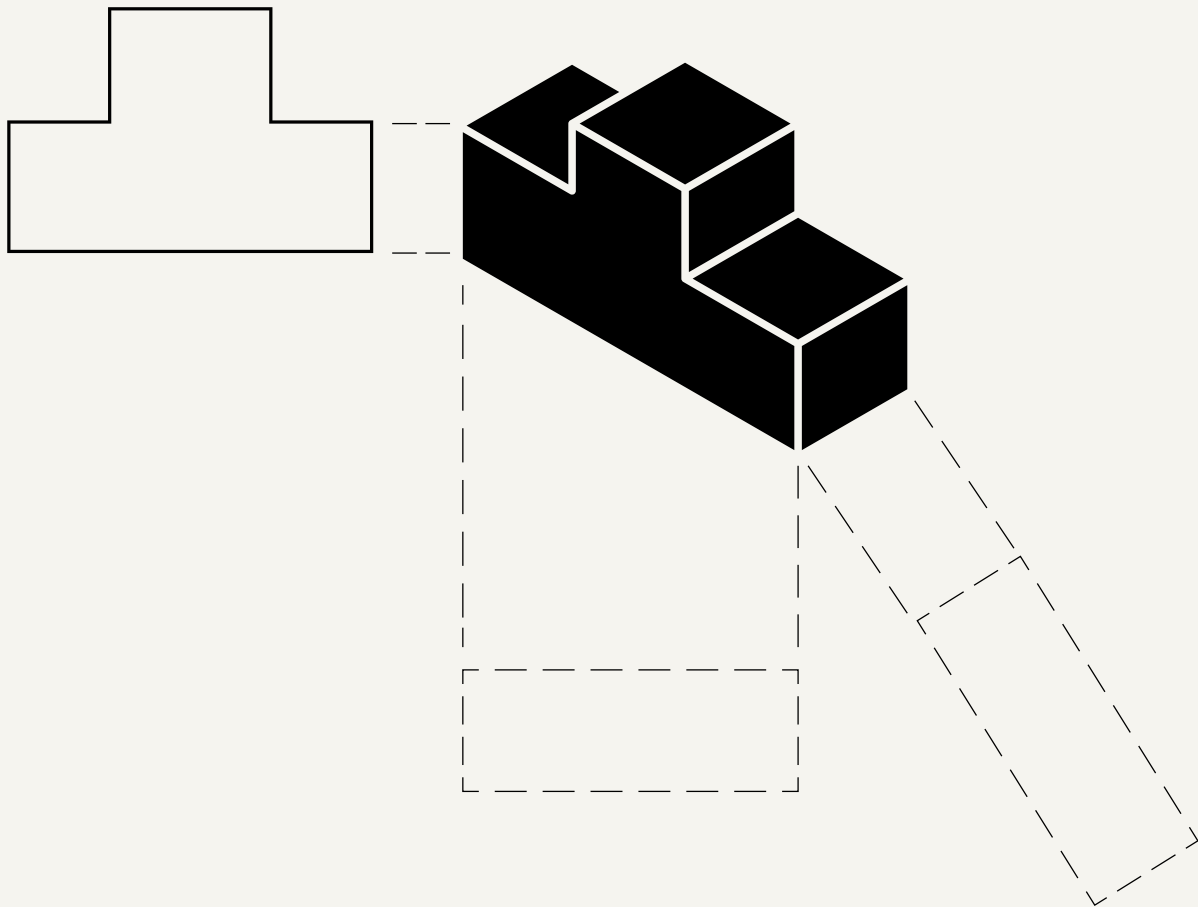


Building Identity: Comparative Case Studies



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Retail stores are images first. Before someone walks into your store, they make an assessment and judgment based on the exterior. When Supreme moved their New York store a few years ago they selected a corner location in the Bowery that was covered in graffiti. The building had sat vacant for as long as I can recall, and over that time it had become a canvas for street artists and anyone who felt compelled to leave a mark. It was the type of property most organizations would run from. If someone did manage to see the value in the building, they would have assumed it was only after the removal of all the graffiti and marks. This was not the case for Supreme. The building, as it stood: covered in graffiti as far as the arm could reach, a product of the streets, shabby, beaten down, but authentic in its grit. This was the perfect store for Supreme; a clothing brand started by skateboarders for skateboarders. Supreme moved into the building as is. For them, they could not have created a more perfect first image because it would have lacked the authenticity of being *of the streets*.

