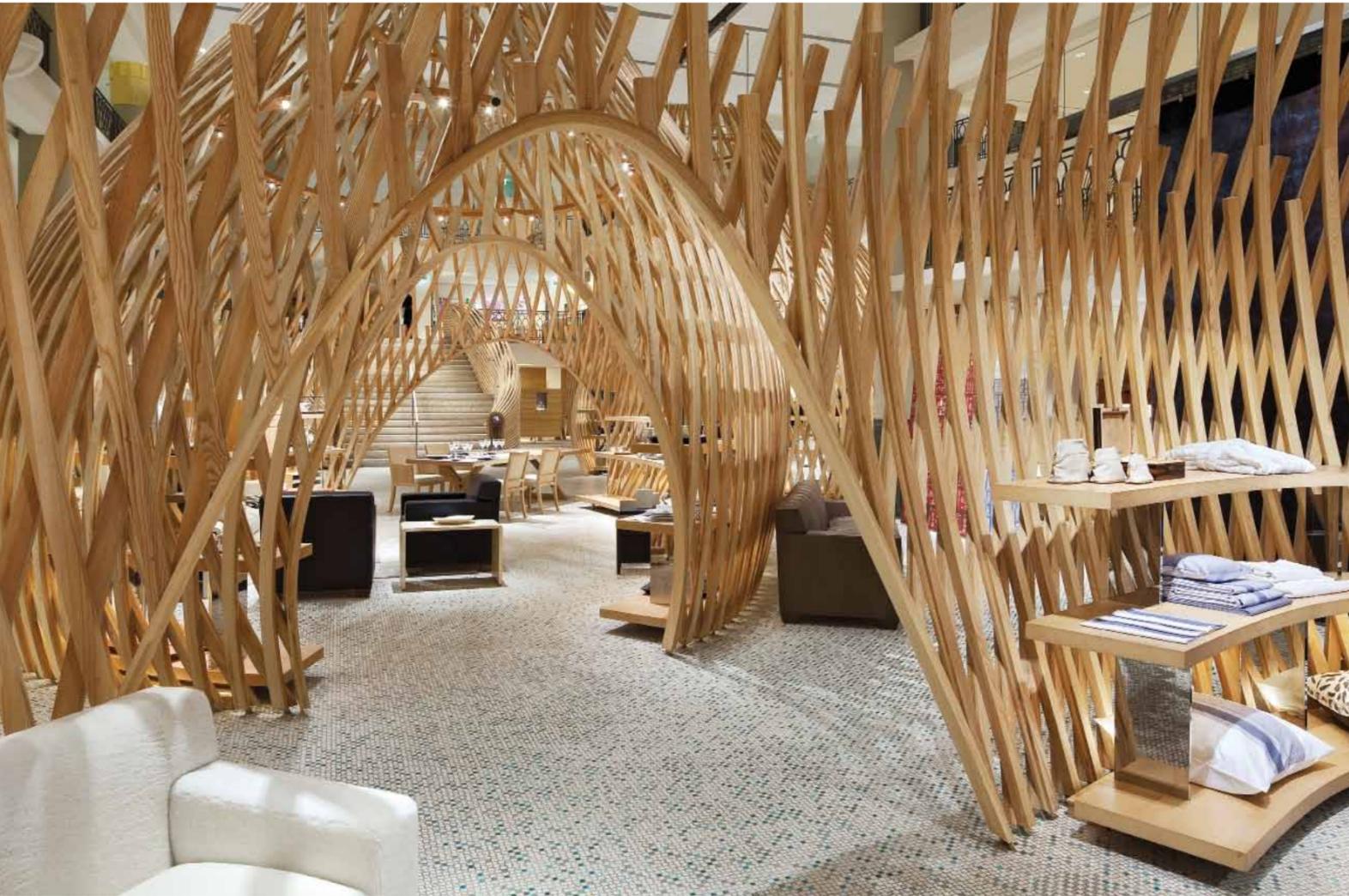
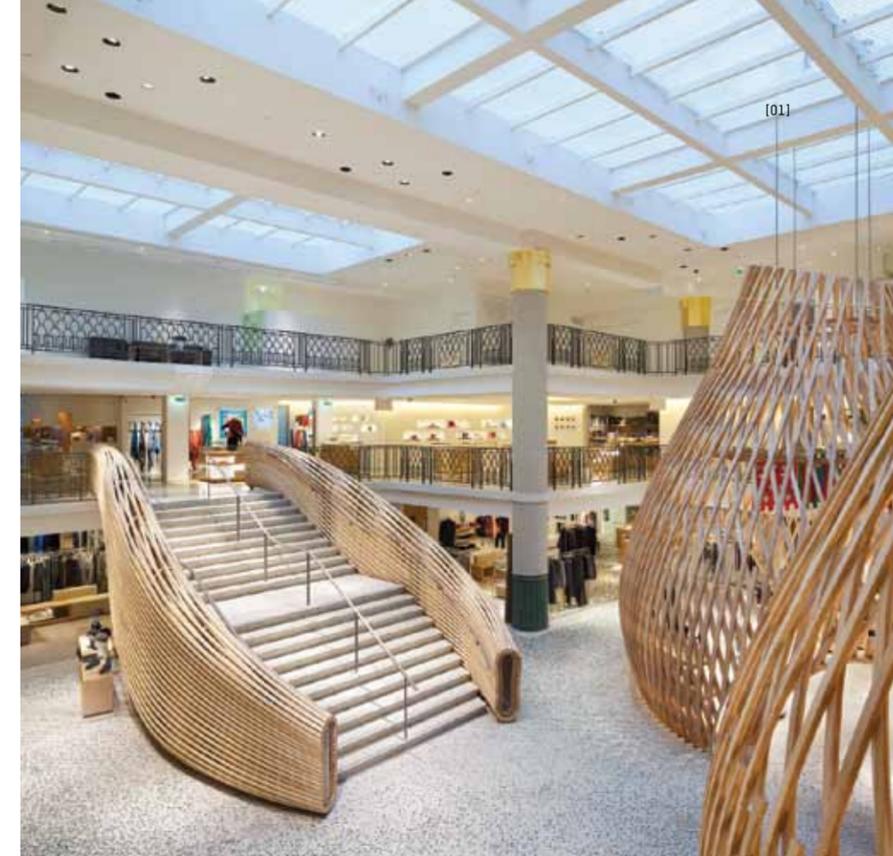


