

Storefront

Window

Workshops

Fall 2026

In Fall 2026, Syracuse Architecture, in partnership with renowned fashion school Polimoda, will launch a series of workshops focused on storefront window design. Offered in New York City, Seoul, Los Angeles and Florence, students participating in these workshops will design “frames” and curate “collections” for storefront windows, an architecture element and display typology that has returned to prominence as in-person experiences and events have become increasingly important to brands and retailers.

The first workshop will take place during New York Fashion Week, September 12–14, at the Syracuse University Fisher Center in New York City, and will be led by Pablo Sequero, Syracuse Architecture Assistant Professor. In addition to a review and discussion of student storefront window designs on Monday, September 14, the NYC workshop will feature a symposium with keynote speaker Massimiliano Giornetti, Director of Polimoda. The symposium will include presentations by Jing Liu, partner at NYC-based firm SO-IL and designer of the recently opened Issey Miyake store on Madison Avenue. Other speakers will include Pablo Sequero and Laura Salazar, partners at salazarsequeromedina and designers of the current Chanel Cabane 7L Pavilion at the Festival des Cabanes at Villa Medici in Rome, as well as a recent storefront installation for the Massimo Dutti flagship store in Madrid.

The second workshop will take place in Seoul, Korea, September 29 to October 1, and will be led by Bing Bu, Director, Syracuse Architecture Seoul/ Tokyo Studio Program; Jiwon Shin, Principal, Shinoh, Seoul; and Michael Hurt, Ph.D., Professor and Visual Ethnographer, Seoul. The workshop will be conducted at Ewha Woman’s University, September 29-30, and a final review and symposium will take place on October 1 at the Dongdaemun

Design Plaza (DDP) in Seoul, designed by Zaha Hadid. The symposium will feature keynote speaker Yang Soo In, Director, Lifethings, Seoul. Other symposium speakers include Eva Zimmerman, Strategic Advisor and Supervisor, Fashion Business Department, Polimoda; Karis Kim, Head of Retail, Tenant Representation, Newmark Group, Seoul; Eunju Ko, Professor of Fashion Marketing, Yonsei University; and Jay Ryou, Head of Store Planning, Aesop North Asia.

The third workshop will take place at SCI-Arc in Los Angeles, October 10-12, and will be led by Alex Sheft and John Farrace, Principals, Sheft Farrace in Los Angeles, and Syracuse Architecture Visiting Critic Fall 2026. The fourth workshop will take place at Polimoda, in Florence, October 26-30, and will be led by Erin Cuevas, Principal CMLA in Los Angeles and Syracuse Architecture Visiting Critic Fall 2026.

These workshops are among several collaborative programs currently being developed by Syracuse Architecture and Polimoda including a post-professional Master of Science degree program, *Space / Brand / Strategy*, which will also launch in Fall 2026. Though most courses will be taught at the Syracuse campus, the program features an immersive summer course “capsule” at Polimoda’s Manifattura Campus in Florence. The summer “capsule” offers a curated menu of courses in design, branding, strategy, and business and is open not only to students enrolled in the master’s degree program, but also to architecture, fashion design, interior design and business students with an interest in retail store design and management.

For more information on the Master of Science degree program, *Space / Brand / Strategy*, see this link:

→ soa.syr.edu/programs/post-professional-ms

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Fall 2026

NEW YORK
12–14 September

SEOUL
29 September–1 October

LOS ANGELES
10–12 October

FLORENCE
26–30 October

NEW YORK

Workshop and Symposium
12–14 September
Syracuse University Fisher Center, NYC

Workshop Leader:
Pablo Sequero, Assistant Professor, Syracuse
Architecture

Workshop Lecture:
Mireia Luzárraga, Director at TAKK and Assistant
Professor at Columbia GSAPP

Review and Discussion: 14 September, 12pm–2pm
Symposium: 14 September, 4pm–6pm
Reception: 14 September, 6pm–7:30pm

