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Surfaces, surfaces everywhere...

How can retailers ensure they specify the correct surface material for their stores? From the look and feel to durability and added interest, there are many different surface coverings for them to choose from.



As the retail landscape has changed, so have customer expectations. When out shopping consumers now expect a lot from a retailer and the look and feel of a store is particularly important. With consumer footfall reduced, shoppers who have left the comfort of their homes for a walk around the shops expect something more; they want to be wowed and immersed in a brand from the moment they enter.

Store design has evolved greatly, and more futuristic and sleeker designs are now becoming the norm. The surface areas of any store are of vital importance, they make up the flooring, walls, ceiling, till areas and counter tops. Retailers who select the right material, echoing their brand values, will engage their shoppers and may even see an increase in dwell time and revenue. Gary Baker, MD of CDUK, exclusive distributor for Corian® in the UK and Ireland comments, "There are multiple but



ABOVE LEFT: Corian® has been CNC pattern cut to create gorgeous decorative wall cladding in the Manolo Blahnik store, Moscow.

ABOVE RIGHT: Corian® in Glacier White and Hot Red, with logo engraved, in the retail banking area of the Santander HQ in Triton Square, London.

MIDDLE RIGHT: Corian® seating/water feature and interactive information points in Deep Nocturne in the Leeds Victoria Arcade by Object Space Place.



RIGHT: Corian® in Glacier White (beauty bar tops, display shelves) and Titanium Grey (edge details of the beauty bars) and new Grey Onyx (back walls to the shelving systems and treatment rooms) in the Dermalogica flagship store by Limeblue Designs.

Images courtesy of Corian® and CDUK.

very specific challenges faced by the 'physical' retail sector, which must work hard to draw shoppers towards a unique 'experience' that cannot be reproduced online. For those brands seeking a loyal clientele at the mid to higher end of the market, a sophisticated yet welcoming environment is key – one that is worth the investment in lasting quality in a way that will inspire customers to do the same. Interaction is also essential, whether that be some kind of extra service or user-friendly integrated technology."

He goes on to say, "Corian® is a material that can enhance any retail design scheme, while being easy to work with and sophisticated both aesthetically and functionally."

There are many factors to consider when specifying a surface. From durability, sustainability, distinctiveness and sensuality, getting the material right for the surfaces will transform a store.

Oliver Michell, Architect, Chief Creative Officer and Co-Founder of FutureBrand UXUS comments, "We're always looking for new materials that can perform under the expected conditions (durability), but more importantly, ones that can reflect and reinforce what a retail brand or organisation stands for. Whether it's colour, texture or pattern – or perhaps provenance, we expect materials to convey as much of the message as interior design or marketing."

He continues, "Acknowledging that every choice we make has an impact on our environment, we will consider anything from the carbon footprint that a material's production, transport and use generates, to thinking bigger through the circular economy model. Increasingly for physical retail, and more typically in hospitality projects, the sensual qualities of a material will tip the scales when choosing the right specification. This is true for all the senses beyond sight: we think



of the scent a material can impart on a space, its tactile qualities, the acoustic impact it has on a room; you could even stretch it to the sense of taste when we're talking about food retail or beauty."



ABOVE & RIGHT: L'Occitane flagship store on Regent Street, London, UK. Designed by FutureBrand UXUS. Photography © Michael Franke. Images courtesy of FutureBrand UXUS.

BELOW: Calacatta Marble from Formica Group. BELOW LEFT: Breccia Paradiso from Formica Group. Images courtesy of Formica Group.



Natural looking materials used as surfaces can offer a calming, neutral yet sophisticated environment which let the products do the talking while giving the consumer a relaxed space to shop in.

Many brands who are looking to create a calming backdrop in which to add their brand values, turn to natural looking materials. Natural looking materials used as surfaces can offer a calming, neutral yet sophisticated environment which let the products do the talking while giving the consumer a relaxed space to shop in. Nina Bailey, Design Manager UK at Formica Group comments, "The introduction of matte surfacing with anti-fingerprint qualities, such as Formica Infiniti, brings a sensorial dimension to proceedings and a clean backdrop to any retail environment. To keep with the holistic approach, retailers should specify natural looking materials, specifically wood and concrete aesthetics to create an earthy and neutral base. Decors from the Formica TrueScale range resemble natural materials at their best. Without a repeat across the width of laminate they are very lifelike and can be used as iconic and eye-catching podiums or as a simple, subtle backdrop."

Ceilings are another area that really benefit from becoming part of the design process. By creating a sleek and smooth ceiling with additional material to create zones and definition, retailers who utilise the ceiling space will see a marked improvement to their stores. The materials used on ceilings have also changed in recent years, utilising the trend of tying each area of the store together with the use of a particular or complementing material.

Tony Thompson, Sales Manager UK (Projects) at Armstrong Ceiling Solutions comments, "There is increasing demand for surfaces to be reflected both internally and externally, where the materials are the same for internal walls and ceilings as well as for facades and the walls of entrance areas, and this puts an additional requirement on the surface material to be particularly robust for wall applications. Even acoustics take a back seat to aesthetics in this area."

He continues, "This is where metal, or mesh metal, or even wood-effect metal, steps up, with the added bonus that clip-in or hook-on metal ceilings are easily dismantlable for maintenance and cleaning purposes, the latter a particular requirement with the current trend for dark ceilings that show dust and dirt more easily."

Adding light to a surface is another way to highlight an area and draw attention to it. By creating lit



ABOVE: Wood Veneer Oak Plain. RIGHT (L-R): Centrum Handlowe triangular Optima canopies. FR L-Exception. Images courtesy of Armstrong Ceiling Solutions.



BELOW: Fenwick Store in Bracknell, UK. Images courtesy of Cooledge Lighting.

areas this will help guide consumers around a store and add interest. Lighting can also be used across a ceiling for a uniform, non-glare addition to any store.

Grant Harlow, Director of Marketing at Cooledge comments, "Adding light to surface materials provides shop designers with a variety of options to create memorable customer impressions. To accomplish this requires a light source that can cover a large area uniformly while ensuring a slim profile so as not to take up too much valuable space. Illuminated perforated materials deliver an interesting modern look that will make a dull feature come to life while glowing resins or glass can add a feeling of elegance to the shop."

Grant Harlow continues, "One way to create a truly unique customer experience is to combine the appearance of fabric materials with lighting to provide immersive general illumination that brings the expansive feeling of the outdoors to the indoor shopping environment."

A store that has been well thought out using specially selected

surfaces will create a look and feel that customers will enjoy. Making considerations early on, in regards to durability, cleanliness, integrating technology, lighting, decoration and a complementary colour pallet will enable the store to function well but also look great, tempting consumers to come back time and again.

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ABOVE L-R: Acne Studios, The Shop at Japan House London. Image by Lee Mawdsley. Images courtesy of Cooledge Lighting.