



New York can do different: Less is More

Visual Merchandising expert Matthias Spanke lives where the trends are created. For STYLE GUIDE he examined the most important shop windows of noble 5th Avenue and Madison Avenue a couple of weeks before Thanksgiving.

It's one thing New York can do – and that's showing off. In Midtown Manhattan half a dozen of brand new super towers are rising to the sky. Among them the highest, most expensive and luxurious residential building, the address of which is its name as well: 432 Park Avenue. In less than three minutes walking distance from there, the biggest department stores and retailers from Saks to Zara reside in posh 5th

Avenue and a block further in Madison Avenue.

Between Thanksgiving, on 24 November this year, and Christmas the proud department stores outdo themselves every year with an extravaganza of glitter and glamour in their shop windows. This was, by the way, started by Macy's, based in 14th Street then, in the winter of 1874, with a collection of porcelain

dolls from all over the world. Last year the window shopping x-mas show culminated at Bergdorf Goodman's in a fairy-tale scenery of seven million Swarovski crystals set by hand.

But who wants to have this drama should know the quiet tones as well. It's the same as in music: the drum roll is the more effective as it is preceded by a soft passage – a "forte" needs a

“pianissimo”. What is valid for a symphony applies for the dramatic appearance of the Christmas shop window decorations as well. Some weeks before Thanksgiving it’s rather quiet and reserved – reduced to minimalistic – in the shop windows of Fendi, Dior H&M, COS and Saks Fifth Avenue. And this is wonderful in a completely different, quiet way.

No matter in which top retailer’s shop window you look these first weeks of November, the focus is exclusively on the product. Extravagant props: none. Instead of “dress up” the motto rather is “dress down”. Plainness as *prélude* to excess is now the programme. You could almost think: “Okay, as simple as that.” But this simplicity has nothing to do with “simple”. It needs a lot of skill – from the idea to its implementation. The most used strategy: clear arrangements of the product and a straight-lined installation. Either makes for the necessary tension despite of minimalism.

This year, H&M and their Paris co-operation partner Kenzo put 16 (!) mannequins on the runway. They are densely crowded like on a New Yorker bus and seem to fall over each other every minute. The effect: very dynamic and attention arousing. As screaming, colourful and crazy the patterns of the clothes are from cap to socks, the stingy is the runway – black metal bars with a board on top. That’s it.

It is much quieter in the shop windows of the other top retailers. This applies the most for & Other Stories and the almost theater-like staging of the window: a huge, whitely back-lit curtain, in front of it four elegant, but modest tops and dresses on busts. That is all.

For & Other Stories it is the white curtain, for Saks Fifth Avenue – Sacai it is classic, white wall elements. The only “patterns” are their geometric cassettes. Nothing distracts attention away from the dresses – the mannequins do not even have faces. Reduction rules.

Zara puts its mannequins into a cool, urban setting. Dark shades in front of white marble – between white and grey there are groups of three and it seems like they were waiting for the subway. Light and shadow, effectively staged, provide an unobtrusive dramatic art. In the gloomy light you have to look closely to recognize more than silhouettes. This is the way to cause curiosity.

Floating, rounded forms serve as backplane design for Dior and Fendi. Like a melting exclamation mark the Italians emphasise the mannequin which seems almost non-participating and which is not even allowed to wear a headdress on her bald head. The Parisian fashion brand presents feminine, geometrical forms in discreet autumn colours.

Simple and likewise creative: COS arranges a selection of the autumn collection according to the colour gradient and lets the garments simply

H&M with Kenzo



hang down from the ceiling on clothes hangers. A clear and linear system like back then in Richard Gere's wardrobe as "American Gigolo". There must be order.

But when will the Christmas decorations finally be unveiled? What will be behind the curtain this year? In my opinion there will be three big trends: "Classic", "Metallic", and "Whimsical". Classic comes up with typical American, classical and very opulent Christmas decorations. And this year's winter decorations will sparkle like the silver of the Ritz Carlton, but in different colour shades, as the second trend is called "Metallic". Often mirrors are used next to various metal-surfaces, so that customers are able to admire the goods from all perspectives. The third important trend this year is called



COS

"Whimsical" which means curious, funny, or quirky. It is characteristic for the "Whimsical"-style that decorations have to be seen with a wink.

Résumé: If the slogan for the holiday season is "More is More" than the motto for late autumn is "Less is More". Because there is one thing the

all the windows have in common: goods occupy centre stage. In New York visual merchandisers even succeed in creating amazing shop windows by only using products and mannequins. The best example for that is the current shop window of H&M.

Photos: Matthias Spanke

& Other Stories



Zara

