

elluminateme

Engaging the Sense of Touch

Material-driven spaces

elluminate**me**

Engaging the Sense of Touch

Material-driven spaces

Hello

Touch is becoming one of the most powerful tools in spatial design. It shapes how we read a space, how we connect with a brand and how long the experience stays with us. This issue looks at projects where materiality does the heavy lifting.

Aesop's Knightsbridge store sets the benchmark. Its soap-block walls are quiet but deeply intentional, showing how honest material choices can communicate more than any graphic layer. The changing rooms at UGG wrap you in the same plush, protective feeling as slipping into one of their boots. Lexus took a different path at Milan Design Week with *A–Un*, a bamboo fibre structure that behaved like a living membrane. Responding to visitors' heartbeats and gestures, it showed how tactility can evolve into a real-time dialogue between human and machine. Maison Diptyque uses material storytelling to bridge heritage and modernity - in London, restored architectural details sit alongside contemporary artworks and sculptural fixtures. In Shanghai, Diptyque *Un Air de Paris* translates the brand's identity into a sequence of tactile rooms built inside a historic shikumen complex.

Material expression continues in Barcelona, where the restauran Enigma by RCR Arquitectes dissolves boundaries through sintered stone, rippled glass and a suspended aluminium mesh ceiling. The result feels more like an atmospheric performance than a traditional interior. We also feature Gentle Monster's Haus Nowhere, Golden Goose's restoration of Palazzo Ca' da Mosto, SALT hair salon in Borough Market, London and Polène's Seoul flagship, which treats the entire building as a single sheet of leather shaped into form.

Together these projects show that materiality is no longer background. It is strategy. It builds rhythm, emotion and memory. Most importantly, it gives brands a physical point of difference in an increasingly digital world.

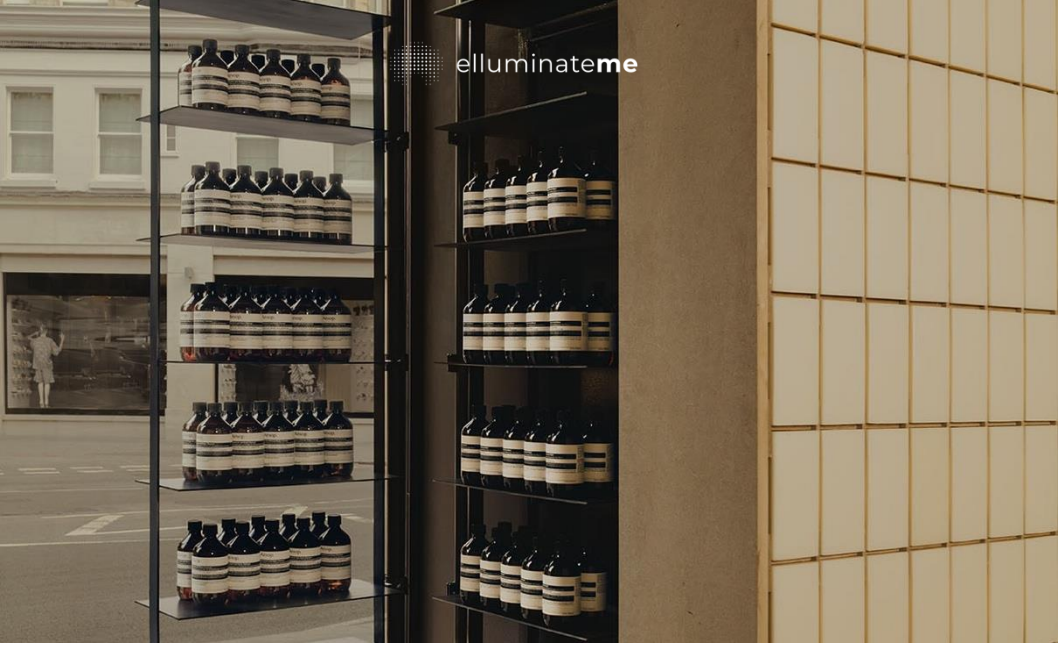
Best,
Steven Kainth
Founder, Elluminate Me

p.s. Feel free to share this document with anyone who may also find it valuable.

Cover page image: Polène



elluminateme



The Aesop store in Knightsbridge at 43 Brompton Road is built around a single defining gesture. Its walls are lined with about 4,500 individual bars of Aesop soap, originally created for the Milan Design Week 2024 installation Form Follows Formulation by Nicolas Schuybroek. After its outing at MDW, the entire structure was transplanted to London and reconstructed on site. The bars are held in a timber framework, each piece hand shaved by carpenters to account for size variations so that the grid could be assembled with exact precision.



