

FRAME

THE GREAT INDOORS

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DOUBLE ACT

SHOP MEETS STAGE
BAR IS GALLERY
CAMPANAS TURN
DRESSERS

The five boutiques on the pages ahead share little, except that each pulls you into a world so explicit it can be encapsulated in a single word.

TIME TRAVEL

Walking into the new Saucier + Perrotte-designed Michel Brisson store in Montreal is like entering a time zone where old and new intermingle.

Words Tim McKeough
Photos Marc Cramer

5 BOUTIQUES, 5 WORDS

Polished



Viewing the new Michel Brisson store from the street, the shopper clearly notes a contrast between the modern section to the right and the classic section to the left.

For the new Michel Brisson store in Montreal, Saucier + Perrotte Architectes wanted to design nothing less than a time machine. But a portal that merely transported visitors back in time wouldn't do; they wanted a time machine on the blink – a store that would scramble perceptions and leave people wondering whether they were in the past, present or future.

The contrasts at play in the interior are apparent before you even step through the front door. Located on Rue Saint-Paul in Old Montreal, the shop inhabits a 19th-century grey limestone building that is typical of the area. On the right-hand side is a space that looks perfectly modern, filled with bright white light and reflective steel hang bars; on the left is a much older room, lined with intricate wood paneling. But things aren't quite as simple as they appear. 'I didn't want to build a project that was only about the duality between old and new,' says architect Gilles Saucier. 'Instead, I wanted to create a new whole. I was inspired by the paintings of Vermeer. He very often used images within images, where you see something in the mirror that speaks to another time, another room or other people. It's part of the image, but at the same time it's separated by a time gap.'

'I was inspired by the paintings of Vermeer, who very often used images within images' Gilles Saucier

To conjure such a temporal distortion, Saucier began thinking about how to merge new and old without losing the basic character of either. One major move is a wall that looks like black mirror inserted lengthwise through the store to soften the barrier between the two distinctive rooms. To produce the effect, he installed smoked glass over a solid wall painted black. 'If you look at yourself in a black mirror, it's very different from a normal mirror,' says Saucier. 'It gives a sense of depth and something that is totally out of time, which is incredible to use in architecture.' At the rear of the room, the glass extends beyond the solid wall, becoming a dark, translucent screen for the fitting room.

In the wood-paneled space, which Saucier calls the *bureau de notaire*, the architects left many elements as they were – the cracked fireplace and chipped woodwork remain as is. They added a twist, however, by coating the walls with grey epoxy and raising the floor, initially 10 cm lower, with a platform topped by mosaic tile and surrounded by recessed lights. 'The mosaic is an old material but in very contemporary shapes, creating confusion between past and present,' says Saucier.

In the larger, more industrial-looking room, that same grey epoxy is spread over the floor. A series of vertical steel bars puncture the ceiling and accept

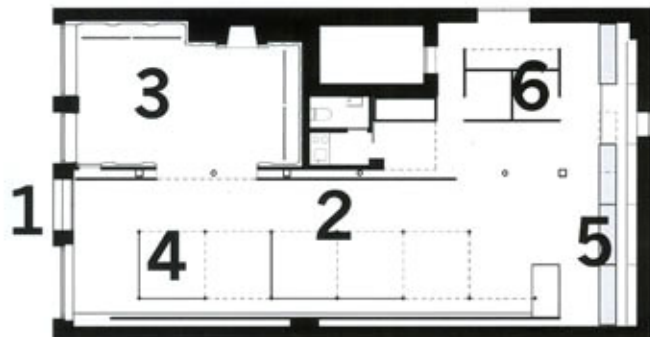
horizontal hang bars that can be arranged in any way the storeowner desires – in rows, like bookcases; at random, like a labyrinth; or cleared out entirely to make way for something else. The bars are also electrified, and each removable unit holds two fluorescent bulbs, tucked into U-shaped channels – one directs light down on the clothing; the other washes the ceiling. 'I hate those store lights that project on your head,' says Saucier. 'The hang bar puts light on the clothes directly, so we used a very neutral fluorescence temperature.'

'I like the notion of changing the perception of where things come from; I call it fake archaeology'

The back of the room terminates in five oversized white-lacquer shelving units with sloping geometries. 'Those are brand new, but I wanted to give the feeling of something out of another time,' explains Saucier. 'If you recuperate something, it's never perfect. You look at these shelves and wonder whether they were something else before. It adds a new layer. It looks like they were always there, but in a different capacity. I call it fake archaeology, and I use that idea very often in projects. I like this notion of changing the perception of where things come from, more than just adding a patina or making something that is fake old.' The shelving units sit on wheels and roll sideways to reveal even more stock hidden behind. Saucier says the idea is to bring the storage room into the showroom itself, so that customers never lose contact with the store's employees.

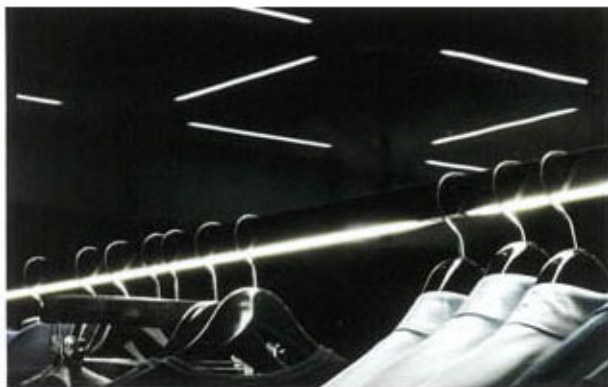
It is Saucier + Perrotte's second store for Michel Brisson. The project maintains a design language similar to the original while generating a very different experience. The first store also played with white and black; featured linear fluorescent lighting; and employed bare concrete, metal, and wood; but the focal point was a singular runway that put shoppers front and centre. The new store feels more like a men's club, a place of respite in the city. According to Saucier, both environments are appropriate for the brand. 'Michel Brisson's clients are people with two lives,' he says. 'Their customer is a very active man in business, who also needs high-fashion sportswear for the weekends.'

Have early attempts at consumer teleportation worked? Yes, reports Saucier. 'I was really trying to lose people in all kinds of contradictions,' he says. 'Everyone who has talked to me about the project says that when they enter they're suddenly disconnected from this world.' He pauses. 'And then they want to take a souvenir with them,' he jokes. 'It could take the form of a suit, a pair of pants or a sweater. After all, it's a store.'



↑ Smoked glass over a solid, black-painted wall inserted lengthwise through the store softens the barrier between the two distinctive rooms and merges old and new.

← Plan.
 1. Entrance
 2. Black mirror
 3. Wood-paneled room
 4. Suspended hang-bar system
 5. Shelving on casters
 6. Fitting rooms



The store feels like a men's club, a place of respite in the city

- ↑ Each removable hang bar holds two fluorescent bulbs tucked into U-shaped channels; one directs light down on the clothing, and the other washes the ceiling.
- ↑ The architects added a twist to the vintage wood-paneled interior by coating the walls with grey epoxy and covering a raised floor with mosaic tiles. Again, a mirror merges old and new.
- Thanks to a flexible ceiling grid and suspended steel bars that support horizontal hang bars, the overhead display system can be arranged as desired. In the background, large shelving units on casters not only display merchandise but also conceal the storage space behind them.



Saucier + Perrotte wanted to design nothing less than a time machine

135m²



MULTI BRAND