Moderator:
Michael Speaks, Dean, Syracuse Architecture

Keynote Speaker:
Massimiliano Giornetti, Director, Polimoda

Speakers:
Jing Liu, Partner, SO-IL, NYC; Designer, Issey Miyake
Flagship Store, Madison Ave

Pablo Sequero and Laura Salazar, Partners,
salazarsequeromedina; Designers, Chanel Cabane
7L Pavilion at the Festival des Cabanes at Villa Medici
in Rome; storefront installation for the Massimo Dutti
flagship store in Madrid

Respondent:
Paula Vilaplana de Miguel, Assistant Curator for
contemporary architecture, The Museum of Modern Art
New York (MoMA)

SEOUL

Workshop and Symposium
29 September–1 October
Ewha Woman's University and
DDP / Dongdaemun Design Plaza, Seoul

Workshop: 29–30 September, 10am–5pm
Ewha Woman's University, Seoul

Symposium and Review: 1 October
DDP / Dongdaemun Design Plaza, Seoul
Review of Student Work and Discussion: 12pm–3pm
Symposium: 4pm–6pm

Workshop Leaders:
Jiwon Shin, Principal, Shinoh, Seoul

Bing Bu, Director Syracuse Architecture
Seoul / Tokyo Travel Studio Program

Michael Hurt, Ph.D., Professor and Visual
Ethnographer, Seoul

Symposium Keynote Speaker:
Yang Soo In, Director, Lifethings, Seoul

Speakers:
Karis Kim, Head of Retail, Tenant
Representation, Newmark Group, Seoul

Eunju Ko, Professor of Fashion Marketing,
Yonsei University, Seoul

Jay Ryou, Head of Store Planning,
Aesop North Asia, Shanghai

Eva Zimmerman, Strategic Advisor and Supervisor,
Fashion Business Department, Polimoda, Florence

LOS ANGELES

Workshop
10–12 October
Southern California Institute of Architecture

Workshop Leaders:
Alex Sheft and John Farrace,
Principals, Sheft Farrace, Los Angeles;
Visiting Critics, Syracuse Architecture Fall '26

FLORENCE

Workshop
26–30 October
Polimoda Manifattura Campus, Florence

Workshop Leader:
Erin Cuevas, Principal CMLA, Los Angeles;
Visiting Critic, Syracuse Architecture Fall '26

Storefront

Windows:

Rise and Fall?

Michael Speaks

Storefront Windows: Rise and fall?

Storefront windows were the most important visual merchandising and branding device used by large department stores and small shops alike from the late 19th century until the post-war period when many retailers began to relocate from city centers to the windowless environs of the urban and suburban shopping mall. A steady decline in the use of storefront windows ensued in the 1970s and continued through the 1980s and 1990s when visual merchandising became a more scientific practice focused entirely on the store interior and television and the internet became dominant media for product storytelling and branding.

The storefront window achieved its greatest commercial and cultural success in the years between 1930 and 1970, a period during which designers like Frederick Kiesler wrote and thought extensively about them, and artists like Salvador Dali and Andy Warhol treated them as mediums of artistic expression. These years also marked the apogee of cultural and commercial success for department stores like Macy's, Bergdorf Goodman, Bonwit Teller and Saks Fifth Avenue, due in no small measure to the artistic and commercial genius of those, like Gene Moore, who designed and art directed their storefront windows. During the 1930s a kind of institutional competition commenced between museums and department stores, especially in New York City, with each vying to develop the most technologically and artistically advanced means of exhibition and storefront window display, which necessarily also meant competing for the best artistic and design talent. Kiesler, who had collaborated with European avant-garde artists and designers, was emblematic of many architects and designers who worked in both museums and retail stores, as was Warhol, who worked as a retail store window designer

before ever showing his work in galleries or museums. Indeed, the careers of some of the most important 20th century American artists were launched during this time working under the direction of Gene Moore, including Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg and James Rosenquist.

