

# FRAME

THE NEXT SPACE

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From teenagers congregating in shopping malls to retirees sipping coffee on the high street, commerce has brought people physically together for decades.

In our post-pandemic society, community is a more potent force than ever. Recent data by consumer and location intelligence specialist CACI shows that consumers are now placing greater value on community and sustainability, while the Edelman Trust Barometer found that ‘people in my community’ (62 per cent) are more trusted than CEOs (49 per cent). The reason for this is innately human – after spending so long apart from people, we now long to feel a sense of belonging in our local neighbourhoods, families and peer groups.

But where does that leave brands? Where a retailer’s place in communities was once tied to a point of transaction, this is no longer the case. After all, citizens are on a collective mission to

reduce consumption, leaving businesses with a choice: bow out, or offer spaces and services as opposed to only products.

In the coming years, this could transform the role of the retailer from a seller into a community organizer. Here, we unpack the ways storefronts will serve as neighbourhood hubs for inspiration, information and day-to-day errands, and how to design for such changes. From citizens as in-store curators to branded eco-educators; after-hours parties to malls that morph into market squares – the opportunities are ready and waiting for designers and architects. Read on to find out how retail can truly be built *by* – rather than *for* – communities.

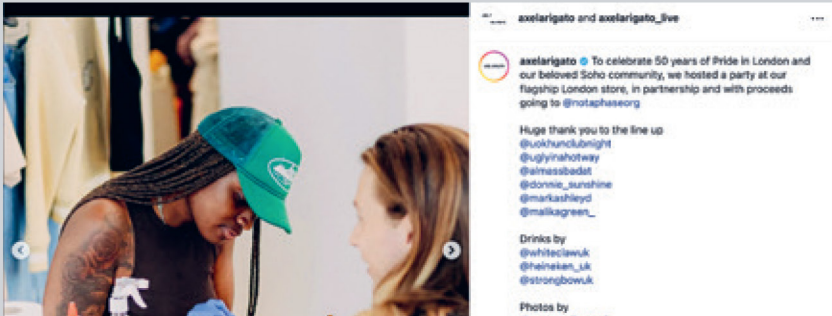
Words Holly Friend

# COMMUNITY STORES



HOW DO RETAILERS – WHICH TRADITIONALLY RELY ON SALES – PROVE THEMSELVES AS ALLIES IN THE COMMUNITY-FIRST MOVEMENT?

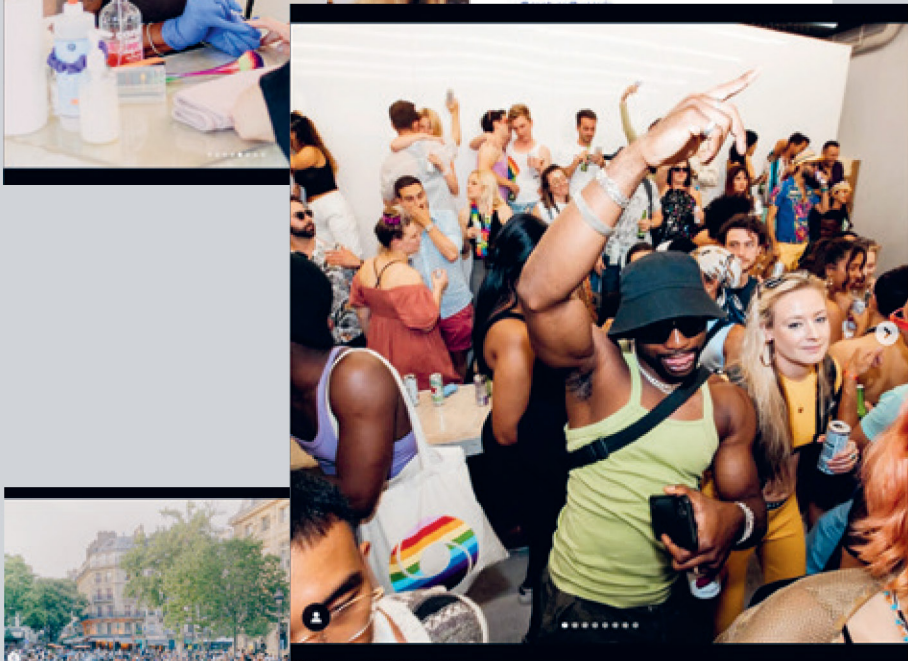
# 1 — CO-CURATION



Corrin Endicott / Harry Ellerson



Lami Loubet



Corrin Endicott / Harry Ellerson



Lami Loubet

Recognizing the need for social connection among its young community, Axel Arigato hosts activities like free tattoos and wild dance parties, which require the Swedish sneaker brand to diversify its team to include event staff.