In this paper I will build upon the discussions in some of the previous papers dealing with brand and store, or building identity, using a comparison between two approaches to retail identity: the Apple store and the Sugamo Shinkin Bank, a credit union located outside Tokyo. I have chosen these two brands because they both invest in building a brand experience that begins with the approach to the store, and each represent different approaches to how they create a building identity.

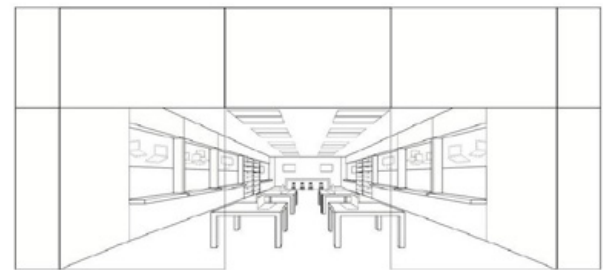


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First, let's look at how Apple approaches their retail store identity. The Apple store has evolved over the years, but they have maintained a consistent approach, design and formula while allowing the interior to evolve. The store design began as one part museum, one part playground (a place to test and play with their products), and one part retail shopping. The store design successfully triggered customers to feel comfortable hanging out there, and their evolution has included new ways to get people to come in and stay longer, such as content and classes. The original store design was all white, then they implemented the metal version, and most recently they have the Italian stone design with tree planters. The most recent version represents the fulfillment of their journey from computer electronics manufacturer to a luxury brand.



The Apple store identity is best exhibited in their dematerialized glass box for the 5th Avenue store in New York City. It is seemingly all about the brand sign. They are seeking to reduce the store identity to its essence, a very simple, "we are here." To achieve this absolute simplicity, they needed to design the conditions to make it about the sign, which is the innovative technologically advanced detailing and construction. There is so much effort that went into the design and execution of this simple glass cube, but this is the Apple ethos, and it is made clear in each of their stores.



Apple even patented their store design, the one-point perspective looking through the front doors (see side bar image from their patent document). This is the level of control and discipline they approach the building identity. First, that you can see clearly inside the store from outside, seemingly nothing is hidden. And second, their attention to symmetry, alignment, and an overall purism is clearly on display. It also creates the intuitive identification of the store; one would know it was an Apple store even if the sign was not present. As evident in the patent image

