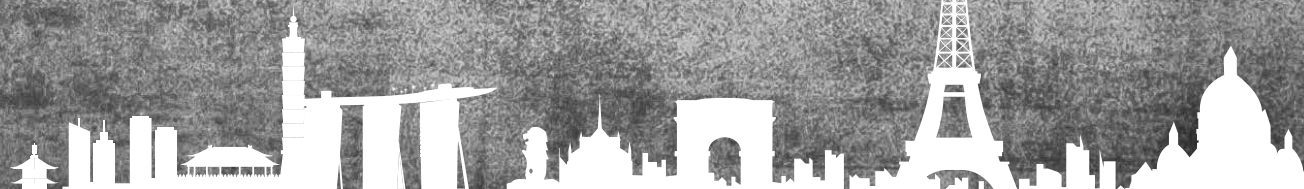


STUDY ABROAD

DISCOVERING THE WORLD'S **COOLEST** STORES

Story by Keith W. Strandberg

Leaving the United States to scour the rest of the world for its coolest jewelry and watch stores isn't the easiest task. In fact, most stores across the globe conform to a corporate identity, which makes them way more mainstream and way less cool. But, just as America has its innovative independent retailers, so too does the rest of the world — and they can even be found, if one takes the time to do some digging. So, INDESIGN looked high and low for stores that step outside the norm, that are willing to take risks and make mistakes, all in the name of providing a different customer experience. What we found were retailers whose stores will spark ideas and whose thought-provoking concepts will be just as inspirational — if not more so — as their “cool” American counterparts.





Bicycles, watches, jewelry and mechanical art coexist at M.A.D. Gallery.

M.A.D. GALLERY



Geneva, Switzerland; Taipei, Taiwan



mbandf.com/mad-gallery



The idea for the M.A.D. Gallery grew out of a need for the watch brand MB&F (Max Büsser & Friends) to have a showcase in its hometown of Geneva.

“The concept was developed very intuitively and, in fact, we did absolutely no research and no thorough planning,” explains chief communications officer Charis Yadigaroglou. “A few days before the 2011 BaselWorld show, an opportunity for the space popped up, it was reasonable and available, and we had to decide within a week. We needed a space to show our timepieces here in Geneva; we didn’t even have a retail partner. The idea of having a mechanical art gallery rather than a conventional watch store came up. Max Büsser had a crazy idea about a year before to retail his watches in art galleries and he just about got thrown out of these galleries, so if the art galleries wouldn’t take us, we thought we’d create our own gallery.”

That loose concept allows the gallery to showcase just about anything — from watches to motorcycles to flying cars, and just about anything in between.

The gallery has been, in spite of itself, quite successful. “We had no idea what we were doing; no one had ever managed a boutique or had any retail experience,” Ya-

digaroglou admits. “But we had a willingness to present our timepieces in a context that made sense to us. For us, mechanical watchmaking is a contemporary art form, so it makes sense to display them here.”

Having the M.A.D. Gallery, which stands for Mechanical Art Devices, allows MB&F to sell to its customers directly, and the space is paid for by the watch sales they make. “When we started this concept, we didn’t expect to sell the gallery items, but to our surprise, things have sold,” Yadigaroglou says, adding that the gallery has seen about 18,000 visitors since opening and has sold about 1,500 items over the last three years.

“I think the success is because there has been no retail planning, no measured approach,” says Yadigaroglou. “In today’s world, everything is researched and planned, so most concepts you see are predictable. Because we didn’t do this and the choices we make are intuitive, it’s always surprising what we present, and our customers like that.”

Another M.A.D. Gallery opened in Taiwan recently, and a third is coming to Dubai in September.

“We don’t expect to have 20 or 30 M.A.D. Galleries around the world, but a few in the right spaces would be great,” Yadigaroglou adds.

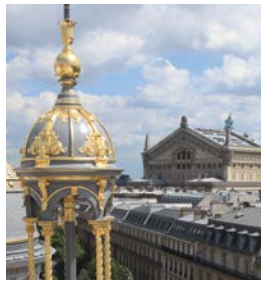


The storefront of the M.A.D. Gallery in Geneva's Old Town.

PRINTEMPS

 France

 printemps.com



Celebrating 150 years this year, Printemps is a Paris institution.