Only a fraction of the soaps carry essential oils, roughly one fifth, to avoid overwhelming scent while still making the material presence clear. The result is a surface that shifts with light and temperature, sometimes appearing to sweat, and encouraging visitors to reach out and touch. The familiar Aesop communal sink, shelving and display counters were brought in from earlier stores as part of the company's focus on reuse and longevity. The space is narrow, pared back, and entirely defined by its tactile soap wall, turning a basic material into both architecture and atmosphere.

Strategic Notes



The strategic value lies in recognising that materiality itself can become narrative. The soap wall does not describe Aesop's values through graphics or slogans, it forces visitors to slow down and engage with the product in a new physical state. This approach suggests that brands in any sector can reconsider their raw materials not only for function but as spatial building blocks. Leather, paper, fabric, or even packaging waste can be scaled into architecture, turning product into infrastructure. It shifts the retail site from a backdrop to an active demonstration of how the brand thinks and makes.

The lesson is that tactility can serve as the most direct form of storytelling. When a material is deployed in a way that changes how people move through space, it embeds memory without explanation and gives the store lasting cultural weight.

Image: Aesop



elluminateme



Lexus' A–Un installation at Milan Design Week approached touch as something far more nuanced than surface contact. The piece explored how a vehicle might one day feel its driver, reading micro-movements, pulse and presence with the same sensitivity as skin. The 10-metre bamboo-fibre structure acted like a responsive membrane. Thirty five kilometres of woven thread formed a semi-transparent skin that revealed its lattice only when you moved closer, encouraging a tactile kind of seeing. As visitors stepped near it, the installation registered their heartbeat and small shifts in posture. The imagery softened or sharpened in response, behaving almost like a living surface that adjusted to the person in front of it. The combination of natural fibre and digital projection created a hybrid material that felt both ancient and sensorially alive, echoing the responsiveness of touch without requiring actual contact.



By grounding advanced technology in a crafted bamboo skin, Lexus demonstrated how future car interiors could communicate through material sensitivity. Instead of touchscreens, the vehicle becomes an environment that reads your physical state, calibrates itself and meets you halfway. It positions touch not as a button to press but as a shared field of awareness between human and machine.

Strategic Notes

- Use material skins that respond to micro-movements and physiology, expanding the idea of touch beyond physical contact.
- Combine natural craft materials with digital systems to create emotional warmth and credibility in tech-heavy environments.
- Treat vehicle interiors as sensory membranes that read and adjust to the occupant's state rather than waiting for manual commands.
- Design for mutual awareness, where machine intelligence responds to the user's presence with the subtlety of touch.
- Position touch as a non-visual communication channel, aligning with future screenless, ambient experiences.

Image: Lexus



elluminateme



Maison Diptyque's New Bond Street flagship turns materiality into a form of storytelling. Restored mouldings, stonework and timber sit beside sculptural fixtures and contemporary art, creating a space where every surface carries the mark of handmade and heritage. Throughout the boutique, touch becomes the anchor: textured finishes, crafted objects and display tables designed as sculptural pieces all invite slow, close engagement. The five thousand glazed ceramic leaves in the boudoir celebrate the unbridled nature of English gardens, adding a tactile, almost botanical presence that connects Parisian identity to London's cultural landscape. Furthermore, the boudoir continues this physical narrative where products are explored through texture and ritual, shifting cleansing from a functional task to an intimate, hands-on experience (you must go to wash your hands here!). It is a room designed to be felt as much as seen, encouraging visitors to engage through material and water rather than signage or instruction.



Strategic Notes

The strategic opportunity lies in using restored surfaces and crafted materials to communicate authenticity through physical evidence rather than narrative. By reframing functional categories as ritual-led tactile experiences, brands can deepen emotional engagement and extend dwell time. Sculptural fixtures and handcrafted details elevate the environment, turning touch into a marker of value and craftsmanship. Seasonal or limited-edition material installations, such as the ceramic leaves, add temporal tactility that encourages repeat visitation. Ultimately, touch becomes the bridge between heritage and contemporary culture, allowing Diptyque to evolve while staying grounded in its identity.



Image: Diptyque



elluminateme

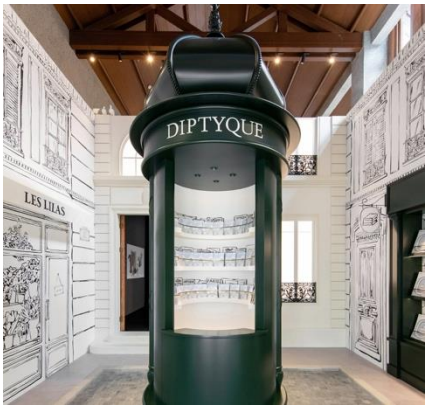
elluminateme



Diptyque's immersive exhibition "Un Air de Paris" in Shanghai, held from 17 September to 8 October 2025 at Zhangyuan, a restored shikumen courtyard complex, translated the brand's Parisian heritage into a series of tactile encounters. Conceived as a journey through fragrance, design and narrative, the exhibition invited visitors to feel the brand's world through crafted surfaces, hand-finished details and material demonstrations. Guests moved through a heritage gallery recounting Diptyque's 1961 origins, an atelier where traditional wax work and ceramics were shaped by hand, and a sensory garden where all forty-nine candles could be experienced not only through scent but through the textures of wax, vessel and flame.



