

Fashion Retail



Eleanor Curtis &
Howard Watson

Marc Newson with Sébastien Segers

Azzedine Alaïa

Paris 2006

Azzedine Alaïa's new accessories showcase in Paris is a temple for shoe fetishists. It is a serene, nearly circular space that is almost entirely free of extraneous furniture. It is all about the shoes, displayed just below eye level in recessed cabinets set into the curving wall: the room focuses purely on Alaïa's creations in a setting designed to inspire silent reverence. It is remarkable that this dignified hymn to quietude is separated from the rue de Moussy by just a set of glass doors. The store is designed by Marc Newson along with architect Sébastien Segers. Newson, the world-renowned Australian designer, is perhaps more famous as a household object designer, but he ventured into fashion boutique interiors as early as 1992 with the Claudia Skoda store in Berlin, and also developed a retail system for the W< streetwear label.

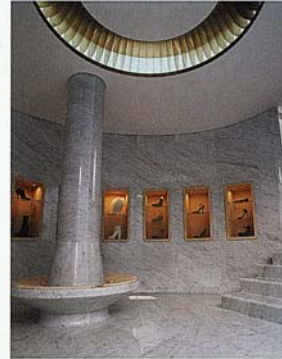
The circular design of the Alaïa store may orientate the eye towards the wares, but the interior structure is a paean to restrained luxury. The floor and walls are lined with white Carrara marble, the grey veins of which give the space its subtle texture. The marble slabs extenuate the concentric design, radiating out from a central circle, and curve upwards at the edge of the room to smooth away the join of floor and wall. Rising up from the floor is the only feature that breaks the flow: a structural column that ascends through the five storeys of the building. It has been integrated into the design by an encasement of two sections of marble. The lower block fans out to create a circular banquette – the only seating in the store. This is covered by six calfskin cushions, described as flesh coloured (which holds true if you happen to be a lightly tanned Caucasian). The marble pillar rises into a plain white plaster ceiling, but draws the eye towards one of the design's other concentric features – a large light that forms a ceiling recess. Light floods in between thin brass fins that join the inner and outer rims – Newson describes the fitting as like 'a brass Meccano'. Brass is also used for other fittings, including the banquette cushion studs and the custom-made LED spotlights in the display cases.

The true purpose of the 'flesh-coloured' calfskin becomes obvious within the 12 display cases. These are fully upholstered in the natural leather so that the colours of the shoes, boots and accessories are already set against the familiar hue of skin. The inner shelving of the cases is glass so there is no detractor from this tonal relationship.

Other than the glass doors on to the rue de Moussy, a second exit point is up seven steps, also clad in white Carrara marble, into Azzedine Alaïa's principle showroom, which has been separately designed. Alaïa, once known

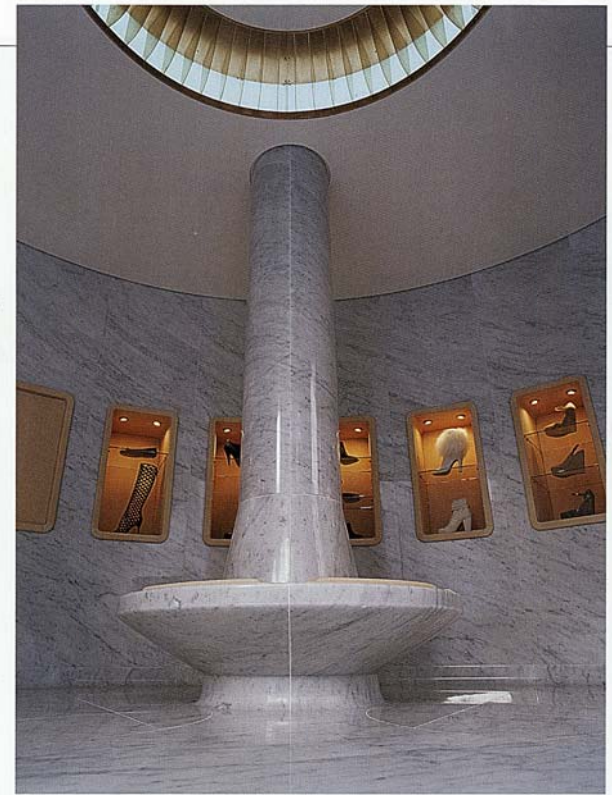


Above: **Azzedine Alaïa Paris.** The single room, designed to showcase Azzedine Alaïa's shoes and accessories, is a simple, Bianco Carrara marble-clad circle



