

Joe Fresh in New York

Photos Ben Rahn/A-Frame

At its most prosaic, the sale of clothing in a supermarket tends to mean piling it high and selling it cheap. Yet remove the supermarket setting, add a dash of urban style, and you have the possibility to create something almost entirely different.

Nowhere is this more apparent than at the corner of 43rd Street and Fifth Avenue in New York City, where Canadian supermarket Loblaw's fashion brand, Joe Fresh, has opened its US flagship: a two-floor, glass-and-steel emporium spread across 1300 m². Designed by Toronto-based Burdifilek, the store had the immediate advantage of being housed in one of midtown Manhattan's more striking pieces of mid-century modern architecture.

This is minimalist glass-box retailing, complete with white, powder-coated metal fixtures at ground-floor and mezzanine levels. Diego Burdi, founding partner of Burdifilek, says that rather than the emphasis on wood that characterizes other Joe Fresh stand-alone stores, the material has been omitted here in New York, in homage to the building's architectural form.

Because it's a listed building, the displays touch neither the perimeter of the space nor the ceiling, which is remarkable for the white, light-transmitting panels that

cover its entire surface. Large freestanding screens – some decorative, others used for brand promotion – are found throughout an interior whose notably linear approach to in-store navigation and layout mirrors the clean lines of the building.

The overall impression is one of edgy retail design that promises to provide an expensive shopping experience. Yet this is a brand that has its antecedents in supermarkets, and the bulk of the Joe Fresh offer is still to be found in food stores, with pricing to match.

The idea that a supermarket clothing brand can morph into a credible fashion retailer is still new but evolving fast. We've seen Tesco move along similar lines in Central Europe with its F&F brand, whose stand-alone stores have been trading in the Czech Republic for about as long as Joe Fresh has been on the scene.

And Joe Fresh is a multichannel business. Visit the website, which feels more like an online fashion boutique than anything related to food retailing. The brand has also inked a deal with department store JCPenney that will see it open close to 700 shops-in-shops in the mid-market retailer's US stores, with a roll-out scheduled for early 2013. _

Fast Facts

Location 510 5th Avenue, New York, NY
Website joefresh.com
Design burdifilek.com
Price of a dress US\$39 to \$59
Completion March 2012



Joe Fresh is located in a 5th-Avenue, modernist building by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill.



White, light-transmitting panels cover the ceiling's entire surface.

Does it work?

Aynouk Tan: Following the 1990s hype of overpriced luxury brands and today's chock-a-block information society, what we need is clarity, simplicity and a price-conscious attitude. What satisfies such demands better than a supermarket? Joe Fresh reflects parent company Loblaw's supermarket strategy: graphic lines symbolize clarity, and big windows stand for transparency. Even the colours are almost obsessively organized.

Bodo Vincent Andrin: Landmark architecture on New York's 5th Avenue meets an affordable supermarket fashion brand. Loud orange juxtaposed with contemporary urban shop merchandising. Such contrasts attract attention, and this shop uses them to full advantage.

Rodney Fitch: I love this project, set as it is in a building and location that deserved something special. Sharp detailing, understated fixturing, lovely features – one of those rare occasions where the overworked epithet 'cool' is appropriate in all its senses. The interior exudes the qualities of a good museum of modern design, one where the space has been 'curated' rather than 'merchandised', demonstrating the collection to great advantage.



Add your comment on Facebook with the Layar app

Because it's a listed building, custom-made white displays touch neither the perimeter of the space nor the ceiling.



Joe Fresh

Shops

109