



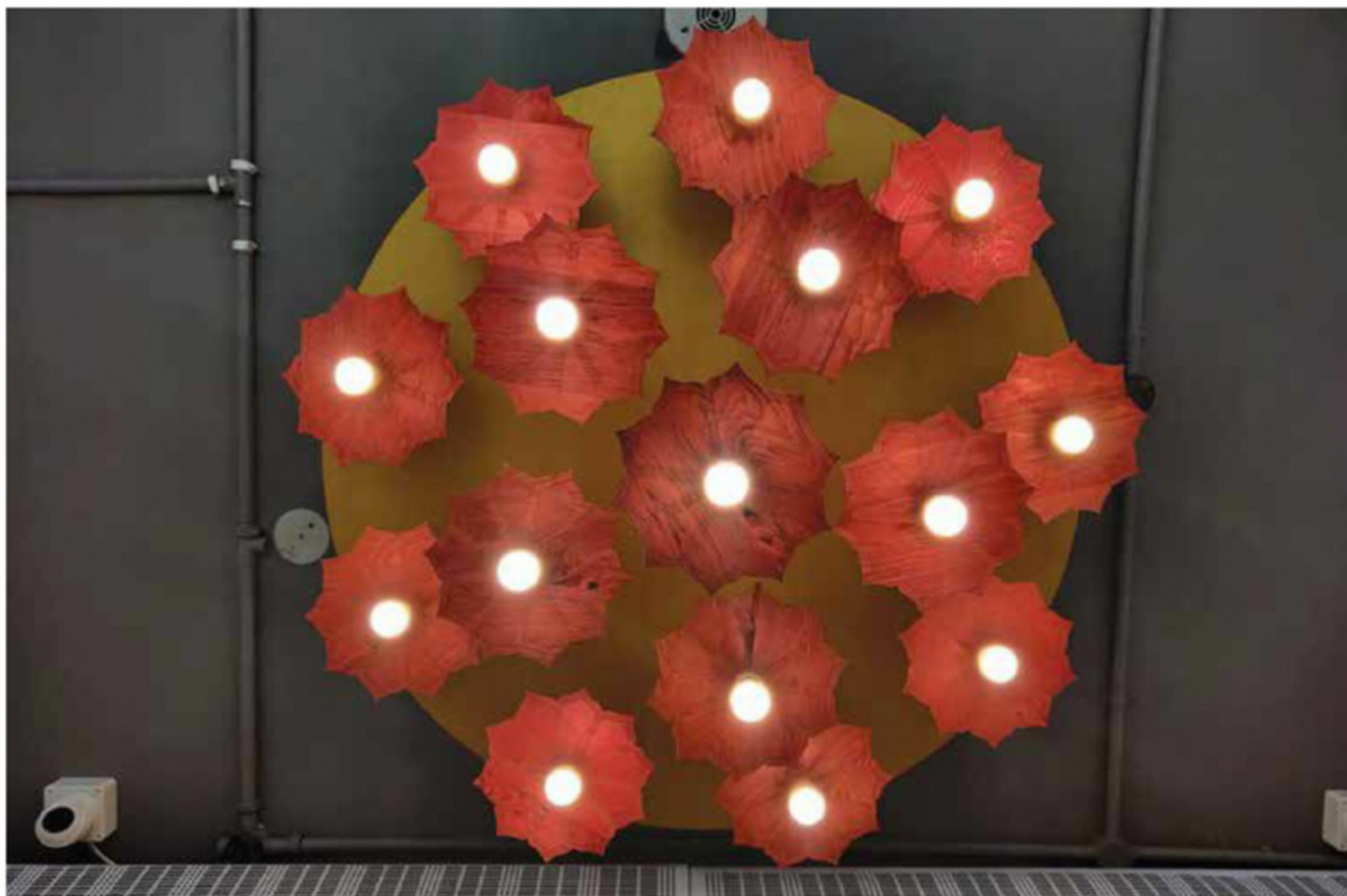
V-M-R-D

Visual Merchandising & Retail Design

The material world

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In the brand theatre called the store, there are many unsung heroes. They all play their part, often quietly and unobtrusively. Architectural and surface materials, for example, are an integral part of the spatial experience of a brand, playing an important role in defining the brand's personality and aesthetic identity. This in turn influences shopper perception of the brand. VM&RD reached out to some store designers and architects to get a sense of what's happening in the material world. Here's a look.



Canadian wood chandelier -Pic courtesy Dreamcatcherzz Design

When Swati Sharma, 35, set foot into this new home interiors boutique in South Delhi, what grabbed her sensory attention was a certain artisanal aura enveloping the space - as though the whole environment was a throwback to the rustic elegance of rural artistic heritage. There was also a certain Wabi Sabi charm pervading the whole space - stripped down, rugged aesthetics that spoke a minimalist language. It took Swati some time to zero in on the source of this aesthetic effect - stone masonry work on the walls and interiors, among other elements. Needless to say, Swati spent more time at the store than she intended to when curiosity drove her inside.

In another instance, as shared by **Tanuj Biyani, Senior Project Lead, Studio Lotus,**

at the store **Paro** by **Good Earth** in the **Chanakya Mall, Delhi,** the design studio used salt bricks "to accord a monastic ambience to the retail pockets, and a sense of tranquility in the spa area".

