

# ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

**SMALL, MEDIUM, LARGE**

Shifting Scales through Design

Plus

**The Ethical Dilemma**

**Building Public Trust Under Scrutiny**

**RESIDENTIAL Multifamily Projects**

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# ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

## 10.2002

On the Cover: HydraPier, by Asymptote. Photograph by Christian Richters  
Right: Imperial War Museum North, by Studio Daniel Libeskind. Photograph by Richard Bryant/Arcaid



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www \* You can find these stories at [architecturalrecord.com](http://architecturalrecord.com), including expanded coverage of projects, and Web-only special features.



# Shop (Up)Lifting

**DESPITE THE PROLIFERATION OF OVERSIZE AND UNDER-DEVELOPED BIG BOXES, ARCHITECTS ARE DESIGNING STORES THAT IMPROVE THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT.**

By Sara Hart



1.

**New York City**

*Bohlin Cywinski Jackson provides Apple Computer disciples a light-filled treasure chest for everything Mac and more.*



2.

**New York City**

*Duccio Grassi takes full advantage of a rare open site and delivers a dramatic showroom for Italian designer MaxMara.*



3.

**Tokyo, Japan**

*No mere big box for merchandise, Renzo Piano Building Workshop has given Hermès an elegant headquarters and Tokyo an architectural gift.*

Shopping is the only public diversion that crosses almost all socioeconomic and ethnic lines. The experiences, however, can be quite different. Ubiquitous discount retailers like Target, Wal-Mart, Kmart, and Home Depot have become one-stop destinations for suburbanites. These retailers' "superstore" versions, in which one can practically observe the curvature of the earth, make the "big box" modifier seem like a mocking understatement, code for stating the obvious—the absence of architecture. The chichi variant of the superstore can be found at tony addresses in every major city. Haute couture flagship stores continue to compete for attention everywhere, despite serious economic turbulence. Flagships have spawned countless boutique outposts in posh neighborhoods, and the high-end merchant's vision often transforms the surroundings and the experience of not only its customers, but of the local community, as well.

So apparently fraught with deep cultural meaning is the prevalence of shopping as a global pastime that it prompted students at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design (GSD) to analyze in exhaustive depth the social and cultural factors that are responsible for shopping superseding other leisure-time activities. They published their conclusions in *The Harvard Guide to Shopping* (Taschen, 2002), under the guidance of architect, polemicist, and GSD professor Rem Koolhaas.

Rem knows retail, having designed the attention-grabbing Prada "epicenter" in Manhattan's SoHo [RECORD, February 2002, page 84]. If SoHo has become a mall, then Prada is the anchor tenant. Two new merchants joined Prada in this retail ganglion. Both stores are beautifully executed in glass, steel, and wood. The Italian fashion house MaxMara got to start with a clean slate, building from the ground on a former parking lot. Around the corner, Apple Computer's new retail store is a light-filled, magically weightless volume tethered to the ground by the sturdy brick envelope of a former post office. MaxMara's spare serenity and Apple's spare effervescence give a kinetic vitality to the streets previously occupied by unanimated art galleries with far less mass appeal. Halfway around the world, Hermès has made a similar contribution, although at a much grander scale. The French purveyor of luxury clothes and accessories introduces some urban class into Tokyo's meretricious Ginza district with a corporate and retail center that seems to radiate optimism and taste.

These three conscientious projects may seem to be exceptions that prove the grim prognosis of Koolhaas et al., but then there are 10 others on our Web site that further suggest that where there is good design, cultural diversity will survive in spite of the shoppers. ■

For additional retail projects, and more information on the people and products involved in the following projects, go to Building Type Study at [architecturalrecord.com](http://architecturalrecord.com).



# Max Mara

## New York City, SoHo

# 2

**DUCCIO GRASSI CREATES A DRAMATIC SETTING FOR WOMEN'S CLOTHES THROUGH THE BOLD USE OF CONCRETE, WALNUT, AND RUSTED STEEL.**

**By Suzanne Stephens**

**Architect:** Duccio Grassi Architects—  
Duccio Grassi, principal; **Fernando**  
**Correa Granados**, project architect

**Architect of record:** FZAD  
Architecture & Design

**Client:** Max Mara USA

**Consultants:** O'Dea & Associates  
(structural and MEP engineers);  
Isometrix Lighting + Design  
(lighting)

**General contractor:** Americon  
Construction/Consulting

**Size:** 6,105 square feet

**Completion date:** 2001

### Sources

**Structural steel:** Maspeth Welding

**Concrete:** La Strada General  
Contracting

**Panel precasting:** Global Precast

**Skylights:** Bellapart, S.A.

(engineering and fabrication)

**Glazing and aluminum framing:**  
Landmark Architectural Metal &  
Glass

Max Mara, the fashion house based near Milan, is known for a strong geometrical cut in its women's clothes, which also feature a color palette that veers from beige to brown to black, and textures that are as sleek as steel or as nubby as brick. In other words, the clothes seem to be inspired by architecture. Small wonder the company felt the architectural design of its shop was important to reinforce its style identity.