Above: **Azzedine Alaïa Paris.** The large, recessed ceiling light features a circle of brass fins

Right: **Azzedine Alaïa Paris.** The concentric design, cut into a difficult, angular space, features a central column, but no other interruptions. Marble covers an iron support pillar to integrate it within the design

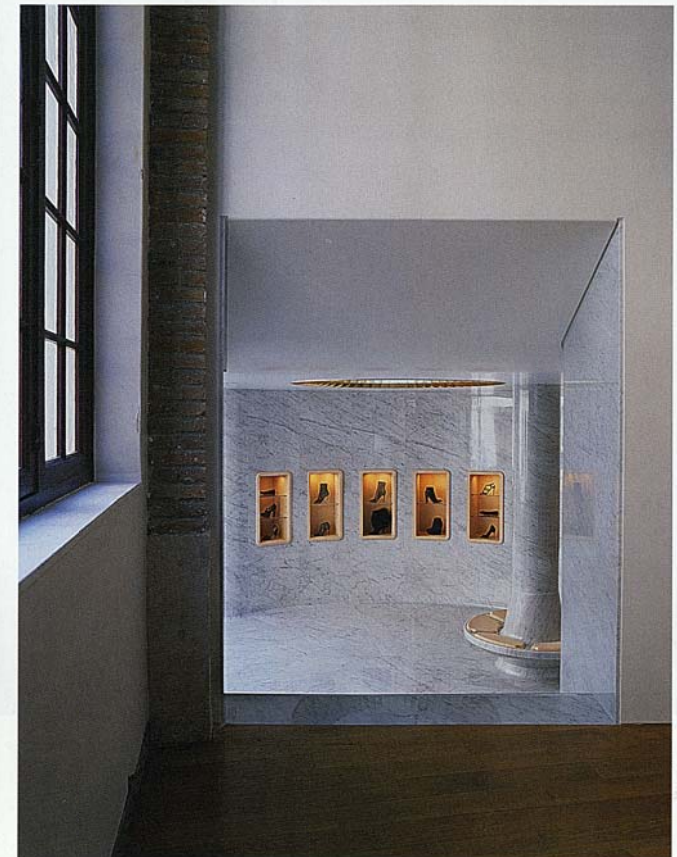


as the 'king of cling' for the way his dresses caressed the body, was born in Tunis and studied sculpture before joining the Paris fashion industry and setting up his own label. In the mainstay his clothing designs could be described as 'sculptural minimalism', which is a description that also suits Newson and Segers' new showpiece. It is no surprise to learn that Alaïa collects Newson-designed pieces and that they feature in his own three-room mini hotel, which is in the same complex of buildings on rue de Moussy.

Segers and Newson seem to be developing an interesting partnership for the creation of unusual environments. The Azzedine Alaïa store is preceded by the MHT store (the jewellery store of Marie-Hélène de Taillac) in Tokyo, completed in 2005, which uses high-gloss lacquer, leather and mirrors to create the impression of an oversized jewellery box. They also created one of the room designs for Puerta América, Madrid, the hotel which is itself a jewellery box for contemporary design.



Left and below: **Azzedine Alaïa Paris.** View of the store from the main showroom. The main feature is the 12 display cases, upholstered in calfskin, halfway up the curving wall





Above: **Azzedine Alaïa Paris**. The base of the marble pillar fans out to form a circular banquette, dressed with six calfskin cushions

Above: **Azzedine Alaïa Paris**. Detail of one of the calfskin display cases

Left: **Azzedine Alaïa Paris**. View of the store from the street, with the buildings of rue de Moussey reflected in the glass entrance doors

Below: **Azzedine Alaïa Paris**. Plan of the new accessories showcase, which is just 23 square metres

