



Christmas shop window at Lord & Taylor designed in Whimsical-style

## New York 2016: in the winter wonderland behind the windows

Christmas without Alice and her Wonderland behind the mirrors? Definitely a no-go. For us, visual merchandising expert Matthias Spanke takes a look into the festive shop windows of Manhattan. Spanke detects three visual trends of this year's Holiday Season – Alice and a lot of mirrors play an important role here, too.



Whimsical-trend at Bergdorf Goodman



Whimsical-trend at Diesel



Whimsical-trend at Saks Fifth Avenue



If one is able to measure the desire for a wonderful world with flying colors, happiness, and peace in the height of a Christmas tree or the number of its brightly shining lights, then this desire is especially big on a small peninsula, between two rivers, which flow into the Atlantic Ocean. To be more precise: XXL. Just like the 25 meter-high, 13 tons-weighing, and about 45.000 LED-bulbs-having Nordmann fir at Rockefeller Center in Manhattan. Since 30 November its lights have been shining to the North Pole easily. Like they should help Santa Claus with his slay full of wickedly expensive premium products to find his way to the winter wonderland of New York City.

Some blocks further to the north, between Madison and Park Avenue, the big desire for the most wonderful

of the wonderful Christmas worlds experiences reaches a level of escalation, which would even demand a maximum of fantasy and creativity from Santa's little helpers. How much Christmas fits into a shop window? Or more important: which kind of Christmas has not been witnessed by window shoppers before? But first of all: which kind of Christmas is the best one for this year? Driven by these questions, the best visual merchandisers and window dressers – quasi elves and dwarfs of the top designers and department store owners – design the shop windows at Broadway, Madison and 5th Avenue for the Holiday Season.

"This year there can be seen three clear trends in the visual merchandising of premium designers like Fendi, Prada, or Louis Vuitton, and the department

stores from Macy's to Saks Fifth Avenue", visual merchandising expert Matthias Spanke explains. "They are called Whimsical, Metallics, and Nostalgic". Good for us, that the expert brought along some further time, to describe the trends in detail.

What may we expect under the term "Whimsical" as a visual concept? "Most of all Whimsical is an intonation, an attitude", Spanke says. "The designs mostly have something self-deprecating – everything is presented with a wink." It is a design style which has a certain distance to its objects and sceneries. A style that does not take itself too seriously and makes the observers chuckle. "In the world of



Whimsical-trend at Lord & Taylor



Metallics-trend at Dior

Whimsical everything is a bit exaggerated, turned in, crazy. But like Americans would say: in a fun way", Spanke adds.

Diesel gets to the heart of the Whimsical-Style with its slogan: "Fur all". It is kind of ingenious this amusing compression of "Fur for all". What it looks like? Well, just like a mixture of mammoth and Monchhichi. Hairy. As tousled the appearance of the furry protozoan, as smooth the mannequin next to it. While horns come out of the head there, a metal bald head shines here. You nearly wish the lady some political correct (fake) fur on her shivery skin. Strange figures are supposed to make bank for Fendi, too. Like on a trapeze the fluffy goblins made of

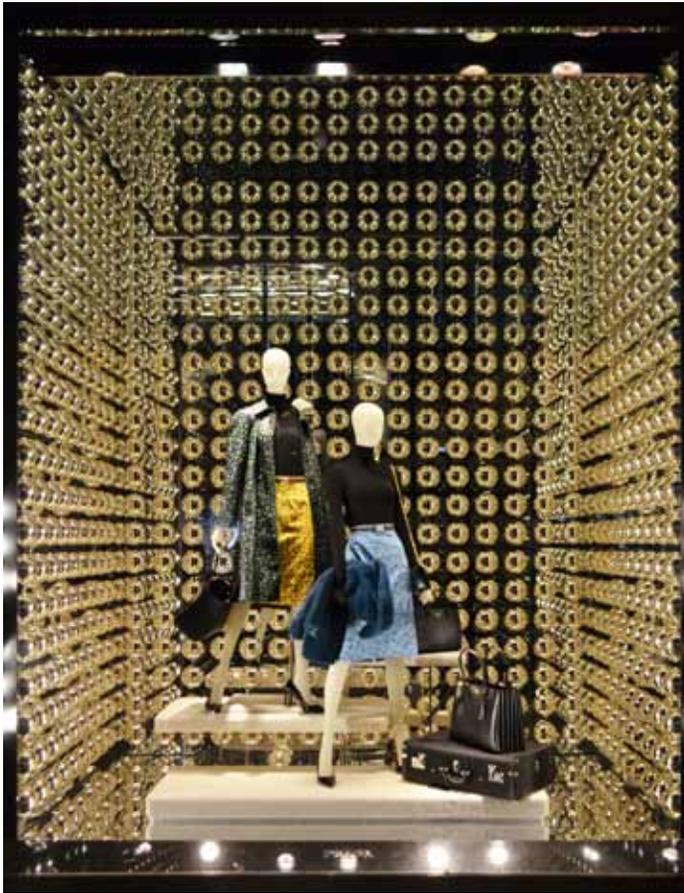
golden chrome and black plush hang from the ceiling. Spanke nearly starts to laugh when he describes the scenery. And this healthy distance towards the Christmas-insanity really has something easing. Just like the breathing out after having carried much too heavy shopping bags full of expensive presents.

