

Stella McCartney's propulsion into the 'A-list' world of fashion designers was no doubt helped by the three stores that were designed for her by budding London architectural practice Universal Design Studio, the retail and interiors arm of furniture designers Barber Osgerby. After a stint at Chloé, Stella McCartney went on to create her own fashion brand, a sassy girl-about-town label endorsed by her celebrity friends and characterized by crisp tailoring and a feminine edge.

Her first store was the New York flagship, located in the trendy meat-packing district. The brief to Universal Design Studio was for a relaxed environment with an air of nature, where customers could feel free to explore and discover the ready-to-wear collection. Set in a gritty urban landscape, the environment wanted to evoke an idealized British landscape, a retreat from the humdrum of the city. As with many retailers today, McCartney was also keen to create a distinctive shopping experience that would attract customers: a space that is defined by clean and modern lines while maintaining a 'soft', rather than a tougher technology driven, interior.

Universal Design Studio simplified the brief into four main themes: relaxation, nature, discovery and differentiation. Nature and relaxation were represented by an 'abstract landscape' built in different scales throughout the 372-square-metre (4,000-square-foot) warehouse space. The window display is set in a pool of water with lily-like display structures – the water reflects the natural light, thus minimizing the reliance on artificial light. Hanging screens, evocative of blades of grass, create partitions and sway in the air as customers come in. The long eastern wall is crafted out of white ceramic 3D hexagonal tiles, designed by Barber Osgerby, cleverly turning the hard material into a delicate pattern. More decoration comes in the guise of the western wall, covered in a peach fabric and prettily outlined by motifs of hummingbirds,



1 The long eastern wall is crafted out of white ceramic 3D hexagonal tiles.



2 Hanging screens, evocative of blades of grass, introduce the 'nature' theme to the store.



3 The window display is set in a pool of water that reflects the natural light into the shop.



4 Vintage items are cleverly encased in delicate display drawers lined with floral silk inlays.

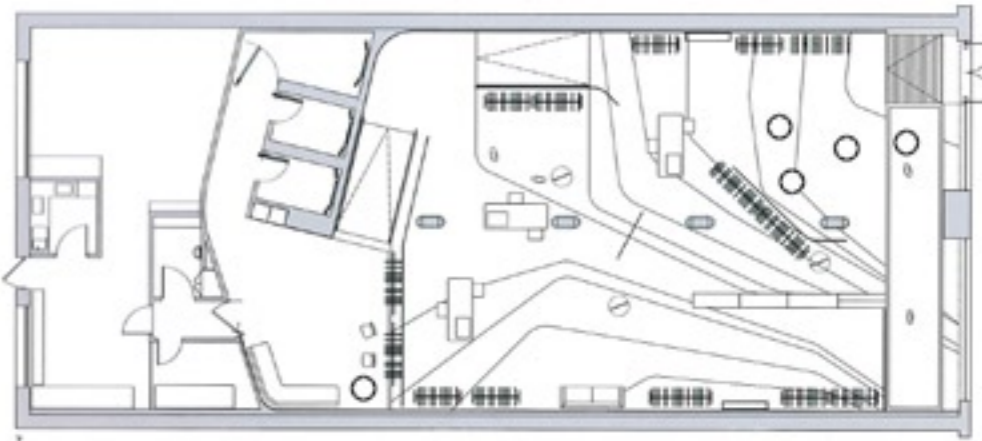
5 All the furniture in the store is custom-made by Barber Osgerby.



flowers, trees, horseshoes and a female centaur, all designed by McCartney herself.

Other features interpret the differentiation theme. Most of the furniture, display units and hanging rails are flexible and can be rearranged. The rear section is an intimate lounge, featuring bespoke seating by Barber Osgerby that has the period look of mid-century (1950s) pieces. In a bid to remove the financial transaction as much as possible from the shopping experience, the till has been withdrawn from the front of house to a room at the rear where a sales-person conducts all transactions.

Having eliminated the financial aspect, the store's design focuses on emphasizing the social and discovering experience. Customers are encouraged to rummage through several drawers, lined with different floral silk inlays, to discover Stella McCartney's collection of bespoke pieces and vintage finds, such as costume jewellery, accessories and chinaware. Floor-to-ceiling mirrors rotate on their vertical axes, enhancing the spacious atmosphere in a sophisticated game of hide-and-seek.



6 The themes of 'nature' and 'relaxation' are represented by an abstract landscape built in different scales.

7 From the top: a section and plan showing the varied floor contours in the Stella McCartney store.