

## RETAIL

# Design plays a key role in the blooming business of flower shops



## JULY'S FLOWERS SHANGHAI

Alberto Caiola amplifies the natural beauty of blossoms with large mirrored dishes. As shoppers move around these objects, the reflections shift with them.



**ALONG WITH THE RISE** over the past decade of botanical creative agencies specializing in floral art direction, and designers who match blossom to boudoir in enchanting 'encounters' with flowers, we've seen a renewed focus on florists. As objects of beauty in and of themselves, flowers can be a store's best decoration. Often, little else is needed, even when blooms appear in a neutral context. Recently, however, such shops are no longer furnished to resemble hothouses or apothecaries. Rather than recusing themselves before the blooms, they frame the flowers, amplifying their virtues. Advances in technology, social media and screens have led to a commensurate increase in the design not just of things but of experiences that revolve around the senses: sight, touch, smell, taste. From China to Denmark, three flower shops demonstrate the whats and whys of this colourful trend.

In Dongguan, China, O32I Studio uses a florist's to anchor the hybrid environment of Nous Restaurant & Flowers. Rather than simply dispersing blossoms throughout the dining room, Nous also harvests their natural decor in a discrete vestibular volume that abuts the restaurant without entering it. Customers must pass through the flower shop to dine, and natural light enters the restaurant through the sheer rose-hued box, which 'influences' the interior with its luminous glow. The concept establishes a symbiotic »



**‘I think we are more drawn to nature and living things because we are online almost all the time’**

reciprocity between the two businesses. With one bathed in colour and the other desaturated, an extraordinary visual results where the two meet or overlap, playing with the current attraction to commercial space. ‘Combining a flower shop with a restaurant means that each affects the other visually, emotionally and in terms of sales,’ says designer Buyang Zheng, who suggested the dual structure to the client.

Instead of entering beneath an awning, visitors arrive at July’s Flowers in Shanghai under a panel of distorting mirror that extends into the shop and across the ceiling. Inside, flowers are displayed in a cluster of pots mounted in front of large dishes that artfully warp the reflected blooms, framing

them with their own skewed images. Think funfair mirrors and add the sophistication of a Christian Dior catwalk. As shoppers move around these objects, the reflections shift with them in a dynamic response that feels emotional.

‘Our job as designers is to give shape to time and culture,’ says Alberto Caiola, design director of his eponymous studio. Caiola conceived July’s Flowers as a product of its environment: Shanghai, a city that seems both futuristic and historical. ‘Social media is helping to transform physical stores into social objects, dematerialized and defined by the conversation happening around them,’ he says. ‘I see this as a great opportunity to reimagine the role of design.’ »



Meat Mountain

## NOUS RESTAURANT & FLOWERS DONGGUAN

Playing with the magnetism of retail facades, O321 Studio invites guests to enter the dining area of Nous Restaurant & Flowers through a street-facing volume occupied by a florist's.





He believes in the potential of the 'offline/online loop' to turn spaces into must-see destinations that stimulate more business. 'The younger generation is consciously seeking value for money, as well as opportunities to increase their social currency. They are more likely to prioritize spending on experiences.' According to Caiola, today's retail world has surpassed need to fully embrace 'wonder, desire and emotion'.

The design of Tableau in Copenhagen is another example of a 'destination' that allows customers to *experience* flowers instead of just buying them, says designer David Thulstrup, who finds potent ways to accentuate the grown goods and, at the same time, to elicit desire. Thulstrup relies on clean, simple elements while establishing extreme contrasts of texture and material (stripped concrete, glass brick, steel displays) and between artificial and natural. 'I wanted to create a space in which flowers could be presented like art pieces in a gallery,' he says. 'Besides getting your everyday flowers, you can find inspiration in a place that makes you want to explore every inch of the store.' All custom-designed tableaux are a balanced combination of the colourful, warm, living textures of plant life and a selection of cooler materials that include stone, glass, LED lighting and metal.

'I think we are more drawn to nature and the intimacy of being in contact with living things because we are online almost all the time,' says Thulstrup, who observes a corresponding shift in design: people want to experience fashion and flowers in curated spaces, viewing them as art, not just as merchandise. Like Caiola, he sees a change in the way people communicate, thanks to the increasing use of social media and online platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest. 'Today's shop owners have to think not only about *what* they sell but also about *how* these goods are portrayed and curated,' he says. 'Tableau is a gallery that showcases flowers while giving them the respect they deserve.' — SM

0321studio.com  
albertocaiola.com  
studiodavidthulstrup.com

Irina Boersma



## TABLEAU COPENHAGEN

'Besides getting your everyday flowers, you can find inspiration in a place that makes you want to explore every inch of the store,' says David Thulstrup, the designer behind Tableau in Copenhagen.