





retail

By Danine Alati
Photography by Adrian Wilson

project: Blanc de Chine New York Flagship

client: Kin Yeung, Blanc De Chine

location: New York

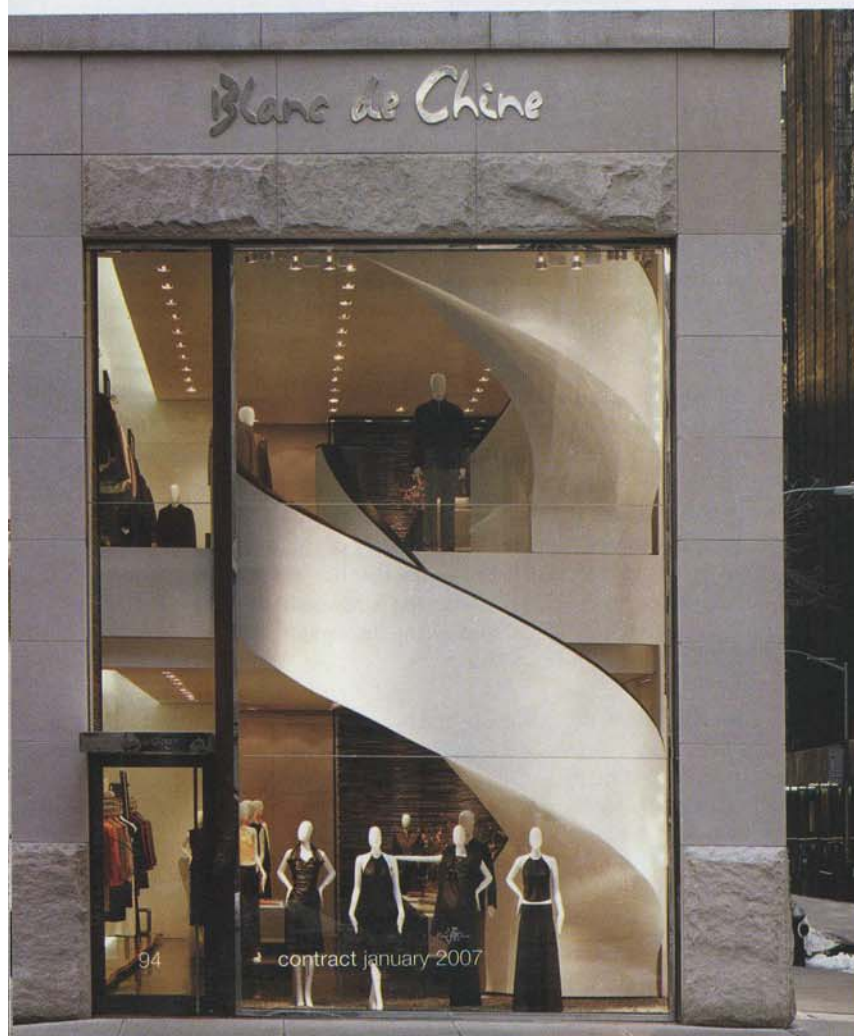
designer: S. Russell Groves

Sensuality, functionality, simplicity, serenity, subtlety, purity, harmony, and comfort are the eight Zen-influenced disciplines reflected in Blanc de Chine, the retail group established almost 20 years ago to embrace contemporary, renaissance life and interpret cultural influences from the East, according to the company's philosophy. With stores located in Beijing and Hong Kong, the brand that offers women's and men's wear, fashion and home accessories, and bespoke/couture services has found a home on an American shopping thoroughfare on New York's Fifth Avenue in a prominent jewel-box space, designed by S. Russell Groves.

"The design of the store is inspired by the clothes themselves. Both have an Asian influence, yet are modernized and streamlined," explains Taryn Kraimer, who handles public relations and marketing for Blanc de Chine in the United States. "We wanted to incorporate Chinese elements in the design but not overdo it. We didn't want it to scream Chinese—there is no red décor."

According to the designers, the project was an exercise in contrasts: modern versus traditional; hard versus soft; rectangular versus curvilinear; crisp steel, stone, and glass versus warm, natural woods. With an all-glass façade, this three-story flagship store serves as a beacon on the corner of 53rd Street that can be seen from as far as 10 blocks away. A sweeping, sinuous staircase juxtaposes with the rigid geometry of the boxy interior and storefront to attract passersby to this brand that has yet to attain nationwide recognition in the United States. Ipe hardwood forms the oversized entry door and slender column slicing through the front glazing to provide a touch of warmth and texture.

"The space is a simple box punctuated by the beautiful organic shape of the stair," notes S. Russell Groves, principal of his New York-based firm. "Due to the openness of the facade and the close proximity of the stair, at certain times of day the glass seems to dissolve and the stair simply hovers over Fifth Avenue."



The client, Blanc De Chine owner Kin Yeung, sought interiors that would complement the brand's updated interpretations of traditional Chinese apparel, reference Chinese motifs and forms, and still reflect the progressive vision of the company. Designers also incorporated the Chinese appreciation of nature with rich variegated hardwood floors, walnut plinths, and ebonized rift oak cabinetry. Bamboo, an oft-overused material, translates into an inventive design element with vacuum-formed acrylic screens that hang in a series of vertical planes.

"I love the treatment of the vacuum formed acrylic bamboo," Groves admits. "We took a very traditional and rather cliché material and transformed it into something innovative, modern, and completely seductive. When light hits it, the creulation of the material refracts the light and creates an ethereal, shimmering effect."

Literally meaning "white of China"—reflecting admiration for the purity of Chinese white porcelain—Blanc de Chine exudes that sense of sleek purity coupled with natural elements in this 5,650-sq.-ft. space. And given the tight footprint, time frame, and budget, Groves adds, "In the spirit of 'less is more,' I think we achieved a great deal with minimal moves and within minimal means." ©



jury comment:
“There is a nice counterpart between the merchandise and the architecture. One single gesture—the stair—unites the two floors and is a dramatic contrast to all the glass.”