

Gastronomy edition: Retail highlights.

POSSIBLE IDEAS MADE

Retail *highlights*.

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The Mandarin café, NYC.

d4r*



Retail *highlights*.

Discovering *innovation* and *immersion* that stands out in the shifting retail landscape.

This edition of Retail Highlights explores how gastronomy is shaping consumer engagement and retail today. No longer limited to restaurants and dining experiences, food, and drink are influencing fashion, beauty, design, travel and retail environments, creating new opportunities for brands to connect with consumers through taste, storytelling and shared experiences.

In this report we look at:

- How food culture is inspiring retail experiences.
- The crossover between gastronomy, lifestyle, design and, consumer culture.
- The rise of experiential dining, food-led destinations and immersive brand activations.

D4R VIEW

Gastronomy edition.

A TASTE OF WHAT'S NEXT

A WORLD SHAPED BY FLAVOUR

Food has become one of the deciding cultural influences of 2026. Far beyond resaurants and traditional dining spaces, gastronomy is shaping how people travel, socialise, shop and experience brands, creating new opportunities for retailers to engage with consumers in meaningful and memorable ways.

Driven by growing consumer interest in authenticity, craftsmanship and sensory experiences, food culture has evolved into a powerful source of inspiration across multiple industries. From fashion collections inspired by regional cuisines to retail spaces incorporating cafés, tasting experiences and chef collaborations, brands are increasingly drawing on the emotional connections that food creates.

At D4R, we're witnessing a shift from transactional food offerings towards experience-led concepts that place discovery, storytelling and community at their heart. Consumers are no longer looking solely for products; they're seeking moments that

feel curated, immersive and shareable. As a result, businesses are embracing gastronomy as a way to bring people together and create destinations that encourage deeper engagement.

The influence of gastronomy can be seen in everything from luxury brand partnerships and culinary pop-ups to food-focused events, experiential retail concepts. As boundaries continue to blur between food, culture, design and commerce, new opportunities are emerging for brands to connect with audiences creatively, through taste and experience.

In this report, we explore the businesses, innovations and cultural movements driving this evolution. Through a selection of standout examples, we examine how gastronomy is redefining customer experience, inspiring retail innovation and becoming an increasingly important force within today's consumer landscape.

STRAIGHT FROM
THE STUDIO: THIS
SOURDOUGH WAS
MADE BY OUR
JUNIOR GRAPHIC
DESIGNER





Powered by matcha.

NUDE PROJECT X LERA BAR OPENING, AMSTERDAM

A NEW BREW OF BRAND EXPERIENCE

As retail spaces continue to evolve into lifestyle destinations, food and drink concepts are becoming a powerful way to build community. Amsterdam's new Nude Project x LERA matcha bar is a perfect example, bringing gastronomy into a fashion setting to create a more engaging customer experience.

Located inside Nude Project's flagship store, the collaboration with local matcha specialist LERA offers visitors a place to pause, connect and enjoy expertly crafted matcha drinks. Rather than serving as a simple refreshment counter, the bar extends the brand experience beyond shopping and encourages customers to spend more time in the space.

The concept reflects a growing trend in gastronomy, where cafés and beverage bars are increasingly used to create destinations centred on culture, creativity and connection.

With the right setting and application, a drink becomes part of the retail experience rather than just a menu item.



02

Downtown dining.

MERCADO CENTRAL,
RIO-DE-JANEIRO

Mercado Central has opened in Rio de Janeiro’s revitalised downtown district, transforming the former Granado Farmácias factory into a vibrant food and social destination. Designed by local practice Tadu Arquitetura, the project spans five interconnected heritage buildings and preserves many of the site's original architectural features, creating a series of characterful spaces that celebrate the property's industrial past while introducing contemporary materials and finishes.

Set on Rua do Senado, Mercado Central brings together three food concepts, Bocado, Suba and Peti, alongside flexible social and event spaces. Blending restored historic features with contemporary design, the venue adds to the ongoing revival of Rio de Janeiro’s downtown dining scene.



“The project seeks to breathe new life into a historic structure, creating a place capable of *bringing diverse audiences together*.”

THE ARCHITECTS, TADU ARQUITETURA



03

Sole food.