Lami Loubet

Once upon a time, the future of retail was puppeteered by a group of C-suite executives calling the shots from towering head offices, metaphorically – and often literally – worlds away from their neighbourhood stores and the shoppers who sustained them. In other words, there was a great disconnect, with communities seen solely as consumers and shopfronts as sales points.

But today, the tables are beginning to turn as retailers recognize the importance of building spaces that are human-centric as well as profit-centric. ‘It’s really important to see the customers as part of the ecosystem we want to build,’ explains Jenny Lee, Life at Home leader at Ikea. ‘We need to see consumers as co-creators and investors, not solely as end users.’

In a sector that still defines itself by economical transaction, how do retailers go about making this shift to a community-first model? ‘It’s about getting customers to be involved from the beginning to the end, because ultimately it’s the everyday people that will be interacting with the space on a daily basis,’ Lee continues. What this creates is an opportunity to redefine the relationship

between stores and those who frequent them. Nick Roberts, associate director at Brinkworth, suggests how language could help us make this distinction, swapping ‘customers’ for a new term entirely: ‘participants’.

Turning passive customers into active decision makers doesn’t only make people feel more valued by businesses, but it also has the potential to solve problems retailers are facing, such as the fact that 63 per cent of consumers expect businesses to know their unique needs and expectations, according to research by Salesforce.

Swedish sneaker brand Axel Arigato has recognized the need for social connection among members of its Gen Z-skewing community, who, after years of dampened social opportunities, want to get to know each other, as well as the brand. That’s why the brand has been hosting numerous in-store activations, from free tattoos to wild dance parties. Going forward, it foresees a need for new retail roles that don’t revolve around sales assisting: ‘To have so many different activations, you need a full team of event staff, people who know how to create parties and festivals,’ explains cofounder Max Svärth. »



# 63%

of consumers expect businesses to know their unique needs and expectations

Maris Mezulis



‘We need certain materials that can survive a place that can be a living space, a nightclub and a store’

As part of the events programme at the Citadium Caumartin flagship in Paris – a design by Ciguë – DJs perform in a glass box at the centre of the store.



While retailers are never going to be able to bend to the demands of every individual shopper, one way they can be shaped by their communities is by turning their buildings into malleable, ever-evolving spaces. Going beyond the pop-up model of the 2010s, David Monaghan, general manager of retail at Beulah, also sees the potential in recasting retail roles. He believes it's going to be important that a landlord or developer 'has a team of people, whether it's curatorial or editorial, that is able to move things around, rotate concepts and collaborate with brands . . . almost like a theatre set.' This could even mean, as Burberry's director of architecture Neil Sharman suggests, applying the concept of guest editors to the mall.

An industry that is already *au fait* with the role of a guest editor is fashion media, so it may not come as a surprise that media brands are applying their knowledge of curation to the retail space. Take Hypebeast, for example. The platform, which focuses on streetwear content, has unveiled HBX, a seven-storey flagship and US headquarters in New York's Chinatown, as part of its mission to expand its loyal community beyond publishing. 'We already have a thriving online community and we wanted to build on the momentum by creating a physical space that houses the entire Hypebeast ecosystem in a complete 360-degree way,' explains its chief experience officer Sujean Lee. While the store does not explicitly use guest editors, it has tapped into its curation expertise as a media brand

with a real-time directory of knowledge of its customer base. With an Epson survey finding that 75 per cent of European shoppers say they would change their shopping behaviour if high street stores were more experiential, HBX is using modular fixtures to respond to what its community wants, building a shared 'court-yard' for hosting pop-up events.

Something that connects these examples is their respect for neighbours. According to a post-pandemic study by Nextdoor, 73 per cent of respondent Americans believe neighbours are their most important community, highlighting a shift towards hyper-localism that urban planners and businesses will soon be expected to follow. A handful of brands are already at the forefront of this, setting the standard for how retailers can actively listen to their neighbours at the early stages of development, rather than waiting until their doors are open. Architect Frank Maali is setting a blueprint for community retail with his design for the campus of homeware brand Vipp, which is currently transforming an old pencil factory in the Copenhagen neighbourhood of Islands Brygge into a holistic brand experience. Conceived in close dialogue with its neighbours, the space is described by Maali as belonging 'to a family of buildings', with large glass façades that offer 'visual contact and visual connection from one building to another'. The space doubles as an experiential test lab, a public-facing cultural hub that has already played host to intimate supper clubs and high-end hotel rooms. »

‘We need to see consumers as co-creators and investors, not solely as end users’

Nikon's Lukstudio-designed Shanghai store includes an interactive testing station with a modular display system (bottom) and a level dedicated to community engagement (top), where flexible furniture enables an easy transition from a casual hangout area to a space for workshops and studio shooting.



Wen Studio