The use of Shanghai's historic alley architecture grounded the experience in local urban ancestry, creating a physical dialogue between Parisian craft and Chinese material heritage. Across twelve distinct scenes – from a mirrored house to an artistic newsstand, a leafy café and floral installations – touch became a quiet connector, whether in the temperature of stone underfoot, the smoothness of ceramics, or the layered surfaces that echoed Parisian life and memory.



Ultimately, the exhibition immersed visitors in scent, craft and atmosphere by allowing them to engage with materials directly. It demonstrated how tactile design strengthens the link between fragrance, place and culture, reinforcing Diptyque's position as a house defined by artistry, sensory depth and the physicality of making.





Enigma in Barcelona was conceived by RCR Arquitectes with Pau Llimona with intent was to immerse guests in a shifting world where surfaces, light and structure dissolve into one another. The plan unfolds as a labyrinth, with passages and translucent glass panels that guide movement and vision while leaving boundaries blurred. The material language is dominated by Neolith, a sintered stone printed with a watercolour painting from the architects. This pattern continues across floors, walls and counters, so the entire interior reads as a single mural in shades of grey, blue and green. Each slab was cut differently, creating irregular joints and a jigsaw-like rhythm that preserves the fluidity of the original artwork.



Above, aluminium mesh clouds form a suspended canopy. This ceiling diffuses light and casts shifting shadows, giving the sense of an atmospheric sky inside the building. Lighting is subdued and carefully directed, glowing through the rippled glass partitions and scattering across the watery stone surfaces. The impression is one of continuous transformation where material and light appear to melt together.
Culinary workstations are embedded throughout, positioned behind glass or framed by partial partitions so cooking becomes part of the architectural sequence. Arrival, passage and chamber all combine into a continuous theatre of stone, glass and light. The entire experience feels dreamlike, with the architecture itself acting as the main performer.



Strategic Notes

For brands, Enigma highlights the value of cinematic, atmospheric design where material, light and shadow shift subtly to deepen engagement and extend dwell time. Embedding functional elements into the architecture strengthens the sense of experience-as-theatre, leaving visitors with a space that feels memorable, cohesive and alive.

Image: Enigma



elluminateme



Haus Nowhere in Seoul, Gentle Monster's fourteen-storey flagship and creative headquarters, treats the entire building as a tactile universe. Raw concrete, sculptural forms and shifting material zones guide how visitors move and feel, with each floor offering a different physical atmosphere. Textured surfaces, kinetic installations and crafted objects invite close interaction, turning retail into a sequence of touchpoints rather than product displays. Throughout the space, material contrasts smooth glass, poured concrete, metal meshes and soft sculptural forms create a continuous sensory rhythm. Haus Nowhere shows how physical texture and atmospheric design can anchor memory and emotion in a brand environment, proving that touch remains one of the most powerful tools for immersive retail.