Printemps is unquestionably one of the coolest stores in the world and, surprisingly, one of the oldest as well. Celebrating 150 years this year, Printemps constantly reinvents itself to keep the customer experience fresh and novel. Over 70 million visitors pass through the doors of Printemps' 18 stores throughout France every year, with the Boulevard Haussmann store, the

flagship, accounting for 28 million of these. "Everything has changed in 150 years and in today's constantly evolving world, longevity is an undeniable asset," says CEO Paolo De Cesare. "Our founder, Jules Jaluzot, wanted everything to be new, fresh and beautiful. His vision and positioning were groundbreaking and were the foundation for his success. The most remarkable thing is that this vision, this commitment to constant innovation, to offering the extraordinary every day, has endured and continues to guide us in everything we do and propose."

Printemps is not afraid to shake up the status quo, especially when it comes to jewelry and watches. The jewelry and watch area, on the first floor, is designed to be open, allowing customers to flow freely from maison to maison, with the "weightless" furniture contributing to the feeling of openness.

Printemps has become famous for its "active" window

displays. "In 2000, the artist Artus even transported his bedroom to one and slept there overnight," says artistic director Franck Banchet. "Tom Ford was the first to launch fashion marketing in the 2000s and brands then became aware that a window display was a medium in its own right. Since then, we have started many highly creative partnerships with labels such as Lanvin, Chanel, Dior, Prada and Burberry.

"These days, everyone can travel," he continues. "To generate surprise and appeal, department stores must present a showcase, an intention and enchantment, obviously related to its values but also to the city that it represents. Christian Lacroix creating couture dresses, but in black denim, Karl Lagerfeld sitting in a window display ... We like to give the general public something that they wouldn't otherwise be able to see."

With a history of 150 years and a mandate to innovate, Printemps is well positioned for the future. "In a world that is becoming increasingly digital, specialized and particularly attentive to efficiency, I believe that the need for discovery, pleasure and emotion — which are, after all, human nature — is even more important," De Cesare says. "Consequently, I am convinced that Printemps is more relevant than ever. I am sure that emotion and surprise are in Printemps' future."



Keeping things fresh and surprising customers is vital to the Printemps mission.

LES AMBASSADEURS



Switzerland



lesambassadeurs.ch

Located in the heart of the luxury watch industry, Les Ambassadeurs has four stores in Switzerland (Geneva, Zurich, St. Moritz, Lugano), and promotes itself as the “Leading House of Leading Names.”

Les Ambassadeurs focuses on the customer experience, creating environments that match the luxury watches they showcase.

“We offer our customers a wide and unique range of different brands, giving them the best and neutral advice in a beautiful, modern and truly luxurious setting,”

says CEO Joachim Ziegler. “On the second floor of our stores, you will find the most sought-after collectible pieces exhibited in our custom made watch winder-wall – a true heaven for watch enthusiasts. It is here, in the Espace Connaisseur, where we organize gatherings for watch collectors and special exhibitions about various topics, and where we treat our VIP clients to a personal but discreet service they find nowhere else.”

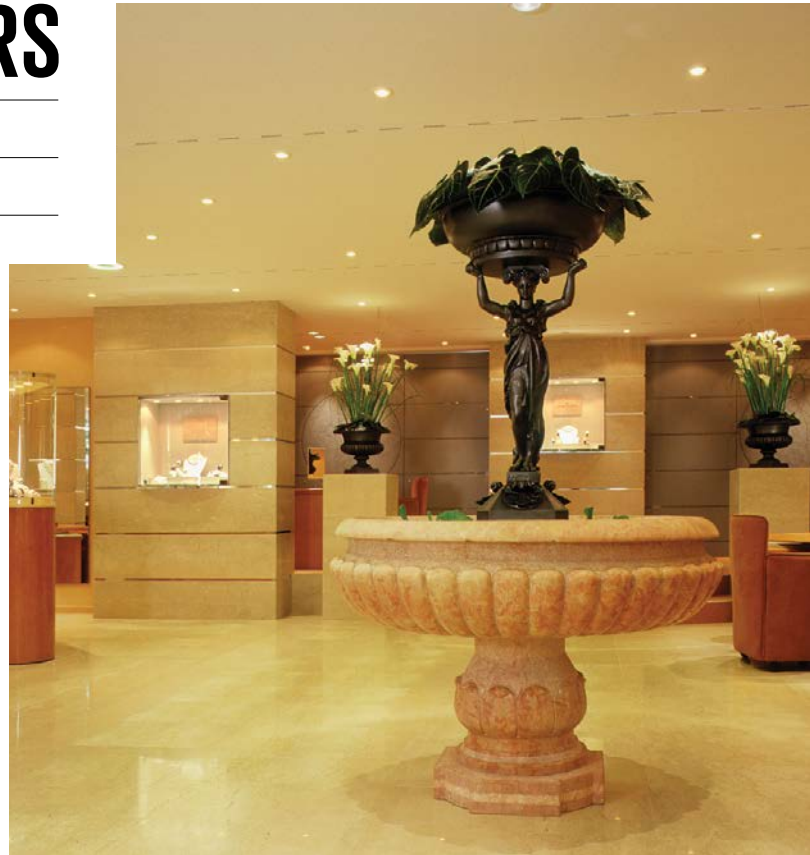
The four Les Ambassadeurs stores are decorated in a style befitting their environment. For example, in the St. Moritz store, the store is fitted with mountain stone and wood, matching the

