

FRAMES

THE GREAT INDOORS

SHARP CUT

SHOPS BY **NEWSON,**
NOVEMBRE AND
SLIMANE

SPEX

Tord Hits

Target



€19.95 EU
£14 UK
CHF 30 Switzerland
\$24.95 USA
\$29.50 Canada
¥3,570 Japan
₩ON 40,000 Korea

Lining the marble-clad wall of the shop are 12 display niches upholstered in flesh-coloured calfskin whose smoothness complements the lustre of the white marble.

Ooh-La-La Alaïa

The new Azzedine Alaïa shop by Marc Newson is a melange of marble and leather flavoured with classicism and *chaussures*.

Words: Chris Scott
Photos: Christoph Kicherer



Strolling along a quiet street in Paris devoid of *boulangeries*, brasseries or anything else that might offer an agreeable distraction, the unsuspecting *flâneur* suddenly happens upon a little gem: a mesmerizing sight sure to stop many passers-by dead in their tracks. Is this an exhibition? A boutique? Where did these artistic shoes come from? Are they for sale? Or simply on display – to be admired through the glass façade?

Carved into the stonework over the large door of the neighbouring building is 'Alaïa', a word that may help the astute observer to solve this puzzle. If you know your fashion designers (or have read the portrait of Alaïa in *Frame 44*), the pieces will surely fall into place. The items vying for attention introduce a new shop that sells shoes and accessories by Azzedine Alaïa.

Not known to follow the normal fashion route, Alaïa has never had shops that boasted normal display windows. That fact in itself makes a glimpse into his world most unusual. The entrance, too, is something out of the ordinary and anything but straightforward. After plucking up the courage to enter the Roman temple-like space, you attempt to open the glass door, but to no avail. It occurs to you that you might gain access next door, at number 7. But hold on – first you have to ring the bell. A word of advice: do not be put off, for your perseverance will be rewarded. Having stepped into the elegant world of Alaïa, you work your way past elongated display mannequins adorned with the designer's finely crafted creations and sculptural dress racks that stand alongside pieces of art and perfectly placed designer furniture. Finally, you reach a series of marble steps that lead down to the shop proper, a circular space that measures a mere 23 m².

Alaïa wants customers to enjoy an exclusive experience, to feel as though they are choosing a precious item from a jewellery box

In realizing this interior, the fashion designer collaborated with longtime friend Marc Newson, whose work is dotted throughout the vast premises, which comprise shop, showroom, atelier, warehouse, three-suite guesthouse and, of course, Alaïa's private residence. No list of requirements was handed to Newson at the outset, since, as he puts it, 'Azzedine doesn't exactly work to brief.' The designer was given a free hand on the understanding that the result would feel like part of the Alaïa showroom, albeit more intimate and definitely 'not like a typical shop'. What Alaïa did want, however, was to show his footwear to advantage in individual cases rather than to integrate the shoes into the shop. Alaïa wanted customers to enjoy an exclusive experience, to feel as though they were in the act of choosing a precious item from a jewellery box.



Detail of a leather-upholstered bench that encircles the pillar at the centre of the shop. The leather is secured by bolts made of brass, a material also used for the light fittings in the niches and in the main space.

* Andreas Danler

'Daylight and marble give this space a friendly, lucid look. The display cases stand out well against the marble wall. Unfortunately, light falling on the shoes inside those cases is anything but ideal. Only the topmost shoe is illuminated and, in most cases, only from above.'

* Leendert Tange

'The beautifully detailed space makes this shop interesting but leaves a question as to whether or not this is a store or a display case. As a display case, it is very well executed. As a store, it lacks the invitation to engage with the product. Products behind glass don't facilitate the buying process. It just asks too much of the consumer.'



View from the top of the stairs into the Azzedine Alaïa shoe shop at 5 rue de Moussy in Paris.

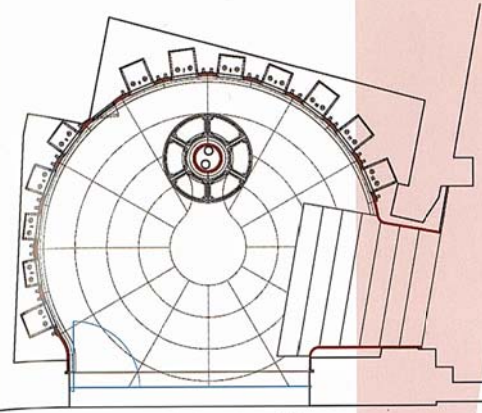


Detail of leather-clad display niche.

Newson, who originally trained as a designer of jewellery, was the ideal man for the job. In fact, he had just completed a shop in Tokyo for French jewellery designer Marie-Hélène de Taillac (see *Frame* 50, page 36). For the Tokyo project, Newson had worked with architect Sébastien Segers, and the partnership was re-established for the Alaïa shop. 'Sébastien has the understanding and ability to ensure that my ideas are executed correctly,' says Newson.

The Azzedine Alaïa shoe shop is akin to a modern-day *tempietto* with an atmosphere more conducive to contemplation than commerce

Many designers would have found the iron column at the centre of the space an unsightly obstacle, but in the hands of Newson it's become the very centrepiece of the scheme. He wrapped it in white marble quarried in Carrara and used the same material for the wall tiles and panels. The cool, luminous marble is complemented by velvety flesh-coloured leather, which covers the cushions of the



Floor plan of the shoe shop, which is connected to the main Azzedine Alaïa showroom by a flight of seven steps.

banquette that encircles the central marble column and lines the 12 display niches designed to present the shoes. Paris-based company Intension provided the subtle LED lighting for the central brass ceiling whose circular form mirrors the pattern of concentric circles created by marble floor tiles. As in all things Alaïa, the shapes, lines, curves, materials and colouring are refined, tactile, subtle and sensuous. All elements are custom-designed and manufactured to the meticulously high standard of detailing and finishing for which both Alaïa and Newson are known. The recurring use of serene circles and a limited number of materials (leather, brass and, most notably, marble) make for an interior akin to an ancient temple, a modern-day *tempietto* with an atmosphere more conducive to contemplation than commerce. Then again, some serious reflection is advisable when a pair of shoes can set you back €800 on average.

Judging from the high turnout at the July 2006 opening, and from the many distinctive Alaïa fashions worn by the more elegantly attired female guests, the shop is set to be a success. A couple of other factors combined to make it a memorable evening: a heat wave that held Paris firmly in its grip and France's involvement in the semifinal of the World Cup, a match played that very evening. But the simple space that encapsulates the spirit of Azzedine Alaïa was the main talking point. There he was, mingling modestly with the beau monde, playing the perfect host to an array of glamorous guests, his elfin figure in proportion with a minuscule space that is no bigger than, well, a shoebox.



* Pim van Lingen

'Shoes and interior design come together at Alaïa in a phenomenal way. You simply can't take your eyes off the shoes. The lighting in the vitrines is the only thing I don't like. Nothing is clearly illuminated. Newson should have paid more attention to that aspect. Otherwise, the shop radiates a sense of luxury. The loveliest background music is the sound of high heels on marble.'

Alaïa's latest shoe collection unmistakably reveals his background as a sculptor.