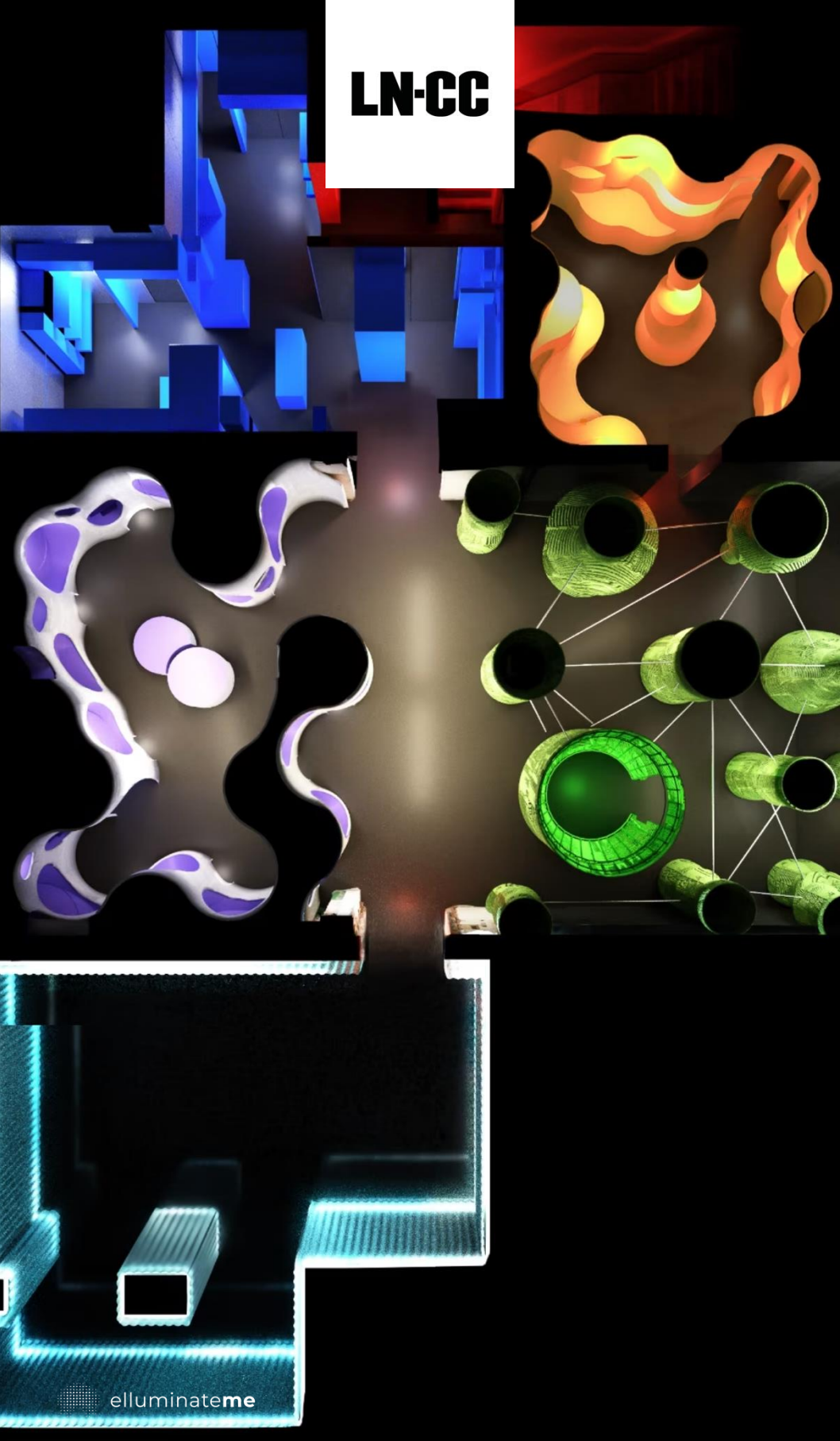
Strategic Notes

Brands can learn from Haus Nowhere's use of material contrast and tactile sequencing to build deeper emotional engagement. By treating surfaces, textures and sensory transitions as narrative tools rather than backdrops, physical spaces can guide behaviour, create memorability and differentiate in a screen-saturated world. Embedding kinetic or atmospheric elements that invite slow, close interaction encourages dwell time and fosters a sense of discovery. Most importantly, Haus Nowhere shows that touch-driven environments allow products to be experienced within a larger emotional landscape, positioning the brand not simply as a retailer but as a cultural space people want to return to.



Image: Gentle Monster

LN-CC





The LN-CC flagship in Dalston sits inside a reworked light-industrial building at 18–24 Shacklewell Lane. Redesigned in 2024 by set designer Gary Card, it unfolds as six tactile rooms, each defined by its own material character. Visitors enter through a bright orange timber tunnel whose tight, octagonal form creates an immediate shift in temperature, sound and texture. Inside, the Atrium rises in green corrugated structures that feel sculptural and weighty. Callisto uses resin surfaces and soft lilac light to create smooth, cool planes that echo geological strata. Midtarsal, the footwear space, wraps the walls in warm, flesh-toned curves shaped to evoke the arch of a foot. Cobalt presents deep blue, harder surfaces for streetwear, while L8TE, with mirrors and programmable light, functions as a small club and performance space.



Across the store, floors, wall finishes and display units change in grain, density and warmth, encouraging visitors to adjust how they stand, move and make contact. Tactile shifts from polished resin to rough timber and folded metal keep the body engaged, while each room's lighting and acoustics alter how surfaces are felt as well as seen. Touch becomes a constant presence, whether through handrails, seating edges or the walls themselves.



Strategic Notes

LN-CC demonstrates how a sequence of contrasting material environments can guide behaviour and shape pace. The narrow timber tunnel slows entry and heightens sensory focus, the green atrium opens the body and the breath, and Callisto's cool, uneven surfaces encourage slower inspection of product. Midtarsal's warm curves create comfort for footwear trials, while Cobalt's sharper light and harder textures move shoppers on more quickly. Each room sets a deliberate tempo and purpose, showing how touch and material rhythm can structure the entire customer journey.



