



Above: Red carpet unites the various spaces, materials and objects within the expansive store interior

Right: A display wall of backlit brass tiles blends shape and surface into a mesmerising whole

RED

METICULOUS COMPOSITIONS OF MATERIAL AND COLOUR CHARACTERISE CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN'S SINGAPORE STORE, WHERE 212BOX HAS CRAFTED AN ENTICING REALM WITH MUCH TO OFFER.



TEXT > GWEN LEE
PHOTOGRAPHY > EDWARD HENDRICKS

ALLURE



SHOE DESIGNER CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN once likened men to bulls, saying they are unable to resist the red soles that have become the signature of his brand. Apparently, legions of women are also fixated, having turned his 23-year-old company into one of the most coveted luxury fashion brands in the world. With more than 500,000 pairs of shoes sold a year, Louboutin's signature red soles have become a secret code to the knowing, the glamorous and the fashionable. And it is to this glimpse of red that the facade of the new Singapore boutique pays homage.

Designed by the New York firm 212box, the latest outpost of the Louboutin kingdom is located in a sprawling 1,500-square-foot shop space in Ngee Ann City. Louboutin fans visiting the store for the first time will no doubt be charmed by flashes of red winking at them from the protruding edges of geometric walnut wall tiles. Meticulously arranged to form a herringbone pattern, the three-dimensional bands are punctuated by larger tiles to create floral pinwheel patterns. Together with the full-height glass display windows, this interplay of transparency and opacity sets the tone for the luxurious but intimate settings within.

Beyond the glass doors, one is immediately greeted by a burst of green light emanating from a beehive-like lighting fixture suspended from an elliptical ceiling cove. Beyond this stands a

4.7-metre-long curved wall with four alcoves formed by backlit etched brass tiles. Various Louboutin creations are showcased in these alcoves, their sensual lines made all the more seductive by the gridded background. To the right of this entrance space lies the men's retail room, and to the left, the two women's rooms. Anchored by a circular sofa with rainbow-coloured stripes, the first women's room is flanked by three display walls, each boasting a different material and technique, and each a testament to the brand's attention to detail and craftsmanship.

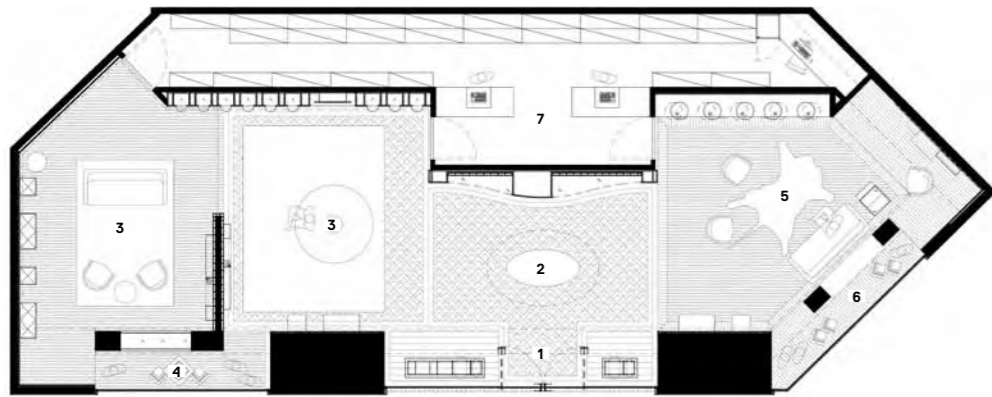
The flashiest of the three is the backlit metal wall that unites the two women's retail rooms. It was made from brass sheets that have been photo-etched with patterns inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright's design for concrete tiles and woodwork. The thin sheets were also meticulously hand-folded to create light wells, several of which are extruded as shelving. At the far end of the room, a wall of travertine stone tiles – arranged in a herringbone pattern similar to the shop front – provides a contrasting statement with its weight and gravitas.

It is easy to see why 212box has been appointed as the designer to many Louboutin retail stores around the world. The multidisciplinary firm not only designs the layout, it invents and produces all of the key materials that go into the stores, often collaborating with artists and craftspeople to create a specific look for each boutique.

