The Showroom Sauvage

Marithé + François Girbaud showroom
New York

I.C. ISAACS HAS ONLY A COUPLE OF MARITHE + François Girbaud freestanding stores in the United States. So the French jeansmaker’s U.S. licensee must make its New York showroom do the job of indoctrinating the American store buyer on the univers Girbaud.

Early champions of bell-bottoms, stone-washed jeans, baggy elephant legs, laser-cut fabrics and futuristic fibers made from recycled elements, the self-dubbed "jeanalogues" continue to thumb their noses at orthodoxy of any stripe, much to the delight of their eclectic cult following (which ranges from the sophisticates who swan around in Girbaud’s bohemian chic garb to the male hiphop artists who dig their mega-oversized droopy drawers so much, they’ve given Girbaud shout-outs in their lyrics).

The different merchandise areas in the showroom reflect the brand’s various moods. A glowing chamber for the hipster-oriented jeans line is constructed with stretched PVC wall dividers (from the French company, Normalu-Barrisol S.A.). The material, of different opacities, makes the room look like a glowing glacier. For the exterior, the Barrisol PVC is translucent, with graphic-cave-painting-like silhouettes of the Girbaud “heroes” hovering within like ghostly beings from another dimension, intertwined with artificial ivy. (The tendrils of ivy is an allusion that crops up frequently in Girbaud’s clothes and stores design lexicon. Ivy was even entwined around the bare arms of its female models in Girbaud’s 2005 spring fashion show.)

The 10-foot windows flood the space with sunlight, causing the 8-foot-long metal branches (or "arborescence," in Girbaud-speak) to cast stark shadows as they fan out from the fixture shelving. The floors are a self-leveling white epoxy cement by Ardex Engineered Cements (Aliquippa, Pa.). Toronto-based ITIF re-created the branch panels, which are flipped in various directions, creating the illusion
of variety without having to work with too many patterns.

As in the fixtures used in Giraud stores, ITIF’s adjustable shelving and hang rods have screws that can be finger-tightened and can be installed intuitively on their sockets, an important consideration for sales floor staffers who may not necessarily be mechanically inclined. There are notched pegs scattered over the outer branches, which permits buyers to move items around from various collections to see how they (literally) hang together.

Down the hall, a showroom for the female Le Jean collection hovers like the great green beyond on the horizon. Pixilated squares appear to be reverberating as the Barrisol transitions into the similarly-sized green metal "scales" that cover the walls floor to ceiling. Installed like shingles, there are 20-odd different shades of green automotive paint.

In this room, the shelving is faced with simple white Corian "matting," complementing the clean, modern aesthetic. In both spaces, the horizontal shelving within the fixture units are custom "verre" – colored acrylic ¼-inch thick – and the hang rods are knurled, or criss-cross scored (as on barbell grips), to add texture.

The standout element in this room is the 16-foot "tronc" [as in tree "trunk"] bench that resembles a felled tree, sliced into thick planks and appearing to be drying on spacers. ITIF created it from MDF, veneered in oak.

While the silly, apocalyptic Giraud mythology conveniently advances the self-serving message – "Buy Giraud or else...!" – the upbeat showroom playfully displays the trickster Giraud god’s lighter side.

— Victoria C. Rowan, New York Editor

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