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Couture Cabana

Miami

Rene Gonzalez's second Alchemist store in the famed 1111 Lincoln Road parking garage is a cool respite from a hot city.

By Linda Lee





PHOTOGRAPHY: © MICHAEL STAVARIDIS; IWAN BAAN (FAR RIGHT)

BEACH COOLER The architects angled the walls and sheathed them and the ceiling in melamine foam. Merchandise is easily accessible in carved-out shelves. One of Zaha Hadid's benches (opposite) holds a cooler of juices. Whereas the fifth-floor Alchemist has a serene, gallerylike atmosphere, the ground-floor store draws on the energy of the street outside (left). The mirrored ceiling at the front reflects the exterior (below left). Below, Herzog & de Meuron's 1111 Lincoln Road garage in 2010.

RENE GONZALEZ'S new Alchemist shop on Miami's Lincoln Road has some tough competition. It stands on a popular plaza opposite a garish movie theater, the Regal South Beach. It is at the base of the 1111 parking garage by Herzog & de Meuron (RECORD, June 2010, page 134), a destination for architourists and the star of numerous photo shoots and television ads. And it has to, if not best, then at least match the success of Gonzalez's previous Alchemist store on the fifth floor of the garage, notable for its austere glass-box beauty and the tightly curated high fashion inside, including the designs of Rick Owens and Givenchy.

The fifth-floor shop, which opened in May 2010, has been widely published and is a financial success. Gonzalez compares it to elite stores like Colette in Paris and the boutiques on Corso Como in Milan, known to the discerning few: "If

you are a follower of these brands, you go to Milan, you go to Corso Como; you go to Paris, you go to Colette. People who come to Miami come here."

Roma Cohen, owner of Alchemist with his wife, Erika Sussman, says Alchemist on the fifth floor and the

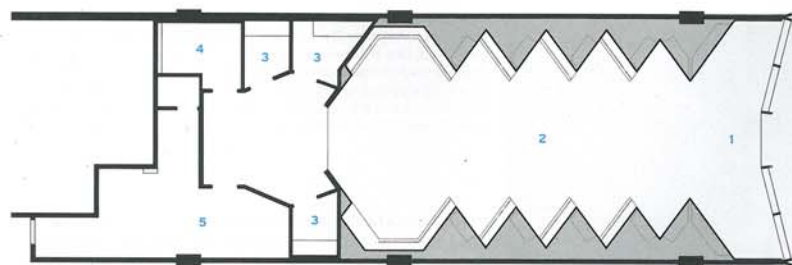


1111 parking garage complement each other. "People come to see the building and then they see our store, or they come to see our store and then they see the building," he says.

But for an outpost on the ground floor, a different approach was needed. "We wanted to connect with the traffic and the people outside," Cohen says, referring to foot traffic on the plaza, also designed by Herzog & de Meuron, in collaboration with landscape architect Raymond Jungles. So he and his wife turned again to Gonzalez. Their conversations, which started in 2011, focused on mood and materials. The word "energy" was tossed around; the Cohens in particular liked the youthful feel of the Harajuku and Aoyama shopping streets in Tokyo. "We were very much inspired by the visual energy there," says Cohen.

Gonzalez, meanwhile, was thinking in a different direction. The glass box upstairs was all about ethereality, looking out to the sky, the views. The new Alchemist shop would look inward; it would be a refuge. "Rene's idea was that it would be a cocoon setting," Cohen says. "We were even thinking about it as a Styrofoam cooler dropped on the beach."

In common with all the other storefronts at the base of 1111, the entry facade has glass walls in a sawtooth pattern. Gonzalez carried the sawtooth inside, with melamine foam



FLOOR PLAN

 0 10 FT.
3 M.

- 1 ENTRANCE
- 2 SALES FLOOR
- 3 CHANGING ROOM
- 4 BATHROOM
- 5 BACK OF HOUSE



credits

ARCHITECT: Rene Gonzalez Architect – Rene Gonzalez, principal; Monica Vazquez, associate; Kevin Regalado, project director; Marija Brdarski, project team
ENGINEER: Vidal & Associates (m/e/p)
CONSULTANT: G2J Design (lighting)
GENERAL CONTRACTOR: Aaron Builders & Development
CLIENTS: Erika Sussman and Roma Cohen
SIZE: 2,500 square feet (gross)
COST: withheld
COMPLETION DATE: December 2012

SOURCES

CEILING AND WALL COVERING: Pinta Acoustic (white foam)
LIGHTING: Oracle Lighting; Lightolier; Dasal Architectural Lighting; Philips; Lumiron
BENCHES: Zaha Hadid

SEEING TRIPLE
 At the rear of the store in the dressing-room "cabana," the foam paneling is replaced with pine boards on the floor and the ceiling. Cove LEDs accentuate the drama of the angled walls.

cladding the ceiling and walls. The niches in the walls hold merchandise within easy reach. At the front of the store, in foam shelves angled toward the street, are items deemed more informal than those sold at the upstairs Alchemist. Sunglasses (a top seller), books, skin-care products, flashy Pierre Hardy shoes, and smartly tailored cropped jackets and relaxed dresses hang in serried ranks that peek out from behind the angled walls.

The ground-floor store draws people inside—it's like entering a white tunnel, an effect accentuated by LED lights behind the foam. Especially after dark, those lights create a forced perspective. The mood changes at the rear of the store, where the 2-inch-thick foam is replaced by pine boards in the dressing rooms. Gonzalez refers to this space as the "cabana." A pair of Zaha Hadid's zoomy benches provide

places for friends to perch and wait. Inside one custom bench is a foam cooler holding Jugofresh juices, a new Miami cult. "That's to get people excited about coming in," says Cohen. Animating the cabana area, and entertaining those waiting, are high-resolution art films (palm trees, sunsets, waves) made by the Cohens' friend Paris Kane.

The owners, who wanted youthful energy, and the architect, who wanted a cocoon, are both happy with the result, and especially with the attention it drew from high-profile visitors (and spenders) during last December's Art Basel. "It's important that a place be cared for by the owners," says Gonzalez. "So it's important that they love it." ■

Linda Lee, a former writer and editor at the New York Times, was the founding editor of Florida InsideOut magazine.