high-end resort itself. In Geneva, the inside of the store complements Geneva’s mixture of old and new.

“A multi-brand retailer is kind of like a living thing, where the total is more important than any single piece, but the total can’t exist without the single pieces,” Ziegler says. “It’s the team, it’s the mixture of brands, it’s the amount of brands, and it’s the philosophy of our company. We are not just selling watches; we are living and breathing watches. We are not just exposing brands, but it is the way they are exposed. I can’t sell watches in an environment that is not up to the level of products we are selling.”



Joachim Ziegler, CEO of Les Ambassadeurs, caters to collectors with high-end service.



Each store has an Espace Connaisseur area (lower right), where watch lovers can meet and see great product.



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MALMAISON



Singapore



thehourglass.com



Designed to feel like a home or a private museum, Malmaison is as much an experience as a retail store.

Malmaison in Singapore is inspired by Château de Malmaison, the famous 19th century home of Napoleon and Josephine Bonaparte.

The Hour Glass is the leading retailer in Singapore specializing in high-end watches, special limited editions and unique timepieces from the finest brands. Back in 2011, The Hour Glass executive director Michael Tay came up with the idea to create a showcase space that could present special watches, jewelry and other high end products.

The result is Malmaison.

Inspired by Château de Malmaison, the famous 19th century home of Napoleon and Josephine Bonaparte, Malmaison in Singapore is a space where The Hour Glass can display virtually anything that fits into the luxury experience.

“Malmaison has not only fulfilled our enduring desire to create a unique luxury emporium concept in the global retail landscape, it also fuels our long term vision to be the world’s leading cultural enterprise,” explains Tay. “Malmaison is about celebrating the ingenuity of the human mind — that man has progressed so far as to create, simply with an idea and his hands, an object of

such impassioned refinement. Malmaison is designed to be the ultimate temple of luxury with its carefully curated collections of the finest of each category, be it in jewelry, horology, clothing or fragrances.”

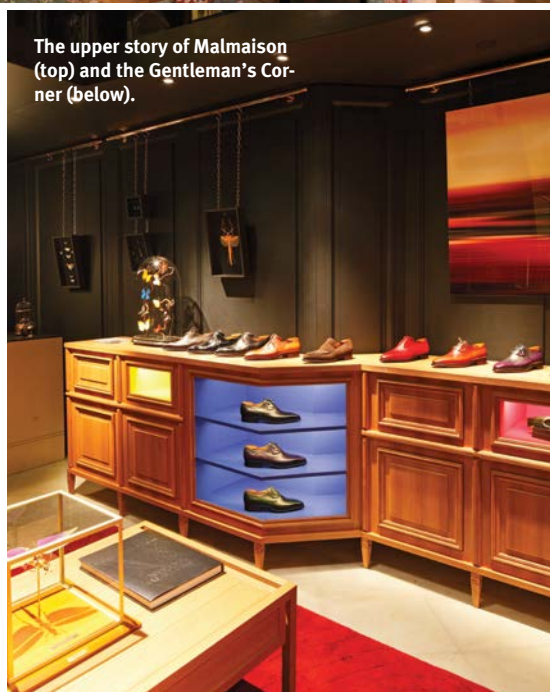
Some of the brands showcased at Malmaison include French jewelry designer Aurélie Bidermann; Pierre Corthay, French bespoke shoemaker; Rubinacci custom tailors; Frédéric Malle fragrances; Shamballa jewelry; Taschen Books; Mawi Keivom; Audrey Savransky’s AS29; and Marjana Von Berlepsch.