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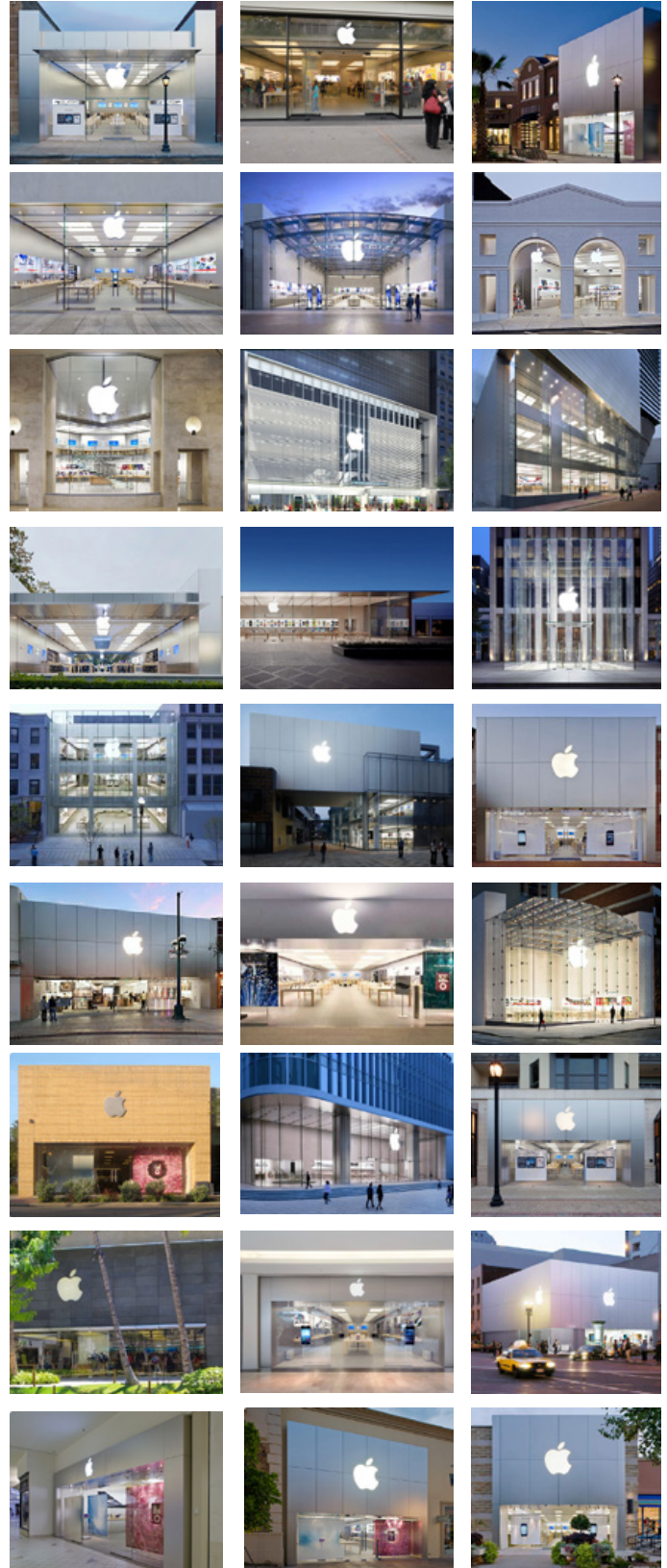
where the Apple logo is missing. See the following page for the consistency of this across a sampling of their store portfolio.

The approach and exterior of Apple stores are consistent and successfully prelude the brand experience. Apple also successfully preempts the brick and mortar visit with exceptional cross channel connectivity through web and mobile. They have opened stores across the globe while adhering to a strict brand guideline. This formula informs the real estate selection and can adapt to each property. It is a great example of a simple formula for the identity of the store.

FORMULA:

- 1. Glowing Apple icon
- 2. Dematerialized interior fully visible upon approach
- 3. Single-point perspective (central axis, grid layout)
- 4. Minimal aesthetic

Apple will select old prestigious properties or create new spectacular stores with a machine-aesthetic and be clearly Apple in both approaches. This is quite rare to have such coordination and discipline in the design of stores. It begins with the real estate selection, and continues with the design team, but it would not work as a pass over the wall process. It is defined, standardized, coordinated, and meticulously adhered to. Look at the variation in building types, and materiality across this array of images and yet how intuitively iconic the Apple brand comes across. Notice how the glowing white Apple logo, with only a few exceptions, has a high contrast to the setting.



