



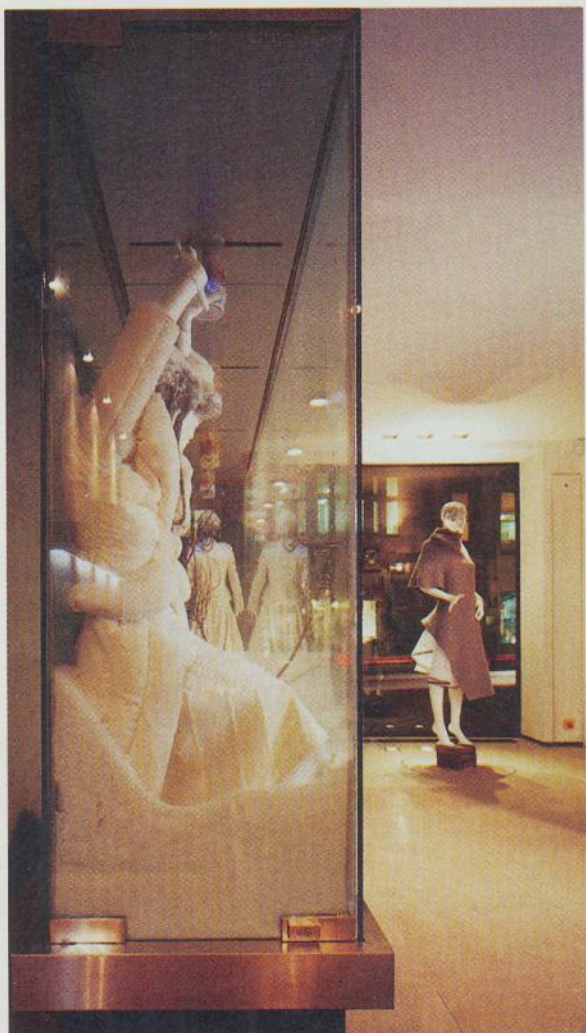
Azman Owens creates a flexible, theatrical stage set for designer Alexander McQueen's first freestanding store in London.

metamorphic McQueen

BEWARE, FAINT-HEARTED SHOPPERS. There are a few provocative surprises to be found at Alexander McQueen's flagship store on London's Conduit Street, a peculiar location running between the West End's Regent Street and Saville Row, epicenter of British tailoring. The first surprise is Conduit Street itself. In the past, the sole reason to visit Conduit Street was a very serious, high-security spy shop offering all kinds of useful paraphernalia for those favoring a career in espionage. Then, two years ago, Vivienne

Westwood set up shop there—whoever suggested she was eccentric?—followed in short order by Issey Miyake, Moschino and, most recently, McQueen.

But it does make sense. Where else in central London could locations of these middling proportions be found? Gucci and Armani have their massive emporia; others their discreet salons. Conduit Street's stores inhabit 18th-century Georgian houses that offer something in between—a thousand or so square feet with room for more upstairs. McQueen's store, which opened last season, occupies one floor only. From the street it is difficult to discern the full dimensions of the store, or even see the merchandise for that matter. Visitors must first march past a 25-ft.-long sheet-aluminum cash/wrap to enter the body of the store. The entrance acts as a theatrical foyer offering hints of what lies beyond. A glass vitrine that crashes through the storefront window presents McQueen's latest eccentric psychodrama. Opposite the long cash/wrap are acrylic display boxes →



Opposite: In the shop's central section, a flexible steel framework supports a revolving portrait of McQueen by Sam Knight.

Left: At the entry, a long display vitrine projects beyond the glass storefront as if it had been forced through. The vitrine accommodates theatrical tableaux from the mind of McQueen.

PHOTOGRAPHY: KEITH COLLIE



finish. Hung on a flexible rotation system, display panels (which are themselves adaptable to many widths) can accommodate glass, metal, wood, or any other desired material. The individually motorized panels have the capacity to rotate and shift angles. (Recently, a horizontal bed of nails was created out of one panel.) With this system the store can be completely re-apportioned at whim. "The steel beams alone cost a quarter of the entire budget," notes Azman. Menswear is displayed demurely, as if at a Saville Row shop, "which was the intention—to remind McQueen of his roots."

"We like to have one big idea, and we decided we were going to design a stage that McQueen could reset as he pleases," says Azman. "He is not like any other designer who has a stock style or a signature—he is nomadic, his collections change every season, and we needed to create a shop that changes for him," adds Owens.

Walls are clad in panels of fibrous cement and the floor is finished with limestone tiles and polished concrete. The suspended ceiling system of powder-coated aluminum fins was designed to obscure existing cornices and crown moldings, which were thought to be protected under British preservation codes. "Then we discovered that the ceilings had been decorated in the mid-1920s, so they could be removed," says Azman. Nevertheless, the architects' ceiling system was installed and now conceals the services and lighting. "McQueen doesn't like to see light fixtures at all," notes Owens. After the artificial legs, the desire to conceal light sources seems downright normal.

—Suzanne Trocmé



Opposite: The accessories wall with acrylic boxes lit from above is repainted each season.

Right: Changing rooms are constructed of translucent glass, including floors that light up when stepped on.

WALLS: KNAUF. LIGHTS: ERCO, CONCORD LIGHTING, KREON. GLASS: SAINT-GOBAIN SOLAGLAS. FRAMEWORK/CEILING: CAMPION AND PARTNERS. SPECIALIST JOINERY: DAVIS HOWARTH JACOB. STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: BRIAN ECKERSLEY. MAIN CONTRACTOR: TAKENAKA UK.