### Program

With its new downtown store in New York's SoHo, Max Mara wanted both to grab the shopper's attention and provide a design appropriate to its clothing. Its new, one-story structure is on West Broadway, on a lot leased on a long-term basis, where the Italian office of Duccio Grassi Architects came up with a two-level scheme. In its expansive interior, walnut-laminated trusses and slatted partitions, precast and poured-in-place concrete, as well as rusted and natural steel are deployed through a trapezoidally configured volume.

### Solution

The drama begins on the sidewalk, where a slatted wall 21 feet and 7 inches high, placed on an angle with the building line, directs the visitor to the entrance. As the slanted wall suggests, Grassi organized the inte-

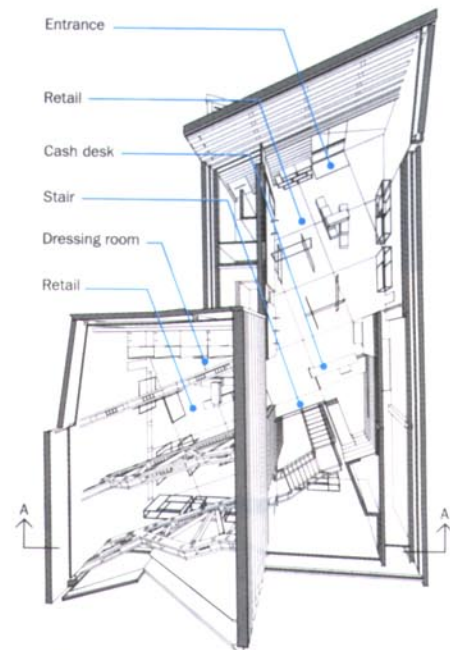


rior elements and spaces according to two overlapping grids, one of which shifts 20 degrees off the orthogonal grid established by the L-shaped structure. Meanwhile, the visitor, who may well be oblivious to such maneuvers, meanders through the first retail space, which is 10 feet high, and is gradually drawn to a light well at the rear. Here, a skylighted atrium, with an inserter stair, reveals a lower level devoted to more clothing. Architecture is deployed to heighten the experi-

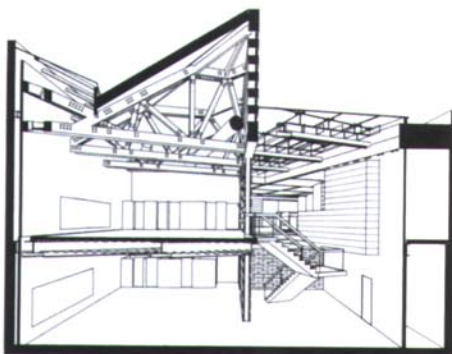
ence of shopping: The only way to access the additional clothing is by detouring through a larger space purveying merchandise, here spanned by three laminated walnut trusses and punctuated by another, smaller skylight. Here, too, the building's concrete-block walls are lined with large panels of precast concrete that ripple like pieces of a quilt and seem sewn together by large stainless-steel cables. Steel channels inserted between the first and second rows of

**www** For more information about the people and products involved in this project, go to Building Types Study at [architecturalrecord.com](http://architecturalrecord.com).





OVERHEAD AXONOMETRIC



SECTION THROUGH A-A

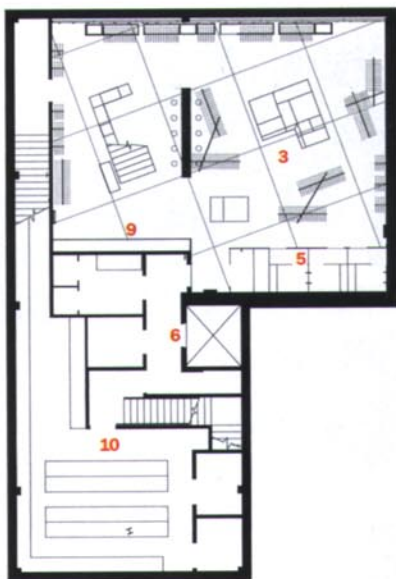
On West Broadway, in SoHo, the Max Mara store stops traffic with its strong wood-and-glass slatted window wall (opposite). Three laminated wood trusses span the main retail space (above) at the rear of the shop.







GROUND FLOOR



LOWER FLOOR

- |                   |                             |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Entrance       | 6. Elevator                 |
| 2. Window display | 7. Double-height space      |
| 3. Retail space   | 8. Office                   |
| 4. Sales desk     | 9. Accessories display wall |
| 5. Dressing rooms | 10. Stock room              |

At the bottom of the stair to the lower level, a walnut wall (above right) is designed with shelflike units that pull out for displaying merchandise. Dressing rooms (above left) hide behind rusted steel panels.





The walls on both levels are precast-concrete panels (opposite, bottom, and below) that have a quilted effect and seem to be sewn together with stainless-steel-cable stitches.