Through the period of steady decline beginning in the 1970s, retailers and increasingly museums and art galleries continued to experiment with and use storefront windows as visual merchandising devices. In 1993, Storefront for Art and Architecture in New York commissioned artist Vito Acconci and architect Steven Holl to design a “storefront” art gallery on a long, narrow—tapering from 3 feet to 20 feet—triangular plot on Kenmare Street in Soho, which would open and close its large windows to accommodate and feature the exhibition on display. Later, in 1997, Richard Gluckman, who had by then established himself through a series of projects for the Dia Art Foundation as “the art world’s architect,” was commissioned to convert a ground floor loft space in Soho into the flagship store for Helmut Lang. Gluckman treated the storefront window as a visual invitation to enter and pass through an unprogrammed reception area past a Jenny Holzer art installation before arriving to a series of thickened, translucent display walls that function as internal storefront windows for the merchandise. It was a brilliant design that used the storefront window as a framing device to draw customers into the store where they would discover the real storefront window stocked with Helmut Lang merchandise.

This period also witnessed the emergence of new concept stores like Colette in Paris, Corso Como in Milan, the Prada epicenter stores in New York, Beverly Hills and Tokyo, and Dover Street Market in London. Like commercial mega art galleries—Gagosian, David Zwirner, Hauser & Wirth, Pace—that were

beginning to challenge museums, these concept stores experimented with new visual merchandising and programming approaches, including in storefront windows, and took a decidedly curatorial approach to creating retail experiences that were as focused on culture as they were on commerce. This was especially true with Corso Como, launched (initially as a photography gallery) by fashion magazine editor Carla Sozzani with the assistance of artist Kris Ruhs, her life and business partner, where photography, fine and collectable art, books, magazines, apparel, food and events all were on offer.

The most important storefront window design during this period, however, could be found at Barneys New York where, from the mid-1980s until the remaining store closed in 2019, creative director Simon Doonan reinvented the storefront window by using it to reflect and help shape what he calls the “unique, judiciously funky Barneys point of view” that came to dominate all luxury retail and that is still recognized as the gold standard. Barneys was the first American luxury retailer to import established European designers like Giorgio Armani, Chanel and Yves Saint Laurent. Just as importantly, unlike all other large luxury retailers, Barneys championed emerging talent and avant-garde designers like Rei Kawakubo/Comme des Garçons, Jean Paul Gaultier, and members of the Antwerp Six, for whom Barneys was the first major store buyer and retailer.

These and other designers were the featured objects of store visual merchandising, but they were always framed by the Barneys point of view described by Doonan in one of his many style memoirs, *Confessions of a Window Dresser*: “No other store combined the deco glamor of prewar retailing with the European boutique sensibility. Clothing is laid out in a serene, dreamy, museum like way, the trendiest art hangs on the walls,

the interior displays are like gallery installations, the music is slightly unexpected but not annoying. Barneys is taste, luxury, humor, and hipness." Barneys' point of view was shaped over many years by the Pressman family owners, who courted and took a chance on emerging designers, but also by Doonan's co-creative director Glenn O'Brien as well as the visual signature of store ad campaigns featuring the work of illustrator Jean-Philippe Delhomme. While all of these factors contributed to the creation of this point of view, which ultimately became the Barneys' brand, Doonan's storefront windows were certainly the defining and most recognizable *literal* and *conceptual* framing of that point of view.

Storefront Windows:
Social media, new cultures, new markets

With the rise of social media platforms like Instagram (2010) and TikTok (2017), product merchandising, branding, and the retail store all seemed to collapse into a seamless online experience in which the only remaining physical trace of brick-and-mortar shopping was the product itself—displayed on screen, ordered online and delivered in person, often with free shipping and returns, to the customer's home. The COVID-19 pandemic lock down extended this near-fully online shopping experience to all retail shopping, delivering what many thought was the final death blow to brick-and-mortar retail and the storefront window. But that was not to be. On the contrary, the lockdown instead created—in the form of a backlash—a powerful desire for in-person experiences of all kinds. While the lockdown did not kill in-person retail, it did, however, accelerate the development of our current hyperdifferentiated marketplace: where the monolithic—though economically stratified—"target audience" and the single channel retail platforms—in-person or online—that served it have been superseded by a proliferation of consumer niches each with its own tastes, values and concerns and, importantly, each with its own shopping platform preferences, whether fully online, fully in-person or hybrid combinations of each.