DR. MARTENS X END, MANCHESTER

STEP OFF THE MENU

Dr. Martens and END. joined forces to introduce the Lowell shoe through The Lowell Deli, a one-day immersive activation that transformed Manchester's cult-favourite sandwich shop, Badabing, into a vibrant brand experience. Designed to connect with END.'s community of tastemakers, the event positioned the Lowell as a versatile lifestyle staple by embedding it within the familiar rituals of food, culture, and community.

Drawing inspiration from the visual language of traditional delis, the

space blended Dr. Martens' heritage craftsmanship with a contemporary, street-ready aesthetic. Guests were invited to create their own Lowell-inspired sandwiches using curated ingredients, while bespoke graphics, live illustrations, and a DJ-led soundtrack brought the experience to life. The activation also linked seamlessly to END.'s retail space through exclusive raffle entries and limited-edition merchandise, turning a product launch into a cultural moment rooted in Manchester's creative scene.

“Dr.Martens x END turned a cult Manchester sandwich shop into a cultural launchpad.”

SEEN STUDIOS





04

Lucky by design.

THE MANDARIN, NYC

The Mandarin is a neighbourhood café and bar in Manhattan's Two Bridges district, founded by a Chinese-Canadian and Dutch couple whose backgrounds helped shape the venue's identity.

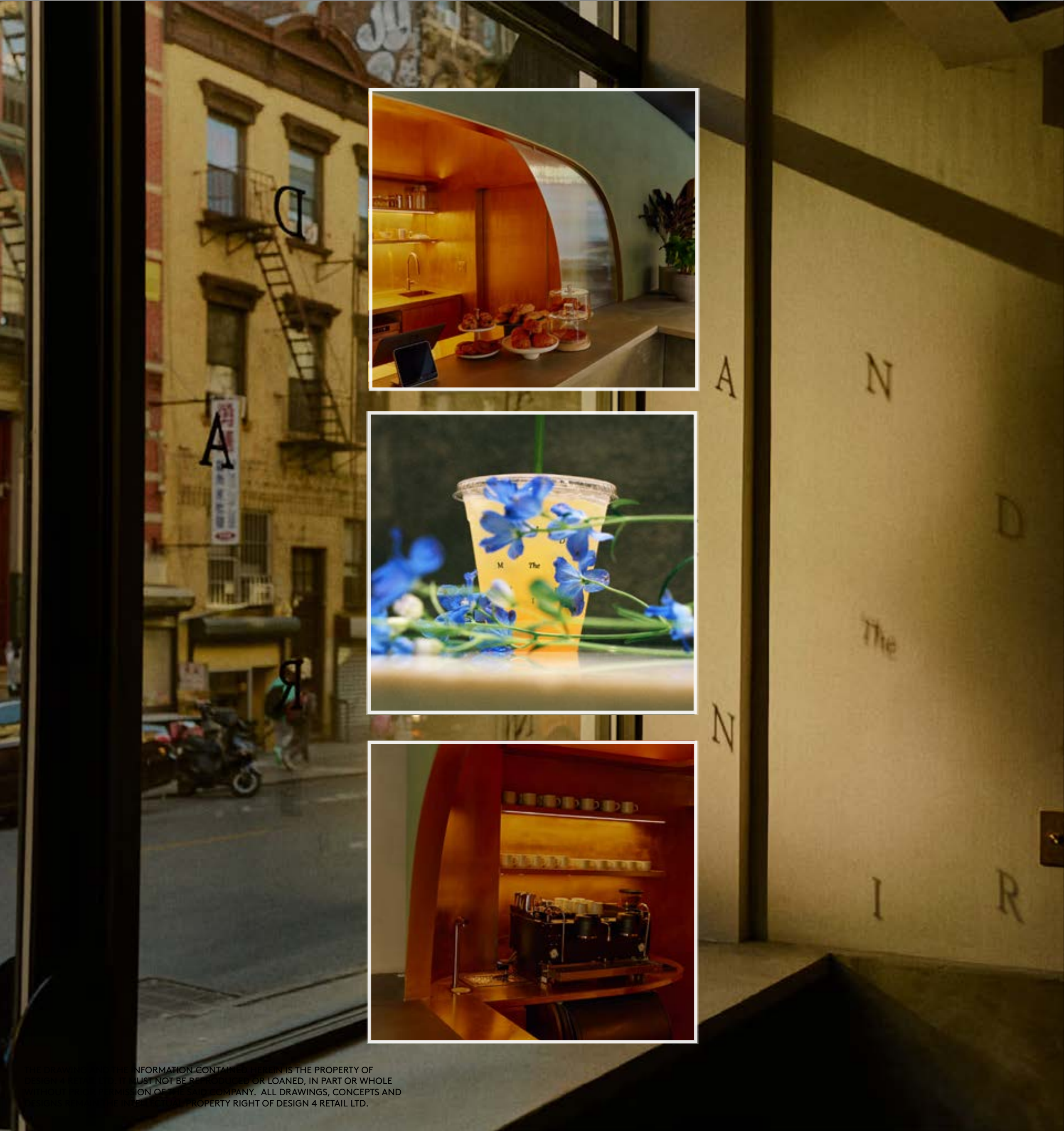
Working from the symbolism of luck, prosperity and cultural heritage, the brand was built around the significance of the mandarin fruit in Chinese culture, alongside the fortunate associations of the number eight. This concept informed a flexible visual system based on the eight letters in the café's name, allowing typography to shift and form distinctive patterns throughout the space.