THE HERMÈS OF RDAI



A recent palatial design in Paris reveals not only an enchanting new space but a mindful, new form of presenting the retail experience of Hermès (via Rena Dumas Interior Architecture). Hermès Rive Gauche is a fashion-forward move, in terms of design, but it also recalls the grace of an olden Paris establishment.



Hermès Rive Gauche, across the Seine, from the original Hermès flagship store, opened at the end of last year. Future and current projects include Shanghai and Mumbai.

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Rena Dumas commenced working with Hermès in 1975 – three years prior to the French brand appointing her husband, Jean-Louis Dumas, as president and chairman of the Hermès Group in 1978. She was signed and commissioned to renovate the Hermès flagship store at 24 Faubourg Saint-Honoré in Paris, and the venture then marked the beginning of an enduring relationship between the two design-centric companies. What we now know as Rena Dumas Interior Architecture (RDIA) has since completed more than 300 luxury stores, each stylistically not only reflecting the history of the Hermès brand, but also tapping into the essence of each store location with its own design philosophy. Since her death in 2009, at the age of 71, the legacy of her work continues under the creative direction of architect Denis Montel, who, prior to joining RDAI in 1999 and co-directing Hermès' houses globally, previously completed stores for both Loewe and Boucheron.

In 2008, Montel also founded RDAI Architecture, a sister company to RDAI, and as managing artistic director of both agencies he develops each project from architecture through to objects – and executes it all with trademark precision.

