

REFRESHING

Joe Fresh Flagship Store, New York City

Interior by Burdifilek

Original architecture by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill

Photography by Ben Rahn / A-Frame





Canadian fashion brand Joe Fresh has opened a flagship store on the corner of Fifth Avenue and 43rd Street in New York City. The shop is housed in a historic branch of the now-defunct Manufacturers Hanover Trust. The building is commonly known as the "Crystal Lantern" bank, a soubriquet bestowed upon the cube-shaped structure by American historian and architectural critic Lewis Mumford. Designed by SOM's Gordon Bunshaft, the modernist volume was, at the time of its completion in 1954, the first glass-and-steel edifice on Fifth Avenue. Indeed, Crystal Lantern broke the design mould for Big Apple banks, which heretofore had mostly been imposing marble-skinned fortresses. It was designated a New York City Landmark in 1997.

Toronto-based interior design studio Burdilek was commissioned to adapt the Manhattan space from its former finance-function (JP Morgan Chase had been the building's most recent tenant... and owner) to its new use. Banking appendages such as a security storefront and automated teller machines were carefully removed, restoring the facade to its original appearance. The conversion process, however, required that extra entrances be added.

Back in the building after a brief period of exile is a Harry Bertoia sculptural screen, the original installation of which was at the vanguard of the trend for displaying art in corporate settings. Bertoia's six-ton copper-nickel-and-brass-panelled partition now

provides the backdrop for a tableau of mannequins sporting the latest Joe Fresh collection. White floors, walls and ceilings, the latter with built-in lighting, provide a clean, minimalist canvas against which the wares are displayed.

Colour comes from the Canadian outfitter's brightly hued garments, which are sparingly displayed around the cavernous store in plain white powder-coated aluminium wardrobes and polycarbonate cabinets and shelving blocks, or hang from white clotheshorses. Because both the exterior and the interior were 'landmarked', prohibiting the attachment of new fixtures, only freestanding furnishings were deployed.

As with many glass-and-steel volumes, the former bank branch looks its best after dark, when it is illuminated from within; especially with Joe Fresh's ubiquitous trademark orange catching the eye and drawing in passers-by.

The Crystal Lantern is just 60ft tall, and is dwarfed by the other buildings in this princely neighbourhood. Yet it remains an uptown modernist monument, with its 27ft-high windows for the mezzanine level and its open-plan interior. Moreover, it still feels relevant, and Joe Fresh, with its bright, affordable, uncomplicated merchandise, seems an appropriate tenant for Bunshaft's vintage glass cube.