Developed in tandem with the interior architecture, the identity was integrated directly into the environment, creating a cohesive experience where materials and spatial design work together to reflect the café's unique cultural story and sense of place.

“The Mandarin is a beautiful café and bar tucked into Two Bridges. Founded by a Chinese-Canadian and Dutch couple, the space reflects this collision of culture and identity as New York transplants.”

SUPERKEEN STUDIOS





“
In Chinese culture,
mandarins are symbols of
prosperity and good fortune,
their roundness representing
fullness and continuity.
”

SUPERKEEN STUDIOS

05

Condiment convenience.

HEINZ AUTO-MAYO-MAT, LONDON

For National Picnic Week, Heinz Mayo partnered with London design studio ChaChaanTeng to launch the UK’s first automated sandwich vending machine dedicated entirely to mayonnaise-filled creations. The activation, dubbed the “auto-mayo-mat”, turned a simple product promotion into an experience that celebrated both food nostalgia and the joy of discovery.

Drawing references from Japanese convenience culture, vintage automats and mid-century design, the project combined retro graphics, character-led illustration and a deliberately nostalgic aesthetic.

The identity extended across every touchpoint, from packaging, posters and merchandise to the vending machine itself. Designed to feel tactile and human, the campaign offered a refreshing contrast to the disposable nature of much contemporary digital content.





06

Drizzled with character.

HONEST TOIL'S VISUAL LANGUAGE

Honest Toil took an unconventional approach to building its place in the gastronomic world, transforming its olive oil packaging into an ever-evolving gallery of illustration.

Founded by Tom Woodgate and Juli Laki after inheriting a small olive grove in the Greek Peloponnese, the brand rejected advice to play it safe with a single visual identity and instead collaborated with a growing roster of artists, allowing each harvest to

be represented through a unique creative perspective.

Honest Toil viewed every bottle and tin as a canvas, celebrating Mediterranean food culture, shared dining experiences, and the craftsmanship behind its olive oil. The outcome is a distinctive collection of artworks that has become the brand's defining feature, helping it stand out in a crowded food market while earning recognition from leading restaurants and food industry figures.



07

Empire of flavour.

BAD ROMAN, BEVERLY HILLS

A FEAST FOR THE SENSES

Building on the success of its New York flagship, Bad Roman’s new Beverly Hills restaurant transforms dining into a theatrical design experience, using bold architecture and expressive interiors to create a destination where gastronomy and visual storytelling are equally important. Designed by Brooklyn-based GRT Architects, the restaurant reinterprets the brand’s playful identity for a Los Angeles audience, embracing colour, texture and spectacle from the street frontage through to the dining room.