Image: LN-CC


DSM



Verdy is a Japanese graphic artist from Osaka who builds whole visual worlds around his characters and street-culture roots. He works through projects like Girls Don't Cry, which carries a soft, emotional graphic language, and Wasted Youth, which channels punk and skate energy.

His mascots Vick and Visty turn those ideas into physical companions, appearing as giant plush figures and signature prints. In 2025 he runs the Verdy Gift Shop inside Dover Street Market London, taking over the basement kiosk and part of the ground floor for three weeks. Each Thursday new drops arrive, from DSM-exclusive Vick T-shirts to reworked vintage Nike jerseys, New Balance collaborations and sculptural Beats by Dre speaker holders.



The space functions less like a store and more like an art set, with shifting colours, dense graphics and life-size mascots that visitors walk around and photograph. Verdy describes the Gift Shop as a way to let people enter his creative universe, mixing product, character storytelling and streetwear culture in real time.



Strategic note

Verdy Gift Shop uses temporary retail as a live storytelling platform and merge art installation, collectible merchandise and character IP to build emotional attachment and turn customers into active promoters.

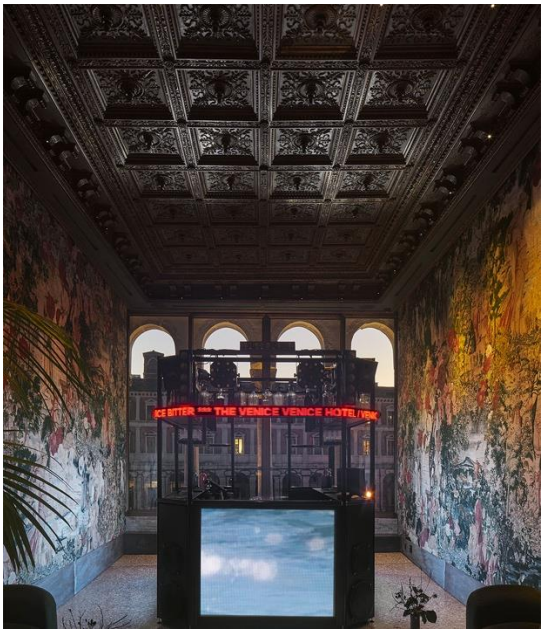
Image: Dover Street Market


elluminatēme



Golden Goose has transformed the thirteenth-century Palazzo Ca' da Mosto into The Venice Venice Hotel, restoring one of Venice's oldest buildings through a lens of material honesty. Original stone arches, carved columns, timber ceilings and the monumental staircase were repaired by hand, while exposed masonry now sits against new brass windows, iron details and marble floors. The hotel's forty-plus rooms are pared back so visitors feel the building's age directly through its surfaces — uneven stone, patinated plaster, cool marble and deep timber grain. Art is embedded into the architecture, from Fabio Viale's marble Pietà to mirrors cast from clay taken on site, creating a tactile dialogue between old structure and new work. Shared spaces, including the Venice M'Art café and the Altana terrace, continue this physical narrative, with every piece of furniture made specifically for the palazzo.





Strategic Notes

The Venice Venice Hotel shows the strategic power of allowing historic fabric to remain physically present rather than concealed. By using touch, texture and material age as core components of brand identity, the hotel becomes both restoration and cultural platform. Its value lies in leveraging a rare architectural site as an active, tactile environment for contemporary art, fashion and music, proving that heritage can be a dynamic sensory asset rather than a static backdrop.


elluminateme



Burberry staged a summer takeover at The Newt in Somerset, a 2,000-acre estate centred on Hadspen House with 42 guest rooms across the main house and the Farmyard. Presented as “The British at Play,” it ran through the 2025 summer season. The collaboration applied a custom green Burberry check across the grounds and guest touchpoints, aligning with the estate’s garden palette rather than importing a display set. The check pattern appeared on sun loungers, parasols, pool towels, picnic rugs and staff buggies, so the identity read consistently from arrival to poolside. The lawns and games were branded to the same effect. The croquet lawn was cut as an oversized Burberry check, and outdoor courts and play areas carried custom equipment and markings.



A Burberry-liveried hot-air balloon was based on the estate for scheduled ascents over the gardens and farmland when conditions allowed. Guests booked picnics made with estate produce packed in Burberry-lined baskets, and afternoon tea was served in The Creamery with a restored British Pullman train carriage dressed for the takeover, bringing the heritage rail reference into a fixed dining setting on site. A dedicated boutique presented Burberry’s Summer 2025 pieces suited to country and garden use, with accessories such as hats and umbrellas aligned to the green check used across the property.