The design of Malmaison is crafted to evoke a private home or museum, where customers can feel comfortable spending time chatting or just relaxing. “We wanted to create an atmosphere of coffee and conversation, in a setting that evokes a sense of





The upper story of Malmaison (top) and the Gentleman's Corner (below).



nostalgia, yet is not steeped in the traditional, as we are principally a contemporary culture,” explains Tay. “Here, you will find 300 year-old restored antique clocks from Charles Le Roy, master clockmaker to Napoleon, ticking alongside some of the world’s finest and most progressive timepieces; underscoring the fact that an object of real craftsmanship has perpetual value, even over centuries. More than just a retail space, Malmaison is an exploratory space to wander in, be intrigued by and discover.

“We want our customers to feel like they are our houseguests; to enter Malmaison is like entering someone’s house, or an intimate little museum,” Tay continues. “We have spared no efforts in enhancing their experience, be it in the scattering of personal artifacts and curios that completely enliven the space, or the comfortable lighting and soft furnishings like antique rugs and settees.”



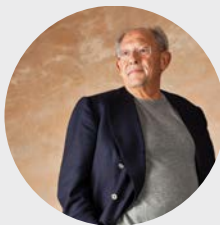
MARCUS



London, England



marcuswatches.com



Owner and founder of Marcus, Marcus Margulies.

Named after its owner and founder, Marcus Margulies, the Marcus store aims to have the largest collections of the best brands and the highest complications of any store in the UK, and they certainly have succeeded.

Margulies has a long history in the watch industry. His father was a watch importer and distributor, and Marcus continued in the family business, amassing a large collection

of timepieces as well as solid relationships with the best brands. He opened the Marcus boutique in 2002.

“Clients who enter our store are looking for luxury timepieces, and so the service has to match the product,” store manager Paul Allison says. “All clients are treated as individuals and offered the Marcus experience. Due to the success of our social media, we get a lot of passionate watch aficionados who cannot afford some of the pieces, but we are not going to turn them away, and are happy to give them a tour of the store and show off some of our pieces.”

Unlike other watch stores, Marcus does not use the displays from the brands, but focuses on the store as the brand. “All the displays we use are created in-house and bear the Marcus logo,” Allison points out.

Being located on London’s renowned Bond Street means that Marcus has a lot of foot traffic, and the store focuses on the windows to catch customers’ attention.

“We try to change the windows at least once a month and as pieces are sold, or come on, they are constantly added,” Allison details. “In addition, we have clients from all over the world who come regularly throughout the year to see us, so we need something different every time that they come in. This can be difficult as some of the brands that we stock only produce a very small amount of pieces per year.”

As for the secret of success, Margulies credits following his instinct and basing his final choice on knowledge and emotion. “Emotion cannot work without knowledge and knowledge without emotion,” Margulies says. “The combination of both is irresistible to an individualist. I have never been afraid to make mistakes. The Marcus boutique is a vital part of that philosophy which has worked very well for me.”

“Emotion cannot work without knowledge and knowledge without emotion. The combination of both is irresistible to an individualist.”
MARCUS MARGULIES

DHAMANI



UAE



dhamani.com



The Dhamani 1969
flagship store in the
Dubai Mall.

Founded in 1969 and based in the UAE, Dhamani operates 15 boutiques — the flagship store in the Dubai Mall, and 14 Dhamani boutiques spread throughout the region. In addition, Dhamani is the sole distributor of the 99-faceted Dubai-cut diamond.

“We are in the people business, and our key touch points are the personalized service and attention to detail, not only in the product, but in the different experience that we offer when the client enters our boutique,” says CEO and managing director Amit Dhamani. “Being the only vertically integrated jeweler in the Gulf Cooperation Council market, we have control over where our gemstones are sourced from. We also have in-house designers who can sit down with customers to understand their tastes and provide a bespoke experience. Every piece of jewelry we make is bespoke, tailored to suit the desires of our customers.

