

# AZURE



Design Architecture & Art

JAN FEB  
DISPLAY UNTIL MAR 15  
\$4.95

## Hair and Makeup by Tibor Kalman

**TOURING THE  
BRITISH AISLES AT  
100% DESIGN**

**MADE TO MEASURE  
WAREHOUSE RENO**

**THE MOVEABLE KITCHEN  
ORGATEC 98**

**KOHN SHNIER BRINGS  
U OF T LIBRARY TO LIGHT**





# clothes encounter



Saucier + Perrotte chose a sophisticated material palette to help define space in this Toronto menswear showroom, updating the clichéd warehouse renovation in the process. The elegant, nearly monochromatic space cedes the spotlight to the clothes.

by beth kapusta, photos by ben rehn

Given all the hype about the global village and the ease of working anywhere in the world at the touch of a button, it's funny how rare it is that a Canadian architect does much work outside their home city. In fact if you looked to Canadian architecture as a barometer, you'd think we still lived in a world of city-states.

In those rare instances when architects work outside their own milieu, the results are often illuminating. Such as recently, when the accomplished Montreal firm of Saucier + Perrotte transgressed their usual geographic boundaries to do a modest project on the edge of the fashion district in downtown Toronto.

It's immediately apparent just how differently they have approached a classic design problem: the warehouse renovation. The warehouse has gone from being a trendy, funky alternative to typical office space, to being something of a cliché of its own. The formula goes like this: strip the wood floors, sandblast the timber columns and exposed brick, drop the required mechanical from above, and throw in a few brightly coloured drywall dividing walls.

Saucier + Perrotte's design for Radix, a 385-square-metre men's clothing wholesale showroom, begins by defying all the conventional warehouse moves. First of all, the strategy



top: Rusted corten steel lends drama to the front hall. A smooth grey stone covers the floor, breaking into a mosaic carpet in the cafe/meeting space at the back.  
bottom: Sliding acrylic panels create intimacy in the showrooms, where a rich brown exotic hardwood, imbuaya, is used for flooring.

is additive rather than reductive: the third-floor volume of a fairly standard warehouse is simply treated as an empty vessel, its brick walls painted out in matt charcoal grey, its ceilings punctured by four round skylights and marked, in the showroom areas, by a complex sequence of lighting channels that create a clear hierarchy of space. The floors are similarly differentiated. A smooth grey stone is used in the most public "hall" that extends from the new square window punched onto King Street to the back of the building, where the stone floor is broken by a mosaic "carpet" in the cafe/meeting room space (the floors of the showrooms are clad in imbuaya, an rich brown exotic hardwood).

Rather than treating the warehouse like an informal loft environment, Saucier + Perrotte's interpretation tends to formalize it, with the use of materials and tones that are subtly different from the standard palette. Like some of S+P's earlier work, the project is a sophisticated experiment with colour and texture, especially the judicious use of heavily pigmented materials in a relatively monochromatic space.

At Radix, colour takes on almost magnetic qualities: the velvety burnt orange surface of rusted corten steel along the main hall is the repelling element with the danger it poses to suits worth thousands of dollars, while the intimate enclosures of the showrooms, veiled by translucent acrylic sliding panels, exert a mysterious attraction. The nearly monochromatic material palette of blued steel column cladding, crisp white walls and ceiling planes, and silver-coloured rolling display boxes creates an elegantly neutral background for the display of next year's fashion.

Architect Gilles Saucier sees the program as a sort of cultural conduit, which brings together products from all over the world and channels them out into the city. In interpreting a standard type, this architect has managed to paint a fresh portrait of a subject we hadn't even realized had grown a little tired. ■