Well, anyone in the business of architecture and store design knows that the architectural/surface/fixture materials can make or break a brand. But how exactly does it impact? Is the effect subliminal? If so, how exactly does it translate into tangible gains for the brand?

Material matters – but why?

Says **Tuhin Roy, Co Founder-Creative Director, JumpingGoose,** "Use of the right material ensures the coherence between

the brand and the store. The store is the language that the brand speaks in. For example- **Motocult** is a biker apparel brand. Giving the store the theme of an Indian Biking Cult, every element in the store- from civil work to fixtures, VM props and in store communication to the lighting related to and has a direct connect with biking."

Agrees **Ashateet Saran, Design Head, Saran Associates,** "Right material usage brings a balance to the store design. Again when we are eco-conscious, it builds brand image, it carries the message that we care. We have been working with salon chain brand called **Bounce,** and they are a very eco-conscious brand. So we are very careful about the usage of the right material there."

Tanuj Biyani of Studio Lotus, explains further while elaborating on the role of materials, "In the context of ever-evolving retail spaces, the role of materials goes beyond function to reinforce brand identity and customer experience. For instance, at the retail outlet for House of Raisons, the juxtaposition of a brass mesh jaali against a pared-back palette of Indian white marble and grey texture paint enabled us to create an elevated purchase experience, while accounting for the product density. The jaalis, in fact, have become a signature element for the brand, being employed as a device to create curated pockets within the larger store experience."

Citing another example, she adds, "In a similar vein, we integrated floating concrete panels within the spatial layout at the Gaurav Gupta Flagship Store in Mehrauli to add drama and create an interesting flow, in line with the surrealist brand narrative. Also, at the store for Ekaya Banaras, housed within a heritage building at Kala Ghoda, Mumbai, stained timber fins with grooves have been employed to create concealed, modular display units."

This synergy between the brand and the store brought on by the right choice of materials ensures that you strike the right chord with the customers. As **Shilpa Rawat & Kashyap Rawat, Promoters & Designers, Dreamcatcherzz Design**, say, "It's very important to select the right material for a brand as it makes the brand communication easier & the brand connect stronger with its customers. Imagine a white marble flooring in an industrial tool store, or a solid wood wall panels in 100% plastic item stores."

Dipen Gada, Principal Designer, Dipen Gada & Associates, sums up while speaking on the role of materials, "The right material in correct proportion and manner can enhance and bring out the overall feel and effect of the space, giving the owners and clients the needful experience."

Material challenges

But while the right choice of material is an imperative, finding the right materials and using it in the most appropriate manner is also a challenge for many of these designers and architects. As **Vikesh Chheda, Director, JCA Architects** says, "In India, there is still a lack of awareness on many international finishes and materials. The other challenges are the high import costs and the lack of skilled labour. Also the availability of various finished products depends on the importer and the country imported from. The supply chain is not very reliable."

The other stakeholders in this eco system, namely the material suppliers/



Ekaya Banaras Mumbai. Pic courtesy Studio Lotus



Pic courtesy JumpingGoose



Pic courtesy A-Class Marble



Sisal used for cladding on furniture - Pic courtesy StoryStudio

manufacturers, have their own challenges too. Says Ramesh Bhandari, Director - A Class Marbles, "Our biggest challenge to date has been the advent of technology in both the marble and surfaces industry. There is constant evolution and innovation, which requires us to keep up with these rapid innovations so as to supply our consumers with technologically-advanced marble and surfaces.

In any case, for all stakeholders in this eco system, whether they are retail brands, architects, store designers or material suppliers/manufacturers, it would help to know about some of these challenges and how they impact. Here's a quick look:

So how does one ensure the right choice and usage for a store project? For some architects or retail designers, the core factor here is the environmental impact and sustainability. As **Shikha Gupta**, of **StoryStudio** says, while explaining the environmentally friendly approach to the choice and usage of materials, "At present, the demand and need for a sustainable way of building is no longer a matter of choice. For our part we try to use materials that would provide natural insulation, and locate

Challenges

- **Availability** - Often designers and architects find it difficult to find the right materials that match the aesthetic standards of a brand brief
- **Pricing** - Many good materials come with the premium tag, when they could be available at an affordable price
- **Practicality** - While options are plenty many of them don't fit in with the practical application
- **Sustainability** - Many materials don't match the sustainability criteria, if a brand or the architect or designer is very particular about that. Or there are not enough suppliers of sustainable materials
- **Logistics** - Transportation delays and reliable supply chains also pose major hurdles in the availability and usage of appropriate materials
- **Skills and understanding** regarding the usage of a material
- **Execution** - Matching the material sourcing and execution with the retail fit-out timeline is another major challenge.

fenestrations in a way that would provide natural cooling where and whenever possible. We also optimise the usage of materials in the construction of certain elements and try to find creative ways to reduce wastage. For e.g: At our studio, we

have built partitions of birch ply rather than civil or gypsum. We have traded in the cost of civil work, plaster, putty, paint or any other cladding for a metal framing with birch ply panelling and a simple lacquer- a technique that costs less, takes lesser time