Strategic Notes

This takeover shows how touch can anchor brand identity across an entire environment. By integrating the custom green check into surfaces people physically engage with loungers, parasols, towels, picnic rugs, game equipment and even the cut of the croquet lawn, the collaboration turned texture, fabric and material contact into a coherent brand language. Picnics packed in Burberry-lined baskets, the Pullman carriage dressed for tea service and the branded hot-air balloon all extended this tactile continuity, ensuring every guest interaction involved a physical encounter with the brand. For luxury brands, the strategy proves that embedding identity into everyday touchpoints creates immersion without overwhelming the setting, allowing the brand to feel lived, felt and naturally part of place rather than simply applied on top of it.

Image: Burberry/thenewtinsomerset



elluminateme



SALT's flagship at 13 Stoney Street, redesigned by Unknown Works inside a former Victorian storehouse, uses materiality and sound as core parts of the experience. The interior replaces traditional mirrors with hand-buffed steel that distorts reflections and catches light differently as you move, turning every surface into a shifting tactile encounter. A custom stainless-steel sound wall, built with reclaimed material from the V&A and Science Museum, houses the salon's audio system and adds cool, weighty texture to the space. Across the three floors, textures shift from polished metal to concrete, soft seating and opal glass, encouraging visitors to feel the space physically as they move through it. Sound is tuned room-by-room, creating zones where acoustics and material warmth shape mood as much as the design itself.



Strategic Notes

SALT shows how using tactile materials and acoustic design can elevate a functional service into a sensory experience. Reclaimed steel, textured surfaces and calibrated soundscapes create a space that feels deliberate, memorable and emotionally grounded. For brands, it highlights the value of treating touch and sound as structural elements that guide behaviour, create atmosphere and build a stronger sense of identity.

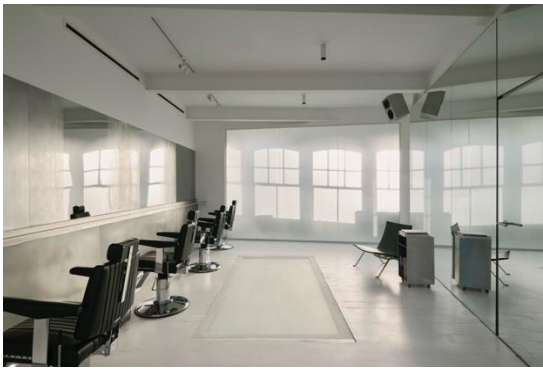


Image: © Henry Wolde



elluminateme



Canada Goose best known for parkas engineered for arctic conditions, the brand extended this credibility into its stores by introducing Cold Rooms from 2016 onwards. These controlled environments sit inside selected flagships and allow visitors to *feel* the insulation rather than simply read about it. Temperatures drop to around –13 °C and some locations use snow machines to recreate biting, granular cold. The result is a space where the body becomes the testing tool: customers sense the weight, warmth and protective shell of the jackets in the conditions they were designed for, turning touch, temperature and atmosphere into the proof points of the brand.



Strategic Notes

Canada Goose shows how extreme tactile environments can validate product claims far more powerfully than signage or sales language. Letting customers feel performance under stress conditions creates trust, reduces decision friction and reinforces technical authority. By embedding a controlled climate zone into the retail journey, the brand positioned itself as a leader in experiential testing, using temperature and physical sensation as core components of luxury storytelling.



Image: Canada Goose

POLÈNE



elluminateme



This is Polène's first Korean flagship on Garosu-gil in Gangnam-gu, Seoul. The two-floor store was conceived by design studio WGNB, led by architect Jonghwan Baek, who translated the essence of leather into an architectural language. The interior and façade are treated as if they were a single sheet of leather, cut and draped to form walls, ceilings, and the central staircase, creating a continuous sculptural volume. Throughout the space, materials echo the brand's identity. Columns are wrapped in leather-like structures, and surfaces reflect the different sides and textures of a hide. A ceramic table by Dasol Lee reproduces the tactile qualities of leather through trompe-l'œil, while ginkgo wood furniture by Jungjoo Im highlights Korean mastery. These details ground the Parisian brand in a local cultural context.



The second-floor features Photobloom, an installation with oversized leather flowers and natural backdrops that encourages visitors to capture their own images inside the brand's universe. The full collection of bags, pouches, and jewellery is displayed in a calm, minimalist environment that allows the products to take centre stage. The flagship demonstrates Polène's commitment to sensory experience, material authenticity, and architectural innovation.



