

It's been a year filled with breathtakingly buzzworthy and wildly ambitious interiors. Take a quick tour of five spaces that made major statements. Whether the design ingrained tech into a company's DNA, reimagined a historic site, or infused a bit of local flavor, each one is a sign of the times. And the finished works will continue to reverberate.

By Kate Rockwood

**DESIGNS
THAT**

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**THE X
FACTOR**
Merges luxe
fashion and the
latest tech
in the smartest
of spaces

Yoox Net-a-Porter Technology Center

LONDON, ENGLAND



The Yoox Net-a-Porter tech hub was designed by Grimshaw Architects.

Photos by: (top) Gabriel De la Chapelle; (left) Philip Vile

High-end fashion brands have been notoriously slow to adopt the game-changing digital tech that has set other sectors on fire. But consumer demand—especially among younger luxury shoppers—is making that industry standard decidedly *démodé*. Yoox Net-a-Porter (YNAP) is not falling into that trap. Already a major online player, it’s looking to up its digital cred with the opening of its tech hub.

“This is our temple of innovation,” said Federico Marchetti, CEO, YNAP, at the center’s inauguration in June. “I consider it our space shuttle, which will transport us into the future.”

The hub will function as a lab where 650 IT experts and engineers can experiment with artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and other cutting-edge technology. Angela Bardino, head of interior design at Grimshaw Architects in London, designed the space around five guiding principles: flexibility, functionality, comfort, greenery, and mobile tech.

There’s a dedicated space for experimental coding, an innovation lab, and a floor layout that adapts to changing teams of workers. Mobile whiteboards hook onto walls throughout the office, and employees can access lockers with their mobile phones, making hot desking operate more smoothly. And with endless configurations of chairs, desks, and partitioned work pods, teams can ideate new solutions in an office environment that supports their work—and doesn’t get in the way of it.

Bardino and her team incorporated leather, bronze, and velvet finishings—the same materials shoppers find in YNAP merch—as well as timber, felt, and concrete into the design. “We were inspired by the concept of warp and weft,” says Bardino, alluding to weaving and the way the office interlaces fashion and technology. “Think of it like a capsule wardrobe that can be mixed and matched, offering eclectic continuity.”

Barr

COPENHAGEN, DENMARK

When chef René Redzepi opened Noma in Copenhagen a decade ago, it quickly became a temple to gastronomic Nordic cuisine—and its distinct look reinforced that brand identity. “Noma was a black-and-white environment,” says Peter Girgis, a senior interior architect at Snøhetta. “You had the white walls, the white beams, the gray painted ceiling in between the beams. It created a cool Nordic environment.”

A year ago, Noma abandoned its location in the North Atlantic House cultural center, and Redzepi teamed up with chef Thorsten Schmidt to fill the space with a new venture called Barr, which means barley in Old Norse. The concept is far more informal than its high-end predecessor, and to keep patrons from calling it “the new Noma,” the space needed a fresh vibe that celebrated the personality of its menu. Where Noma offered a tasting menu with wine pairings, Barr serves up traditional fare from the Nordic North Sea, such as meatballs and schnitzel, alongside beer and aquavit, the spiced spirit of choice in Scandinavian countries.

Schmidt and Redzepi wanted a warmer, casually convivial ambiance for Barr. So they chose Scandinavian firm Snøhetta, led by Girgis in Oslo, Norway, to rethink the new restaurant’s interiors.

Snøhetta homed in on beer for inspiration. Seeing barley under a microscope, Girgis found it beautiful and decided to use the geometric pattern of the grain’s molecules as the focal design motif. Girgis and his team milled the barley pattern into raw, locally sourced Danish oak wood and clad the bar and ceilings in that engraved timber. Snøhetta also swapped Noma’s bleached oak floor out for natural oak to add warmth to the space.

In the dining room, Girgis replaced the iconic Hans Wegner wishbone chairs that propped up Noma diners with Finn Juhl’s 108 Chairs in oak and camel-brown leather. “We wanted a coziness,” he says.

The homey ethos extends even to the tableware. Schmidt and ceramicist Kasper Würtz designed the simple ceramic plates, and Girgis is designing accompanying cutlery. All of these elements put together—softer chairs, sturdy clay plates, the abundance of untreated wood—embody the Danish concept of *hygge*, or the contentedness that comes with getting warm indoors.

That’s a new life force for a space that once hosted Michelin critics and celebrities within its edgy concrete walls. “As soon as we say Noma, you think one thing,” Girgis says. “But [the chefs] wanted this to be a place that was a little more down-to-earth—something with an old pub feeling.”



Barr restaurant was designed by Snøhetta.

Photos by: Line Klein



Nike NYHQ, by Nike's Workplace Design + Connectivity

NEW YORK, NEW YORK, USA

Nike—it's one of the most devastatingly effective brands in the world. And there's no shortage of the Nike vibe in its new East Coast headquarters, dubbed NYHQ.