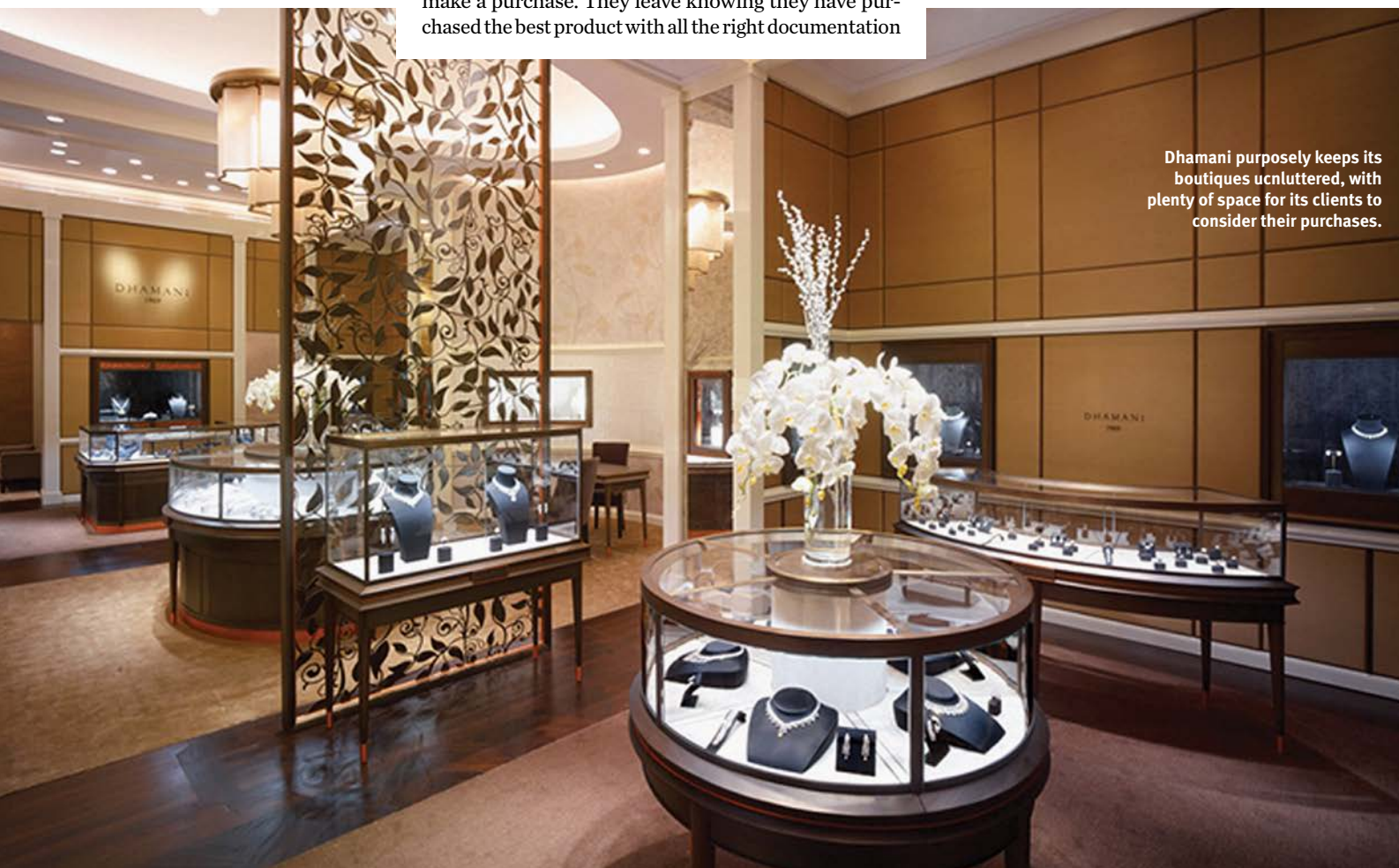
Because everything Dhamani sells is custom, the store experience surrounds clients with only the finest quality gems and service. “Since each of our pieces is bespoke, and the gems sourced ourselves, we want to create the feeling of contentment, comfort and pride when they make a purchase. They leave knowing they have purchased the best product with all the right documentation

with the assurance of the Dhamani seal on it.”

The layout of the Dhamani boutique reflects the company’s approach to gemstones and jewelry and the brand’s place in the industry. As Dhamani operates in the high end of the jewelry business, the boutiques are set up to allow the space and time needed by the customers.

“Customers who come for these products certainly need more time to make their decisions,” Dhamani says. “We have developed a segmented way of display and arrangement of jewelry that provides customers with focused product selections. We are constantly training our team in various aspects and skills related to this.”

The future of Dhamani rests in the transparency of the company in its sourcing of fine-quality gemstones and crafting of world-class jewels, Dhamani says. “The surprise element for a client comes from different experiences with the Dhamani product. We personally take care of our customers to understand their needs and ensure that we fulfill them and more. That way when they leave, they can be confident that what they wear is truly something unique only for them.”



Dhamani purposely keeps its boutiques uncluttered, with plenty of space for its clients to consider their purchases.