

# CINEMATIC FASHION

THE THOM BROWNE BOUTIQUE IN HONG KONG'S CENTRAL DISTRICT CALLS TO MIND A MOVIE SET THROUGH ITS EVOCATION OF A MID-CENTURY OFFICE.



Above: The presence of mirrors throughout the store builds on the cinematic air with multiple frames of view



TEXT  
PHOTOGRAPHY

▷ GWEN LEE  
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STEPPING THROUGH THE DOORS OF Thom Browne's new boutique in Hong Kong is like entering a time machine. Instead of a traditional retail space with mannequins and shirt stacks, one emerges on the other side in a 1950s office illuminated by fluorescent light tubes. The walls are clad in marble tiles and the floor is of poured terrazzo in a warm hue. Horizontal blinds adorn the wide expanse of floor-to-ceiling glass.

The prevailing colour is grey – reminiscent of the designer's trademark suit – but the mid-century furniture on display punctuates the otherwise neutral palette with splashes of yellows and browns. Just beyond the double doors, a wooden office desk paired with two vintage Edward Wormley Y-back

chairs beckons. Against the wall on the right stands a stainless steel clothes rack hung with shirts and blazers from the label's latest collection. Next to it, a large mirror multiplies the effect of the venetian blinds.

It is tempting to compare the interior to the set of *Mad Men*. Fans of the cult television series may even go so far as to speculate that Browne had conceptualised the space with Don Draper in mind. But the truth is, the fashion designer had laid his claim on the mid-century aesthetic way before the world rediscovered the tight-fitted grey suits of the '60s via their television screens. Moreover, his muse could not be more different from the hard-drinking, adulterous *Mad Men* protagonist. Instead, Browne,

Above: The intentional banality of the office-style setting emphasises the allure of the vintage furniture and the items on display

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who has won awards such as the Council of Fashion Designers of America Menswear Designer of the Year and GQ's Designer of the Year, describes this imaginary gentleman as someone who has good taste but is low-key.

It is easy to imagine being such a man when surrounded by vintage furniture designed by the likes of Paul McCobb and Pierre Jeanneret. With the Hong Kong boutique styled like a movie set, the mind is free to forget the jeans-and-T-shirt culture on the street and embrace the romance of the suit.

To realise this vision, the fashion designer was heavily involved in the renovation of the shop space, which was carried out with New York-based Brazilian architect and interior designer Andre Mellone. Browne adopted a hands-on approach and exerted his influence on every stage of the project, from the conceptualisation of the space, to the selection of building materials, to the sourcing of vintage furniture. "I wanted a boutique environment that evokes not that of any retail space," says Browne, "but rather an office from the late '50s-early '60s based on the aesthetic of my first store in New York." He is quick to emphasise that it is an aesthetic built not on nostalgia, but on the "sensibility and spirit" of that period.

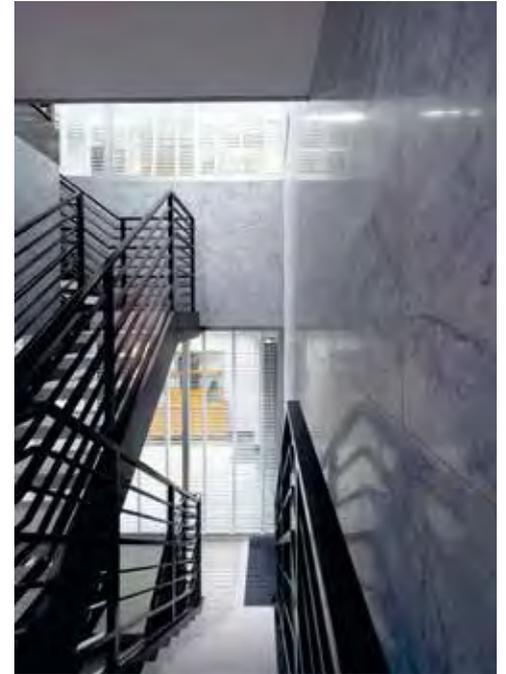
Unlike the New York store, however, the floor space in Central is narrow and long. The boutique, spread over three storeys, relies on an elevator and staircase for circulation. Each level's floor plan is slightly different and suffers from odd corners that seem to conspire against retail display. The vertical circulation quickly became the most challenging aspect of the renovation.

By nature, staircases in narrow buildings are a tricky affair. If designed badly they become eyesores, detracting from the fluidity of the space and deterring movement to the upper levels. Executed well, they become design features and enhance the quality of the interiors they inhabit. To Browne,

Top: Vintage furniture and lighting pieces were mainly sourced from the USA

Bottom: Odd corners in the floor plates were highlighted (rather than concealed) with bands of contrasting surface treatments





## THOM BROWNE

**DESIGNERS** Thom Browne and Studio Mellone

**TOTAL FLOOR AREA** 204 sqm

**THOM BROWNE**  
(1) 212 633 1197 thombrowne.com

**STUDIO MELLONE**  
(1) 646 476 8952 studiomellone.com

**FINISHES**  
Poured terrazzo flooring, marble wall tiles.

**FURNITURE**  
Vintage pieces mainly sourced from the USA.



it was clear from the start that the staircase had to become a design element that complemented the overall language, rather than compete with it. In collaboration with designer Mellone, Browne decided on a metal staircase whose simple lines echo the horizontality of the window blinds. The treads are open and finished with terrazzo similar to the shop floor. To increase the visual connection between levels, grey marble cladding was extended up the full height of the stairwell.

Says Mellone, “For me, the most satisfying thing about the store is the fact that in spite of dealing with very complicated existing conditions, from planning and structural points of view, we were able to accomplish a final design in keeping with the Thom Browne architectural language. We had to let go of symmetry (which is something Thom loves but was impossible to achieve here), and use the materials and lighting to bring back the feel of other stores.”

Moving between levels, one cannot help but be drawn by the museum-like fashion displays beyond the sterile blinds. With his trademark restraint, Browne has created a retail experience that is not only unusual, but oddly cinematic. «

Top left: The angled mirror panels promise the potential of subtle stolen glances of goings on in other parts of the space

Top right: The staircase was designed as an extension of the retail zones and allows for veiled visual connection with them

Bottom: A curiously pared-back scene is displayed at the entrance point