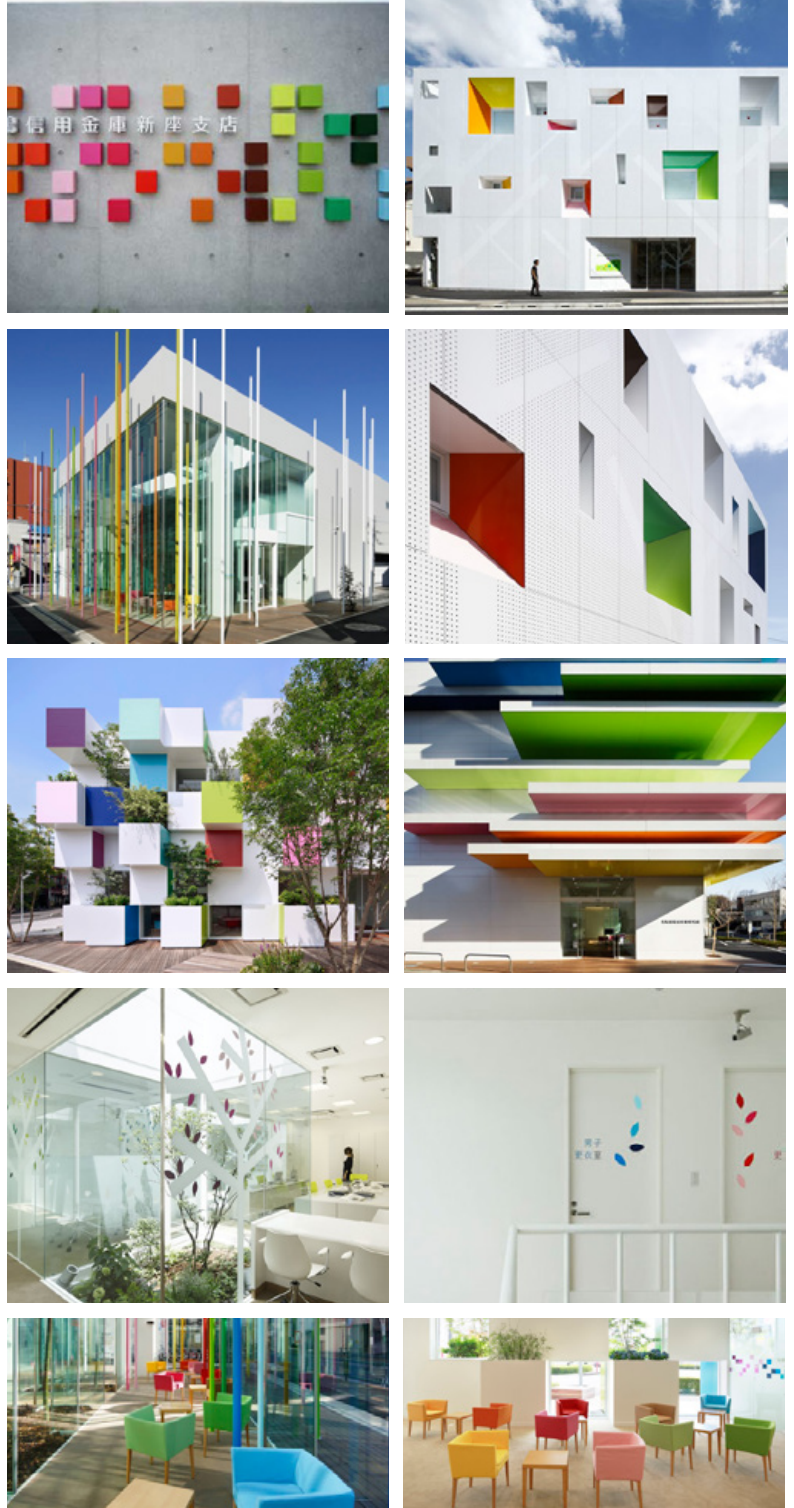
Building Identity: Comparative Case Studies

Now, let's look at the Sugamo Shinkin Bank store identity. It will quickly become evident why I selected this brand. The Sugamo Shinkin example is quite unique as it exhibits a core set of principles for the image and experience of the branch, which becomes a design language for the brand. The intent is to be outwardly expressive through the building form and architecture while maintaining a fairly simple interior design. The design is expressive upon approach, and unique for each branch. This is a creative way to brand their properties. Easily identifiable, each building is unique, in the words of the architect, "playing a melody with colors." To my understanding, the consistency is a product of using the same architect for the different buildings, allowing them to be creative within an acceptable design language for the brand.

FORMULA:

1. Unique exterior design using multiple colors of brand identity
2. Overt provocation in design
3. White field background
4. Activation through whimsical use of color

This is a very different approach than that of Apple's consistency of standardization but requires the same level of brand definition and standardization as to what is and what is not representative of the brand. The Sugamo Shinkin Banks do not need signs as the building design is the identity, but continually rethought for each store implementation.



Design Made Shorts are brief articles on change and design by Founder & Chief Designer Brock Danner. See our website for more: designmadenyc.com