There's the gargantuan version of the swoosh composed of Sedum plants splashed across the rooftop. And inside, the Nike ethos only gets stronger. Home to the company's Workplace Design + Connectivity (WD+C) team, the approximately 150,000-square-foot (13,935-square-meter) space—designed in partnership with Studios Architecture—features a 4,000-square-foot (372-square-meter) basketball court for events and bleacher-style stairs. An orange Volkswagen bus outfitted with a conference room table pays homage to the original van from which the founders would distribute Nike shoes at track meets in the company's early days.

As with Nike's products, the materials incorporated throughout the design embody one of the company's key tenets: "Sustainability is at the core of the Nike brand," says Matthew Kneller, Nike's director of global corporate communications. Conference room ceilings

feature acoustic tiles made from old Nike footwear designs, created in partnership with consumer goods upcycling company Miniwiz. And some of the office's large wooden benches are made from reformed utility poles, Kneller says.

But the space isn't all Nike, all the time. It also celebrates the city the sportswear giant now calls home. According to Kneller, the idea was to highlight New York City's biggest sports moments through graphics, images, illustrations, color, typography, and space. "With this move, we wanted to further Nike's already deep roots in NYC," he says. "At Nike NYHQ, we're better equipped to connect with our most influential consumers, in the most influential city. It serves as the pinnacle expression of the brand in a global city."

To further the building's New York state of mind, Nike turned to several local designers and artists, including Brooklyn-based furniture maker UHURU Design and Harlem-based artist Micah NYC, who created a tiled wall of drawings inspired by local sports hubs like the former West Fourth Street basketball courts.



THE X FACTOR
Creates a global hub with the right mix of corporate and local identity

Sissi's Wonderland Library

SHANGHAI, CHINA



Sissi's Wonderland Library was designed by Muxin Studio.

When Muxin Studio started drafting plans for a new children's library in Shanghai, the designers had one overarching goal: "We just wanted to make it like a big toy," says Leo Sun, designer, Muxin Studio, Shanghai.

Muxin installed zigzagging ramps and miniature archways for children to crawl through, added green grasslike carpeting, and built bookshelves that double as chairs—perfect for plopping down with a book after a game of hide-and-seek. And like any well-designed toy, Sissi's Wonderland is safe for little ones. Instead of standard rows of ceiling-height bookshelves and shadowy corners, Sissi's sports circular rooms, rounded archways, and curvilinear walls and ceilings.

The space skips what Sun calls the "flamboyant decoration and superficial embellishments" typically found in spaces designed for children. Sissi's, she says, is more sophisticated, with bright white walls, warm wood shelves, and an inky black ceiling that's reminiscent of a planetarium. Even with that pared-down palette, Sissi's Wonderland is meant for play includes reading.

THE X FACTOR
Makes reading fun with an unexpected sophisticated design



Nike NYHQ, by Nike's Workplace Design + Connectivity, was designed in partnership with Studios Architecture.

Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa

CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

On the V&A Waterfront in Cape Town, next to fishing boats and an aquarium, stands a hulking concrete building. Built in the 1920s, it once held millions of tons of maize. Now it holds some of Africa's most spectacular contemporary art.

The space is an admittedly unlikely home for the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (MOCAA). Stepan Martinovsky, the London-based architect at Heatherwick Studio who led the project, calls the former grain silo "a gigantic machine" that wasn't made to hold people inside. That, of course, meant there were no distinct rooms for visitors to stroll through and peruse an exhibition.

To ready the interior for humans (and art), Martinovsky and his team first had to remove several colossal metal tubes—each 5.5 meters (18 feet) in diameter and 33 meters (108 feet) tall—that ran from underground up through the grain silo's atrium. They then stripped the protected plaster off the interior concrete walls and exposed the original rock aggregate. "You can see bluish-greenish, brownish stones of varying sizes—it becomes really rich," Martinovsky says.

Once visitors pass through that concrete realm, they can wander more than 80 galleries of varying sizes. Martinovsky says he and his team made them intentionally generic. "They could be anywhere in the world," he says. "They're there to support the art." As spectators circulate through the galleries, glimpses of the concrete can be seen through deliberate gaps between the gallery rooms.

Despite the buzz around it being the biggest museum to open in Africa in a century, the team took an intentionally restrained approach to the interiors. "There's this trend of building museums like trophies for towns, like in Bilbao, where the Frank Gehry museum put the city on the map," says Martinovsky. "We could have done that, but this building gave us a great opportunity to anchor the museum in the place, by using its history. It has soul." ■



THE X FACTOR

Puts the focus squarely on the artwork with restraint—and soul

The Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa was designed by Heatherwick Studio.