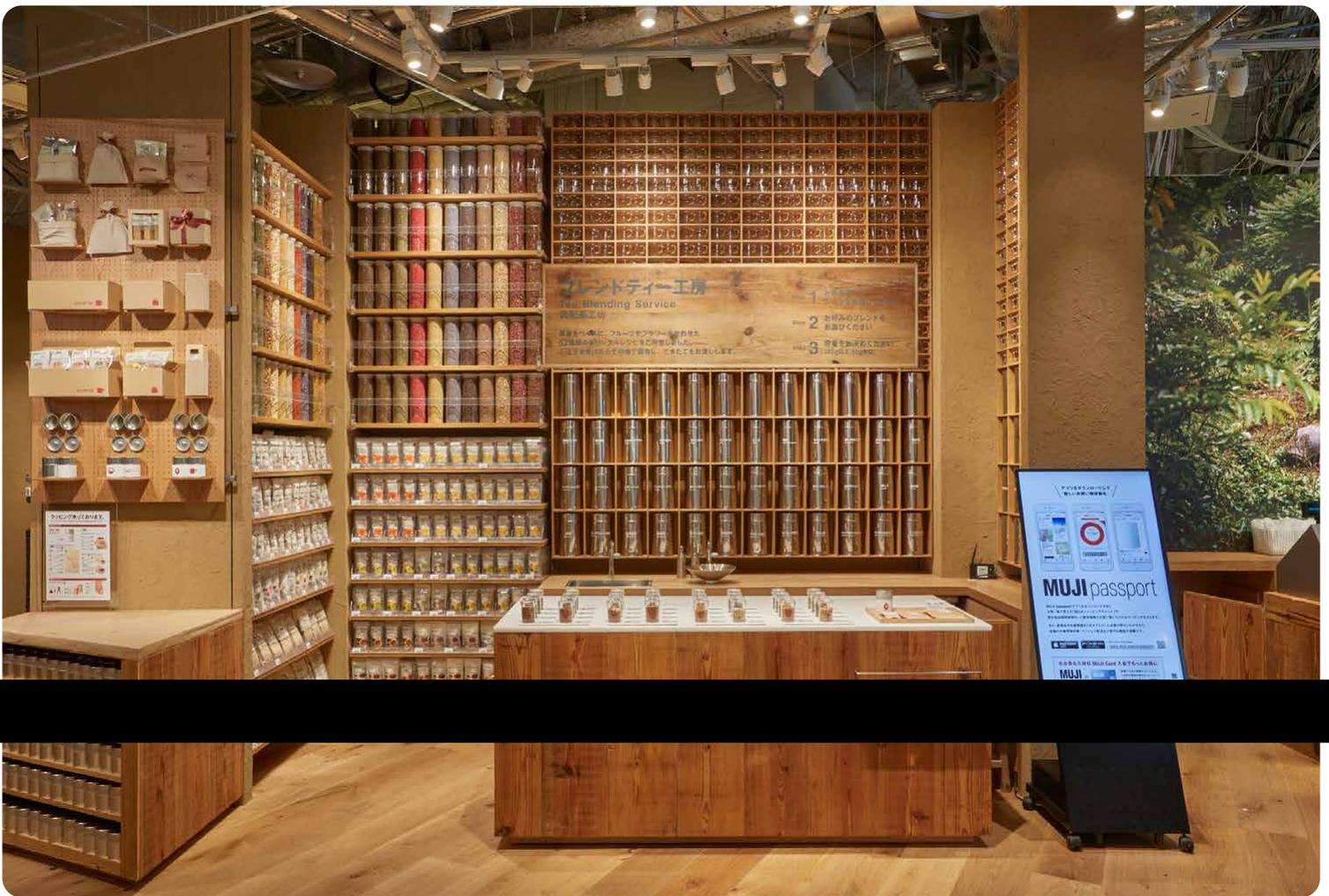
New York is also home to Showfields, which opened its doors last year in spectacular fashion. Showfields calls itself the 'most exciting store in the world' and presents a concept that ingeniously interlinks online and offline trading.

4,500 square meters spread over four floors of a historic hundred-year-old brick building on the corner of Bond and Lafayette Street in the NoHo district, it is no longer the turnover, but rather the experience per square meter that counts. In numerous micro showrooms, shoppers at Showfields discover and experience brands from the wellness, health and household sectors.

The Australian cosmetics line Frank Body, for example – whose coffee-based products are brand new to the American market – offers on-site skin peeling, while the dental care specialist Quip gives curious customers the opportunity to test its products in a pretty, fully equipped bathroom. Just like at home.

Aesthetics clearly matter and the standards are incredibly high. Something that's not just reflected in the shop design, but also the packaging of the carefully curated products. A visit to Showfields is literally a museum-like experience; especially as the showroom areas are broken up with small galleries, coworking spaces, and common areas.

The so-called 'showrooming' is a new concept: Customers come to the store to be inspired, look for advice, and experience the product. Then, they buy online. Where many retailers would despair of this shopping behavior, at Showfields, this is exactly the intention. All over the shop, retail brands are fitted with a touch screen kiosk where shoppers conveniently place their orders online. The result: no inventory, more space. Therefore, it's not only the ambience and interior design that make Showfields so attractive but also the vast choice that founder and CEO Tal Zvi Nathanel carefully curated. A bold concept with a big vision: a rollout of more than 100 branches is in the planning.



In the food department of Muji Ginza's ground floor, the shelves are several meters high, but because of the groceries' reduced packaging design, the store looks spacious and serene. Nuts, spices, biscuits, teas – all wrapped in beautifully designed packaging.

Space is also a topic at Muji in Tokyo, and people think big – that is simply a given in this city. Muji is known for a rather simplistic presentation of their stock and affordability of its products. This 'Japanese lifestyle' has been on sale at Muji for 40 years now. From clothing, shoes, stationery, kitchen utensils to home accessories, the flagship store that opened in Ginza in 2019 is a general store of the highest quality – of course, entirely on-brand with a clean, minimalist and linear design, in line with all Muji branches across the world.

**Because of the groceries' reduced packaging design, the store looks and feels spacious and serene.**

In the food department of Muji Ginza's ground floor, the packed shelves are several meters high, but because of the groceries' reduced packaging design, it looks and feels spacious and serene.

Nuts, spices, biscuits, teas, but also fresh fruit and vegetables can be found on the shelves. The smell of fresh croissants straight from the in-house oven of the integrated bakery onto the counter is simply divine.

All snacks are packed in simple, Muji style, white or transparent bags that despite – or should I say because – of their simple but carefully crafted packaging, make the perfect desirable little gift. Kenya Hara, one of Japan's most renowned designers, is the originator of this minimalist design concept. A children's playground, crochet

courses, reading corners and the restaurant in the basement are important to the concept, but the gallery, bar and hotel on the top two of the seven floors complete the experience. One can easily spend a whole day – and subsequent night – at Muji.

*GMG's color management and proofing system enable packaging to be produced both digitally in small numbers and conventionally on a global scale with identical color results. This flexibility allows innovative stores to start small and test new products before committing to large print runs.*