

OBSERVED

WRITTEN BY
Cathryn Drake

DESIGNERS
Duccio Grassi Architects
www.ducciograssiarchitects.com

PROJECT
MaxMara
Corso Vittorio Emanuele
at Galleria de Cristoforis
(39) 02-7600-8849
www.maxmarafashiongroup.it

Milan,
Italy

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Democratic Experiment

MaxMara's innovative new store in Milan brings high design to the masses.



Luxury has always been associated with waste, but not in the harmonious way Duccio Grassi Architects has united them in MaxMara's restyled Milan flagship store, which opened earlier this year. Precious materials such as platinum bump up against recycled finds like weathered ipe, taken from an 80-year-old Argentine soccer stadium. "This choice came from a meeting with one of the fashion stylists, who talked about the unusual material combinations that MaxMara uses in its clothing," Duccio Grassi says. The general spirit of experimentation in this four-story space is a reflection of the company's innovative approach to fashion and its desire to take advantage of the changing locale.

"Today, Corso Vittorio Emanuele represents the most 'democratic' street of Milan, which has diverse stores with

a variety of customers," says Laura Lusuardi, MaxMara's fashion coordinator. To welcome new shoppers, the architects created a softly curving glass storefront, which rises almost 18 feet with no visible supports. "We have eliminated the exterior," Grassi says. "There is no facade, there is no sign, there is no door." Instead, a sliding-glass wall panel remains perpetually open. "The objective is to invite people to enter," says Fernando Correa Granados, a Duccio Grassi partner. Inside, an irregularly spiraling staircase, in dark copper with oak steps, expresses the shop's vertical logic, leading the customer upward both physically and in terms of price.

Rising from shoes and accessories on the ground floor to the 'S MaxMara Collection at the top, the atmosphere becomes increasingly precious, ending **continued on page 40**

Above: Recycled wood covers the walls.
Below: "This stairway is the explanation and the icon of the store," Duccio Grassi says. It connects the 15,070-square-foot space (which spans four floors) and draws the customer upward.



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The bridal salon trades white silk upholstery for a rough-wood backdrop and Francesco Rota's nubby Wabi chairs for Paola Lenti.



"It is not necessary for silk to be displayed on silk."



continued from page 38 at the intimate bridal salon. But nuptial clichés are absent. Undulating twig screens and tinted gesso-textured walls add a touch of coarseness to the rarified chamber. "It is not necessary for silk to be displayed on silk," Correa Granados says. "A rough background highlights the luxury of the article." Accordingly, the shop alternates lacquered display boxes with others made of Corian; mirrored dressing-room ceilings cap rose-gray silk walls; and stained-oak walls are interrupted by strips of platinum-fused glass with a bronze sheen.

MaxMara's dedication to democratizing the cutting edge comes across in the exposed ductwork and cement of the underground design shop, called the Basement. Handmade touches by Sergio Calatroni lend an irreverent vibe: for example, colored tape is affixed to columns and walls in quirky patterns. Curated by the design doyenne Rossana Orlandi, the shop sells unconventional household items like the recycled Scrapwood furniture series by the Dutch designer Piet Hein Eek, and Michel Charlot's purposely imperfect Mold lights. "This is furniture design that is rather sophisticated for this area," Correa Granados says. "It permits lots of people access to a level of design that they may not have seen before." He might just as easily be talking about Duccio Grassi Architects' own contribution. ○

The Basement, an underground housewares shop curated by Rossana Orlandi, is meant to reflect the MaxMara brand by introducing design to a wide audience. Droog's 85 Lamps chandelier, designed by Rody Graumans, hangs near an Established & Sons M5 dining table, designed by Frank, and a multicolored set of Gio Ponti's Livia dining chairs for L'Abbate.