"Christian and I always discuss what we love about a city and what our experiences are when we travel," says Eric Clough, Principal of 212box. "Then we embark on sharing our love of materials and new ways of changing materials using traditional and new techniques – sometimes specific to the region and sometimes steeped in history, literary references or just infused by the craft of making things."

Just as the shoes and bags are unique to each Louboutin store, every boutique is in turn a unique translation of the culture and city that frames it. Actively involved in the interior design process, Louboutin's idiosyncratic taste makes its presence felt throughout the entire space. This is especially pronounced in the men's retail room, which exerts its masculinity with a Jean-Francois Lesage tiger rug that was hand-embroidered in Chennai, India. Referencing the cobbler's trade, the men's section is replete with details such as studded leather panels, carved wooden scallop tiles and spiked circle displays. Again, 212box references the external walnut wall by repeating the floral pinwheel motifs on the men's studded wall.

LEGEND
1 Entry | 2 Retail Room | 3 Women's Retail Room | 4 Women's Visual Merchandising | 5 Men's Retail Room | 6 Men's Visual Merchandising | 7 Back of House



PLAN



"CHRISTIAN AND I ALWAYS DISCUSS WHAT WE LOVE ABOUT A CITY AND WHAT OUR EXPERIENCES ARE WHEN WE TRAVEL."

ERIC CLOUGH

Top Left: Custom-designed, die-cut, hand-folded brass plates were inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright's designs for concrete tiles and woodwork

Above: Leather wall tiles introduce another colour and texture to the men's retail room



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Not unlike the French designer's office, which is crammed full of souvenirs from his travels (sphinxes, obelisks, skulls, etc.), the store surprises with unexpected artefacts such as reclaimed tin panels from New England and a spider web made of chains. With the clever use of mirrors, recesses and lighting, the experience of entering a Christian Louboutin boutique is more than a casual retail trip. It is a journey into Louboutin's psyche.

"Viewing a reflection of the stone wall, sandwiched between a sparkling brass-tile wall and a red leather wall, accented by the red carpet, always throws me into the dreamy world of the Louboutin experience," says Clough, who is particularly pleased with the way the architectural materials are layered together through the mirrored surfaces.

While some may view such an intensively designed space as functionally inflexible, the temporary conversion of the Louboutin Hong Kong boutique – also by 212box – into an art gallery proves otherwise. Following the success of Quentin Shih's photography exhibition in May, Chief Operating Officer Alexis Mourot does not rule out the possibility of the Singapore boutique going beyond its role as a purely commercial space. "Given the right opportunity," he says, "we definitely welcome creative projects in the Ngee Ann City boutique that show our continual support for the arts." Never before has a shoe shop had so much to offer.



CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN

CLIENT Christian Louboutin
ARCHITECTURE FIRM 212box
 Architecture PC
PROJECT TEAM MEMBERS Eric
 Clough, Eun Sun Chun
BUILDER Pushing Tin Pte Ltd
CONSULTING ENGINEER Plan One
 Engineering Services
FS CONTRACTOR 2UE Engineering
 Pte Ltd
FURNITURE AND FIXTURES SUPPLY
 Ardes Design Associates Ltd

TOTAL FLOOR AREA 140sqm

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FINISHES
 Geometric Walnut and Travertine Wall Tiles
 Custom Designed by 212box Products
 LLC. Die-cut, Hand-folded Brass Plates
 Custom Designed by 212box Products
 LLC. Reclaimed Tin Panels on Display
 Furniture by 212box Products LLC. Red
 Leather Wall Tiles and Hand-embroidered
 Tiger Rug by Lesage Intérieurs. Oak
 Parquet Flooring supplied by Ardes Design
 Associates Ltd.

FIXED AND FITTED
 Joinery, Display Systems and Signage by
 Ardes Design Associates Ltd.

LIGHTING
 Bespoke Glass Teardrop Pendant Lamp
 Supplied by Ardes Design Associates Ltd.

FURNITURE
 Circular Lounge Custom Designed by
 212box and Fabricated by Pushing Tin Pte
 Ltd with Upholstery Fabrics by CETEC.
 Armchairs Supplied by Out of Stock with
 Upholstery Fabrics by CETEC.

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Left: Custom-designed
 geometric travertine wall tiles
 play with the light dramatically

Above: Flashes of red peek
 from the protruding edges of
 walnut tiles beside the entry