



## Environmental Art

A mood board of what inspired—and what's sold at—the Conservatory reveals that it's all about the experience of being there first, buying later.

**FASHION** As you approach the foyer of the Conservatory—the brand-new store in the center of the emerging Manhattan neighborhood known as Hudson Yards—you have the sensation of time-traveling to a world that's part nineteenth-century botanical-garden atrium, part mid-century hotel lobby. Where you're really headed, though, is to the future of retail—which is fast becoming as centered on community as it is on commerce.

"I think about it every minute," says Brian Bolke, the Conservatory's mastermind, and what he thinks about is changing our understanding of what shopping is. Before taking on Hudson Yards, Bolke spent a few decades in retail in Texas as the founder of Forty Five Ten and, before that, of a Dallas flower store. At the Conservatory, a palpable environment of green plants

FASHION > 97

### THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: A 1995 VOGUE SPREAD SHOT BY STEVEN MEISEL; NEW YORK'S HUDSON YARDS; PHOTOGRAPHED BY RON GALELLA; AN IRENE NEUWIRTH CRYSTAL NECKLACE (IRENE NEUWIRTH.COM); A BOUQUET BY LEWIS MILLER DESIGN; THE EAMES LA CHAISE CHAIR; THE INTERIOR OF NAPA VALLEY'S PROMONTORY WINERY.

STEVEN MEISEL, VOGUE, 1995; HUDSON YARDS; REN DERING, COURTESY OF RELATED/OXFORD; BOWIE AND IMAN; PHOTOGRAPH BY RON GALELLA, COURTESY OF STALEY WISE GALLERY, NEW YORK; FRAME, SUBJUG/GETTY IMAGES; NECKLACE, JOSEPHINE SCHIELE; FLOWERS; DON FREEMAN/LEWIS MILLER DESIGN; CHAIR, COURTESY OF DESIGN WITHIN REACH; PROMONTORY; GINA GAILLE FROM LUXNAPA.COM; TAPE, FLAS100/SHUTTERSTOCK; DETAILS, SEE IN THIS ISSUE.

and flowers—designed by New York’s reigning floral impresario, Lewis Miller—greet visitors and replaces the usual store windows. “People are not going to expect it,” Bolke said, touring the space recently.

Though there are plenty of familiar stores elsewhere in Hudson Yards (the city’s first Neiman Marcus, a new Forty Five Ten, Stuart Weitzman, a two-story H&M), all connected to the High Line and the new Equinox Hotel, when you pass through the Conservatory’s entrance you’ll enter a space that you might first confuse for a branch of the Staley-Wise Gallery, which has curated a selection of Ron Galella photos from the seventies and eighties for the space. You’ll see crystal jewelry by Irene Neuwirth and ocean-inspired Dezso jewelry by Sara Beltrán; there’s also a meditation space, operated by Bastide. The centerpiece, though, will be a restaurant where customers sit in Eames chairs, surrounded by Knoll wall coverings and Pacific Northwest plantings, with culinary accessories from Finesse, Thomas Keller’s line (some of the food is by Keller as well). All of it, of course—from items to experiences to the food—is for sale.

As for the fashion: Forget racks; forget stacks. Designer pieces, from regenerated Stella McCartney cashmere to Jil Sander shirting, have been edited

What the Conservatory represents is a sea change, a true tipping point, for retail

and commingled, yes. But here’s the catch: You can’t actually buy anything at the Conservatory in the traditional sense. Instead, an “adviser” will—after answering any questions about sizing or, really, anything else—register you on the Conservatory’s website. Once you’re on the site, the magic of coding

connects your shopping cart directly to the brands whose pieces you have just seen, touched, and tried on. Once purchased, the pieces are sent to you at home or, if you prefer, to the Conservatory for later pickup, sans the scourge of cardboard boxes. (You cannot, however, simply buy from the site without visiting the store first.)

What this represents is a sea change, a true tipping point, for retail. Without racks of inventory to manage, Bolke is free to focus on the sort of immersive experience that seems to ask you what you want instead of telling you, to lead you instead of push you. He takes his cues from the past, working to create the feeling of intimate luxury in the old Takashimaya on Fifth Avenue or the casual, almost familial sense of the early days of Barneys New York. (It’s an admittedly shifting vista: Every three months, the Conservatory space will be redesigned, reconfigured, reimagined.)

Bolke’s “aha” moment in all of this? “Service went away,” he says. “And while wherever you shop may feel very Zen and chic, if you have an informed and *actually* friendly person who greets you? That’s what’s going to make you want to go.”—ROBERT SULLIVAN