Saks Fifth Avenue comes up with a lollipop-like, cheerful decoration with a touch of the fifties under the slogan "Land of 1000 delights": oversized candy canes, orange drops, and huge, red cotton candy – childhood dream with a guaranteed sugar shock. Speaking of dreams. Film director Tim Burton crosses Spanke's mind here: It is a magical

dream world like in Tim Burton's 'Alice in Wonderland'. At Saks every Alice wears a bell-bottomed dress.

Taking a look into the neighborhood into the windows of Lord & Taylor or Bergdorf Goodman, wonder worlds are presented there, which are interpreted absolutely uniquely, too.

Lord & Taylor takes us on a journey to an "Enchanted Forrest", which is the design theme here. Duffy Ducks with red ribbons around their long necks pose for a kind of snow ballet and carry Advent wreaths. The feet and hands of a giant bear stand out of a heap of snow: perfect for the little mice, who use the big bear as a sledding hill.



Metallics-trend at Prada

From the squirrels' point of view we get a peek on the ice skating figures in the window.

At Bergdorf Goodman we enter a greenhouse of a morbid-chic world like those of the classic Hollywood movies of the 1940s or 1950s, "Citizen Kane", or "Sunset Boulevard". A world full of flamingos, giant insects, frosty blue, or ladies in elegant robes. "Both of them are not only wonderlands, but they also complement each other. Just like the two department stores made an arrangement", Spanke says. "While Lord & Taylor realizes that theme in a 'childlike' way, we enter a very glamorous, elegant world at Bergdorf Goodman." As a result a walk along these windows leads us from childhood dreams to the Fantasia of our adult world.

No Christmas without mirrors. Finally Alice finds her Wonderland behind mirrors, too. "Mirror faces and metallic are a significant trend within the visual merchandising of

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Nostalgic-trend at H&M



Nostalgic-trend at Louis Vuitton

2016's Holiday season", Spanke opines. "Mirroring surfaces are often used to let the clients experience the staging from several different perspectives."

Prada interprets the mirror trend in a typical cool and linear way. On gold-mirrored walls there are also gold-mirrored hemispheres arranged in strict symmetry. At the moment Christmas balls de Luxe build the shiny setting for the goods, that will soon lie under a Christmas tree in a luxurious four- or rather six-bedroom-apartment.

Don't worry. There are wilder decorations, too. "At Dior or Burberry perspectives start to flow by the use of mirrors which taper in the middle of the window", Spanke describes. The effect: you can see the goods from all perspectives in endless reproductions and fragmentations. A mosaic of spheres, glass, and neon-light as a

blazing distorting mirror of our wishes, fantasies, and desires.

Those who prefer a classic Christmas will be happy about the shop windows of H&M, Louis Vuitton, and Coach. For their visual interpretation of the Holiday Season they bank on the classic element per se: nostalgic. But even this look can be created very differently. "During Holiday Season 2016 nostalgic technology plays an important role. Technology and staging are presented in a nearly deconstructive kind of way", our expert for visual merchandising explains.

At Louis Vuitton we witness a machine with gear wheels revolving like they did in former toys, to move the polar bear. It is a magical view, which "disenchants" the wintery staging at the same time. Just the same at H&M, where the surrounding of the cozy

stage becomes part of the decoration. We get a look beyond the borders of the picture onto wooden constructions and ropes, which stabilize the set. It is a kind of self-reflexive, ironic comment like we saw it in the Whimsical trend. Visual Merchandising expert sums up: "Christmas has lost its innocence and winks at us with a smile. We have three trends, where the observers are always able to detect something new. Those can be perfectly combined to each other and can be presented very playfully but also really adultly."

Text: Dr. Kai Kaufmann

Photos: Matthias Spanke