A cantilevered, poured-in-place-concrete stair (right) sculpturally unites the two levels.

the panels can be used for hanging clothes, while other items are arranged in movable steel racks, some of which have leather and mirror panels. The modular design of these cagelike units incorporates both shelving or hanging bars used as display devices. More surfaces for showing shoes, bags, and scarves are provided by clustered islands of rectangular volumes formed of white solid surfacing, sheet metal, or leather cushions. Along one wall, rusted steel panels conceal dressing rooms, which are lined in white solid surfacing and mirrors.

As visitors descend the cantilevered poured-in-place-concrete stair, rotated on a 20-degree angle

aligned with the trusses and the entry plane, they arrive first at a wood display wall, in which polygonal shelves, equipped with lights on their undersides, pop out like drawers. The main retail space of this lower level retains the quilted concrete wall of the upstairs space; in this instance, the ceiling is exposed metal decking, painted white.

The artificial lighting throughout is programmed to supplement illumination from the two skylights; the skylights themselves seem weightless, for the glass is supported by stainless-steel fingers, rather than the heavier mullions usually seen elsewhere. Since the steel column-and-beam structure

of the store is painted white, it too seems to disappear.

### Commentary

Many of the architectural motifs, such as the use of the diagonal, the oversize wood and glass partitions, and the large trusses with lights mounted in them, would likely dominate or fight with clothes by another designer. Here, however, fashion and architecture propitiously reinforce each other. The skylighted atrium, the slanted ceiling planes, the concrete wall, and the cantilevered stair all create a volumetric statement that keeps the shopper moving while still being able to actually see the clothes. ■







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**ARCHITECTURAL RECORD:** (ISSN 0003-858X) October 2002, Vol. 190, No. 10. Published monthly by The McGraw-Hill Companies, 1221 Avenue of the Americas, New York, N.Y. 10020. Periodicals postage paid at New York, N.Y. RCSC and additional mailing offices. Standard mail enclosed in edition codes 010, 011, 012. Canada Post International Publications Mail Product Sales Agreement No. 246565. Registered for GST as The McGraw-Hill Companies. GST No. R123075673. **Postmaster:** Please send address changes to ARCHITECTURAL RECORD, Fulfillment Manager, P.O. Box 566, Hightstown, N.J. 08520. **SUBSCRIPTION:** Rates are as follows: U.S. and Possessions \$64; Canada and Mexico \$79 (payment in U.S. currency; GST included); outside North America \$199 (air freight delivery). Single copy price \$8; for foreign \$10. Subscriber Services: 877/876-8093 (U.S. only); 609/426-7046 (outside the U.S.); fax: 609/426-7087. **SUBMISSIONS:** Every effort will be made to return material submitted for possible publication (if accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelope), but the editors and the corporation will not be responsible for loss or damage. **SUBSCRIPTION LIST USAGE:** Advertisers may use our list to mail information to readers. To be excluded from such mailings, send a request to ARCHITECTURAL RECORD, Mailing List Manager, P.O. Box 555, Hightstown, N.J. 08520. **OFFICERS OF THE MCGRAW-HILL COMPANIES:** Chairman, President and Chief Executive Officer: Harold McGraw III. Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer: Robert J. Bahash. Executive Vice President, Organizational Effectiveness: Barbara B. Maddock. Senior Vice President and General Counsel: Kenneth M. Vittor. Senior Vice President, Corporate Affairs, and Assistant to the President and CEO: Glenn S. Goldberg. Principal Operating Executives: Leo C. O'Neal, President, Standard & Poor's; Robert E. Evanson, President, McGraw-Hill Education; Scott C. Marden, President, McGraw-Hill Information and Media Services. **MCGRAW-HILL CONSTRUCTION:** Norbert W. Young, Jr., FAIA, President, Vice President and CFO: Louis J. Finocchiaro. **COPYRIGHT AND REPRINTING:** Title © reg. in U.S. Patent Office. Copyright © 2001 by The McGraw-Hill Companies. All rights reserved. Where necessary, permission is granted by the copyright owner for libraries and others registered with the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC), 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, Mass. 01923. To photocopy any article herein for personal or internal reference use only for the base fee of \$1.80 per copy of the article plus ten cents per page, send payment to CCC, ISSN 0003-858X. Copying for other than personal use or internal reference is prohibited without prior written permission. Write or fax requests (no telephone requests) to Copyright Permission Desk, ARCHITECTURAL RECORD, Two Penn Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10121-2298; fax 212/904-4256. For reprints call 212/512-4170 or fax 212/512-6243. Information has been obtained by The McGraw-Hill Companies from sources believed to be reliable. However, because of the possibility of human or mechanical error by our sources, The McGraw-Hill Companies or ARCHITECTURAL RECORD does not guarantee the accuracy, adequacy, or completeness of any information and is not responsible for any errors or omissions therein or for the results to be obtained from the use of such information of for any damages resulting therefrom.

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