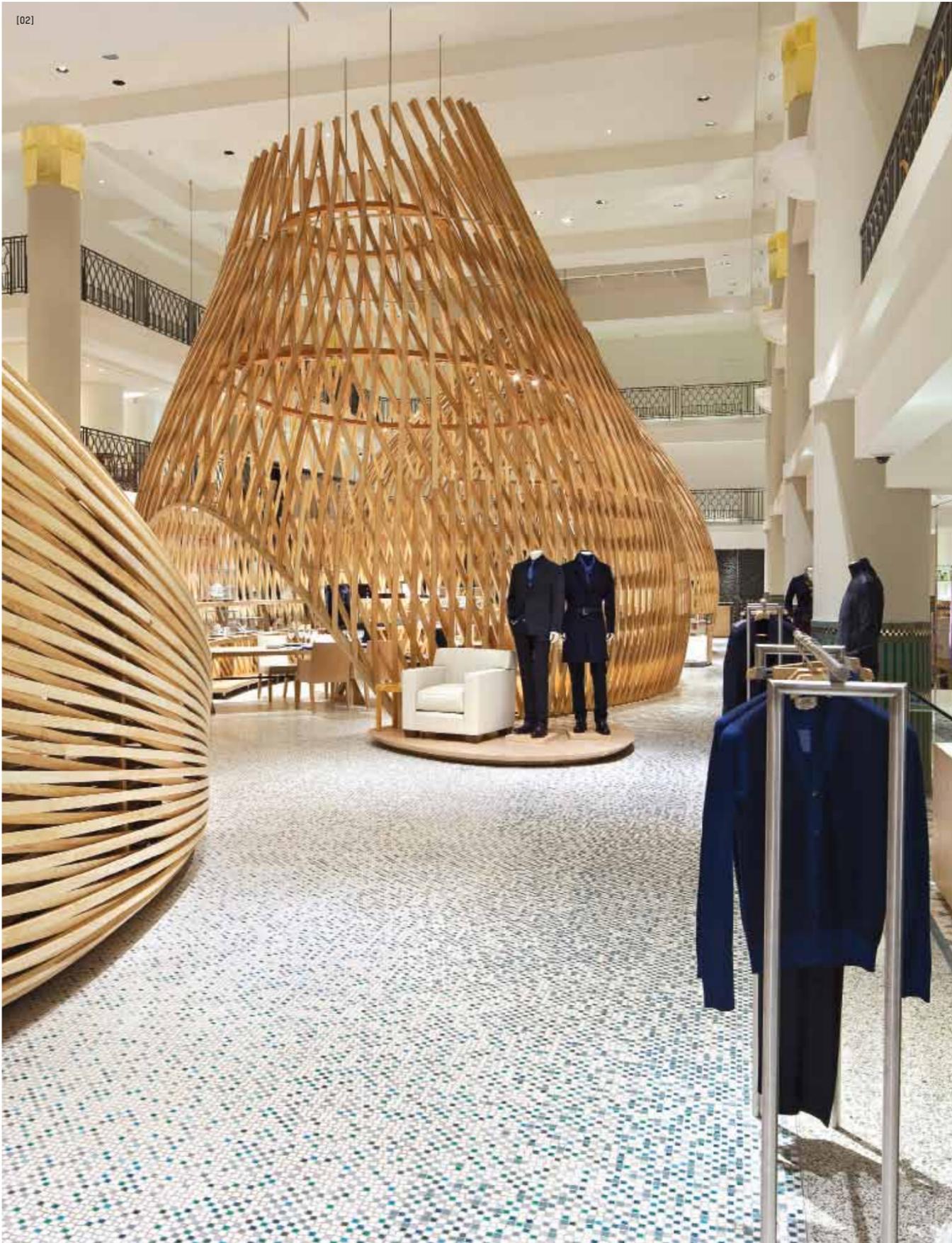
Across the Seine from the Saint-Honoré flagship is the palatial Hermès Rive Gauche, which opened in Paris in late 2010. It's an extraordinary arena for the 173-year-old brand, not only reflecting a rich history of quality and exceptional workmanship, but also signposting fresh directions for Hermès, with the addition of new collections and services.

Rive Gauche is an important project for Hermès as it now offers a more serviced retail environment – with the inclusion of a florist, bookshop, tearoom and an expanded art devivred department of furniture and accessories. The brief entailed integrating

the new metiers and finding a rapport with them, holistically, within a new space. "Hermès does not strive to be spectacular, but more so seeks to translate the values of its product into a physical space," says Montel. "The values we translated into the store design are those of heritage and modernity, savoir-faire and creation. The space in reality is very much alive and active."