Over the last few years, several new architecture typologies have arisen to exploit this new market reality. Among the best known and most fully developed is the pop-up shop, especially those found in the Seongsu district in Seoul, the most robust, experimental and fully developed pop-up retail area in the world. Another is the super "duck" (à la Robert Venturi), including the urban-scale objects that serve as shopping and attention magnets like the Louis Vuitton ship in

Shanghai and the “luggage wrapper” that clads the (under-construction) flagship store on Fifth Avenue in New York City. Both typologies have become important for prototyping and testing new products targeted at niche markets and as territories for an urban *mise-en-scène* where shoppers post selfies of their own in-person shopping experiences. Here, and everywhere in this omni-channel, hyperdifferentiated marketplace, the focus on niche, choice and individuality dominate. And yet, it is becoming increasingly clear—from luxury to premium and everything below—that much of the product on offer, as well as the ways in which it is branded, merchandised and sold, whether online, in person or hybrid, has not resulted in difference but in sameness. Most brands and most retailers now rely on a formulaic approach that has produced (perhaps unintentionally) hyperdifferentiated homogeneity.

As a result, all brands and retailers are now searching for new strategies that will enable them to create products, stories and stores that deliver authenticity, uniqueness and depth. In our workshops, we will reconsider a third architecture typology—the storefront window—to determine what promise and possibility it might offer in the development of these new strategies which are ultimately responses to what are both commercial and cultural challenges.

Frames: Literal and Conceptual

We will consider the storefront window as the first and most important frame used by retailers. As we saw in the brief history sketched above, the storefront window is a *literal* frame, an architectural device used by retailers beginning in the 19th century and continuing to the present to visually merchandise whatever is on offer. But the storefront window is also a *conceptual* frame, an editorial and curatorial device that retailers use to develop, shape and express their distinct *point of view*. And, as we saw with Barneys, it is this point of view that defines and is ultimately understood to be the retailer’s brand. Barneys was a retail store but, perhaps more importantly, it was also a point of view developed, shaped and expressed through the conceptual device of the frame. One could say that the Barneys’ brand is framed literally by the storefront window and conceptually by the point of view developed by Simon Doonan using those windows, but also by the other creative director, Glenn O’Brien, the visual language developed by artist Jean-Philippe Delhomme, and through the numerous editorial and curatorial decisions made by the Pressman family. While the literal frame sits between the exterior and the interior of the brick-and-mortar store, the conceptual frame (which, necessarily includes the literal frame) is free from the bonds of place, scale or even technology.

Consider Prada. Beginning in 1978, when Miuccia Prada became creative director, Prada began to develop a point of view focused on concepts, counterintuitive (“ugly” not conventionally beautiful) ideas of luxury, and the use of materials such as Pocono nylon, a cheap, industrial fabric normally used for tents and parachutes. And it is precisely this Miuccia point of view that today distinguishes Prada from all other luxury brands. Though it has evolved and been shaped over

time, including by Raf Simons who joined in 2020 as co-creative director, the Prada point of view has remained consistent over time and is today recognizable (though not always explicable) by luxury insiders as well as the general public. Prada's point of view is literally framed not only by its famous storefront shop windows, but also by the OMA/Koolhaas and Herzog & de Meuron designed epicenter stores, by the frames created on billboards, print and online magazine ads, scaling from the frame of the personal device, the mobile phone, to the urban scale of a city block, as witnessed at the Prada Foundation in Milan. What is consistent through all these literal framings is the conceptual framing, the editorial point of view that is the brand Prada.

We could say the same for the concept stores mentioned above—Colette, Corso Como, DSM—all of which developed a distinct point of view through their own unique conceptual frames that were then literally framed inside and outside their brick-and-mortar stores, scaling from the personal to the urban and beyond, consistently through online and in-person platforms and applications. And all of this begins with the storefront window, the first frame of retail visual merchandising, branding and retail.

Michael Speaks, Ph.D.
Dean and Professor
Syracuse Architecture

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