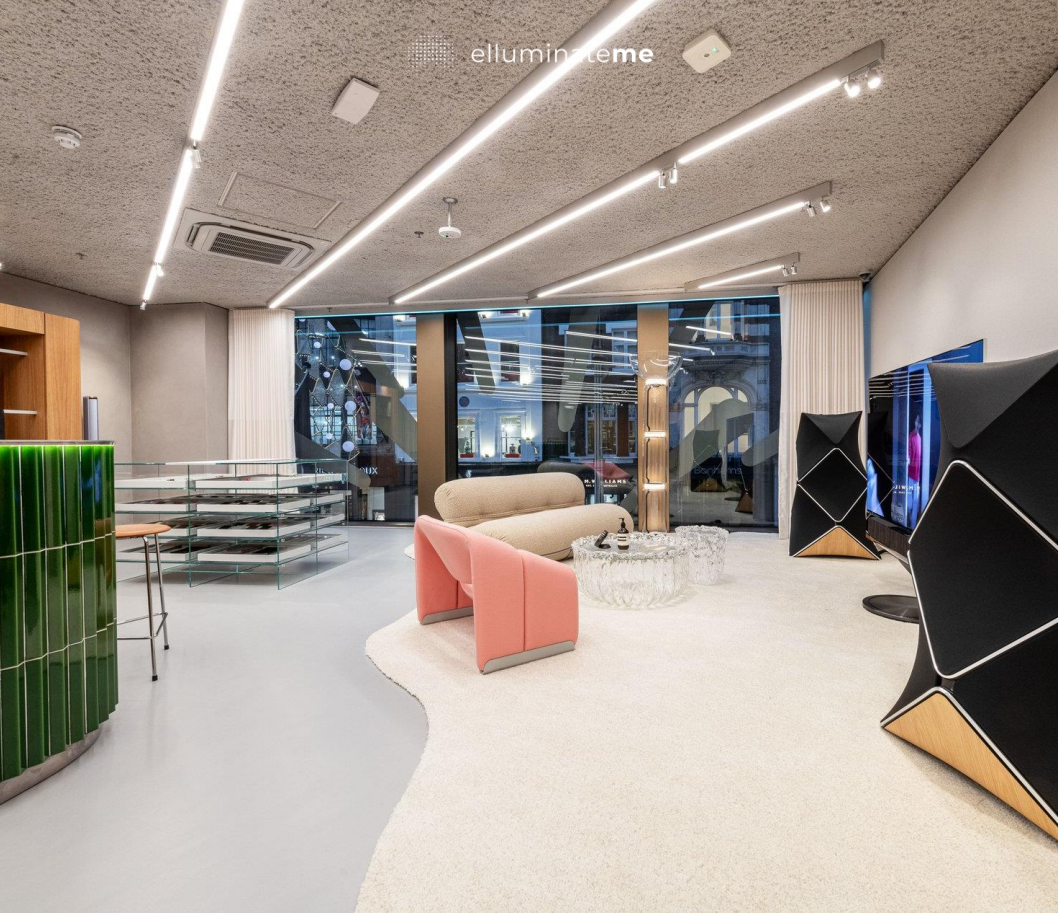
Strategic Notes

The space is built as if it were leather itself, so before a customer handles a bag, they are already surrounded by the textures that define it. Real hides, ceramics imitating grain, and wood shaped to recall folds of material sharpen sensitivity to texture and weight. This primes visitors to read the products through their hands and eyes with more attention to detail. By embedding these cues in the architecture, the store trains perception rather than simply presenting goods. The result is a retail setting that turns material awareness into part of the buying process.

Image: Polène



elluminateme



Bang & Olufsen's New Bond Street flagship is a 4,000-square-foot, three-level space built around the physicality of sound. Natural oak, brushed aluminium and acoustic textiles create a quiet, tactile backdrop that invites visitors to run their hands along surfaces, feel material temperature and understand how texture shapes acoustics. The central expereince is the Sensorium, a sound-isolated chamber where visitors experience B&O systems through vibration, air pressure and spatial resonance as much as through listening. Across the store, modular displays, fabric-wrapped panels and customisable finishes encourage clients to handle products directly, exploring the weight, surface and craftsmanship that define the brand's Scandinavian design language.



Strategic Notes

B&O demonstrates how tactility and acoustic design can turn a retail space into a form of product validation. By allowing visitors to feel materials, sense sound physically and customise finishes through touch, the store strengthens trust and deepens emotional engagement. Presenting products within architectural and sonic context shows how they behave in real environments, positioning the flagship as both a cultural venue and a sensory showcase for the brand's identity.



Image : B&O


UGG



UGG's Knightsbridge flagship on Brompton Road is designed around physical comfort, with materials and forms that echo the brand's signature softness. The most distinctive expression of this is the changing rooms. They are shaped to feel like stepping inside an UGG boot: warm, cocooned and quietly private. Curved surfaces, padded finishes and gentle, diffused lighting create an enveloping atmosphere, so customers feel held rather than watched. Every texture has been chosen to soften the experience, from the plush seating to the warm surfaces that encourage slow, tactile interaction with footwear.