Set in the 1935 Heritage-listed Lutetia Hotel, the main showroom is housed in the former swimming pool. The design philosophy celebrates the past while embracing the future, with art nouveau elements such as mosaic tiling and iron detailing retained, ultimately contrasted by four nine-metre ashwood pods that fill the tri-level volume, curving organically as though reaching towards one of three skylights. "We gave ourselves the task of making this a double project," says Montel. "One was valorising the existing building fabric and the other was adding a contemporary architectural project. The goal being to make an individual and unique project, so that one-plus-one equals not two, but one. It is a dialogue between two expressions, between two eras."

"In terms of the architecture, we first looked at the problems posed by the immense empty volume and approached the project from a volumetric angle to inhabit the space. The huts are 'houses within a house'. Their supple and light form refers to nomadic architectures... They are at the same time both enveloping and transparent, to allow perspective views, and thus maintain the perception of the entirety of the space that welcomes them. The huts nod to Hermès' nomadic past, with each pavilion encasing a different product collection. This not only provides visual respite, but zoning areas within the store, providing a sense of intimacy with each collection."



[02]

[02] RDAI enlisted an elite crew of craftsmen and artisans, each commissioned specifically for the restoration of tiles, as well as the on-site construction of the pods.

[03] The pods are meant to concentrate particular areas of the retail experience. The lightness of the wood structures are both open and free of any end-point closures.

[04] From almost every angle and perspective the formations play off each other, creating a charming visual play in the overall space.

[05] A view from underneath reveals perhaps the most alluring detail in all of the woodwork — a grand staircase that flows and opens to the base level.



[03]



[04]



[05]

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[06] The final structures that now stand in the space show a striking degree of accuracy when compared to the original renderings of the project.

To execute this ambitious project, RDAI enlisted elite craftsmen and artisans, each commissioned specifically for the restoration of tiles, as well as the on-site construction of the pods—a complex and delicate process carried out within a short time frame. “We worked with highly specialised artisans including German carpenters and mill workers from the Black Forest for the construction of the huts, French plasterers, Italian mosaic layers, French furniture-makers and metal workers,” says Montel. “We had already worked on other sites with most of these contractors and they understood the level of quality required for the realisation of an Hermès shop.”

The huts, constructed from pre-curved and laminated solid ash wood, each had a double-curved slat calculated by a sophisticated three-dimensional modelling program written specifically for the project by the structural engineers Bollinger + Grohmann. The laminated wood was then cut and pierced with holes for the bolt fixings, with the numbered slats glued and pre-assembled on scaffolding in the workshop of the German contractor, Holzbau Amann, in the Black Forest. Then they were dismantled, sanded three times, oiled and sent to Paris with the scaffolding. When finally assembled on site, the pods were bolted and the holes filled with carefully matched wooden caps.

Beyond the pods, lighting also defines each area. While the skylights flood the space with natural light by day, they are lit at night to prevent a ‘black hole effect’. Given the expanse of undulating white plaster walls that rim the circumference, the walls are lit from above by LED tape, the light source secreted. Each hut is internally lit, so they read as giant lanterns, off-

set by floor-embedded lighting that accentuates the vaults of latticed wood. The huts also encase a giant dual-ring timber chandelier, and the shelving is lit by invisible LED tape.

Restored mosaics uphold the architectural history of the swimming pool, with floors, columns and staircase tiled with broken tiles or granite, and the entrance to the store features a mosaic carpet with a Greek motif. The less visible rooms, such as the fitting rooms or bathrooms, are finished with broken tiles linking them to the history of the pool. The floor surface of the pool gleams shiny, and matte, white-gold tiles that sparkle subtly recall the space formerly being covered by water—the sparkles accentuating the play of light.

When asked if the design concept matches the realisation, Montel replies, “It does not always happen this way, but the finished project reflects exactly the initial sketches and models we worked on. As the structural engineers developed the modelling of the project, they were able to precisely translate our design. There were no compromises made on site and the huts emerged as we had imagined. The result is a testament to the skill of the architect, his team and the many collaborators. Future Hermès projects include Shanghai and Mumbai. *(inside)*

[07] Forward-minded in the design’s visual engagement with the existing space, RDAI was mindful to accentuate both new and old with stunning, restored tile work.



[07]