Elsewhere in the store, the curving central staircase sets the tone, the UGG Renew programme brings sustainability into the service experience, and a commissioned artwork by British artist Liam Pitchford grounds the space in Knightsbridge. The result is a store where comfort isn't just a product story but something you physically feel the moment you step inside.



Strategic Notes

Touch is one of UGG's strongest differentiators, and the Knightsbridge flagship shows how to use physical comfort as a retail strategy. By shaping the changing rooms to feel like the inside of a boot, the brand turns trying on product into a sensory proof point. Soft materials, curved forms and warm lighting reinforce the emotional qualities UGG is known for, creating a space where comfort is experienced, not just described. The integration of UGG Renew and locally commissioned art strengthens the sense of care and authenticity. For brands, the lesson is clear: when touch and material atmosphere express the product's core promise, the store becomes a living extension of the brand rather than a backdrop for it.

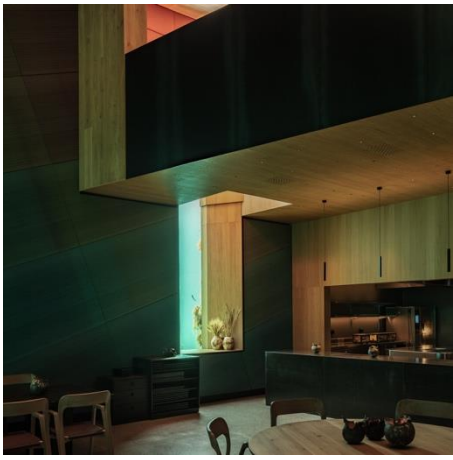
Image: Gensler



elluminateme



Under in Lindesnes is Europe's first underwater restaurant and a major work of environmental architecture. Located on Norway's southern coast, it joins structural engineering with marine observation. The concept is to let visitors experience the sea from within rather than view it from above.
Designed by Snøhetta, the 34-metre concrete structure is partly submerged and built to endure the weight and movement of the North Sea. Its exterior is coarse to allow marine growth, turning the surface into a functional part of the ecosystem.



Visitors enter through a small building on land and walk down a gradual passage lined with oak. The transition from daylight to dim light signals entry into a different environment. Materials such as oak, wool, and metal were chosen to manage sound, insulation, and temperature as the space narrows and deepens.

At the lower level, the dining room opens to a large acrylic window that measures more than eleven metres across. It provides an unobstructed view of the seabed and surrounding life. Lighting is kept at low intensity to prevent glare and keep focus on the view outside. Furniture and fittings were made in collaboration with Norwegian craftspeople using local wood and natural fabrics. The layout follows clear proportions and symmetry to maintain visual calm.



Strategic Notes

Under shows how material transitions can shape emotional immersion as powerfully as views or storytelling. The journey from rough exterior concrete to warm oak, dense wool and cool metal creates a graded tactile shift that prepares guests for the underwater environment long before they reach the dining room. These materials regulate sound, temperature and atmosphere, making visitors physically aware of their movement deeper into the structure. By using texture and thermal contrast as part of the narrative, Snøhetta turns touch into a guiding tool, helping guests adjust, slow down and tune into their surroundings. For brands, Under demonstrates that when materials change with purpose, coarse to smooth, warm to cool, open to enclosed, physical sensation becomes a silent form of wayfinding and a powerful driver of memory and meaning.

Image: Under

elluminateme

We Don’t Just Spot What’s Next. We Help You Act on It

Steven Kainth has spent over two decades helping global brands navigate innovation. At the heart of his work is a belief that communication should move people — and deliver results.

.

“Steven is truly a rare find. He’s a brilliant strategist with a keen ability to stay tuned into those industry happenings that others seem to miss. He is the consummate dot-connector, making profound observations that tie the current trends to client needs in practical, usable, achievable ways. He is deft and inspiring in his communications with current and prospective clients: they seem to hang on his every word... But it's not just flair. He has the substance to back it up.”

General manager, Berkshire Hathaway company

TO EXPLORE HOW ELLUMINATE CAN SUPPORT YOUR NEXT PROJECT OR STRATEGIC CHALLENGE

elluminateme.com

Some of our clients and brand experiences:

fitbit Google FORTNUM &MASON EST 1707 hp Mercedes-Benz

MICHAEL KORS Microsoft OAKLEY OMEGA

PRADA Ray-Ban SONY SONOS UGG

Bespoke insight reports are available on request. Topics include:

AI | AR | Audio | Digital, Social & Media | Experiential Marketing | Fashion Tech | Health & Wellness | MR | Materials | RR | Retail | Robotics | Sports Tech | Transportation | Wearable Technology | Workspaces | VR