Rather than replicating the original restaurant, the design was evolved to respond to its Beverly Hills setting. A vibrant façade of serpentine stripes, checkerboard detailing and glowing neon signage turns the building into a landmark in its own right, projecting the restaurant’s energetic personality onto an



otherwise restrained street. Inside, richly layered materials, sculptural lighting and references to Ancient Roman mythology create an immersive environment that feels both dramatic and intentionally unconventional.

The project highlights how hospitality brands are increasingly using design as an extension of the dining experience, creating memorable destinations that go beyond food alone. By combining maximalist aesthetics with a strong narrative and sense of place, Bad Roman Beverly Hills demonstrates how restaurant design can become a powerful ingredient in a venue’s identity, helping to transform a meal into a culturally distinctive and highly shareable experience.



WHEN FAST FOOD MEETS FASHION

As gastronomy continues to extend beyond the plate, food brands are finding increasingly creative ways to capture attention and spark conversation. KFC’s latest campaign does exactly that, transforming an innocent ingredient into an unexpected fashion statement.

Created to promote a new pickle-themed menu, the Pickle Puffer is a transparent jacket filled with sliced gherkins and pickle brine instead of traditional padding. Complete with a pickle-shaped zip and a built-in tube for sipping pickle juice on the go, the design embraces humour and spectacle in equal measure.

Inspired by an AI-generated video that circulated online, the one-off piece reflects a growing trend for food brands to use bold, limited-edition products as cultural talking points. Much like Lady Gaga’s infamous meat dress, the aim is simple: create something unexpected enough to stick in people’s minds and keep the brand front of mind long after the initial moment has passed.

The project showcases how gastronomy today is as much about storytelling as it is about taste. Through playful design and unexpected concepts, brands can turn everyday ingredients into moments that customers want to talk about.



08

Big *dill* energy.

THE PICKLE PUFFER, KFC



09

From farm to *floor*.

MARMOLEUM COCOA FLOORING, FORBO FLOORING

Drawing inspiration from developments in contemporary gastronomy, Forbo Flooring has demonstrated how material innovation can connect food production, sustainability and design. Through the introduction of its Marmoleum Cocoa flooring, the brand has transformed an often-discarded by-product of the food industry into a design-led surface solution that bridges environmental responsibility with visual appeal.

At the centre of the project is the use of cocoa shells, a by-product material generated during chocolate production that would otherwise go to waste. By incorporating these shells into its flooring, Forbo has created a distinctive material palette that celebrates the origins of its ingredients while introducing texture and character to interior spaces. The flooring is available in 16 colourways, each designed to reflect a natural yet contemporary appearance.

The development builds on the brand's existing Marmoleum range, which is produced using predominantly natural raw materials. The addition of cocoa shells further strengthens the product's sustainability credentials, demonstrating how waste streams from the gastronomy sector can be repurposed into innovative design applications.

A key element of the project is Forbo's collaboration with Dutch social enterprise Kumasi Commodity Innovations. Kumasi creates beverages from cocoa fruit juice and partnered with Forbo to utilise surplus cocoa shells, enabling both organisations to extract value from different parts of the same resource. The partnership also supports cocoa farming communities, reinforcing the connection between responsible sourcing and product development.

“These environments create deeper, more meaningful engagement that goes beyond traditional advertising, while offering something a bit unexpected within the context of tennis season.”

BRITTNEY ONDREJKO, MANAGER OF RETAIL AND WHOLESALE MARKETING AT WILSON



ELEVATING FOOD CULTURE THROUGH IMMERSIVE DESIGN

As gastronomy continues to shape the worlds of design and luxury retail, SolidNature and OMA/AMO have transformed familiar food culture into an unexpected artistic experience. Through Il Sonno, an immersive installation unveiled during Milan Design Week, they reimagined a supermarket stocked entirely with everyday groceries carved from natural stone, inviting visitors to reconsider the value of the objects and ingredients that surround them.

Built around themes of consumption, permanence and craftsmanship, the installation turned the routine act of food shopping into a surreal culinary journey. Stone bananas and marble sandwiches blurred the line between gastronomy and design, creating a dreamlike environment that encouraged guests to engage with food in a more thoughtful way.

The project also reflects a broader movement emerging across luxury design, where food culture is increasingly being used as a creative lens to explore storytelling, sustainability and emotional connection.

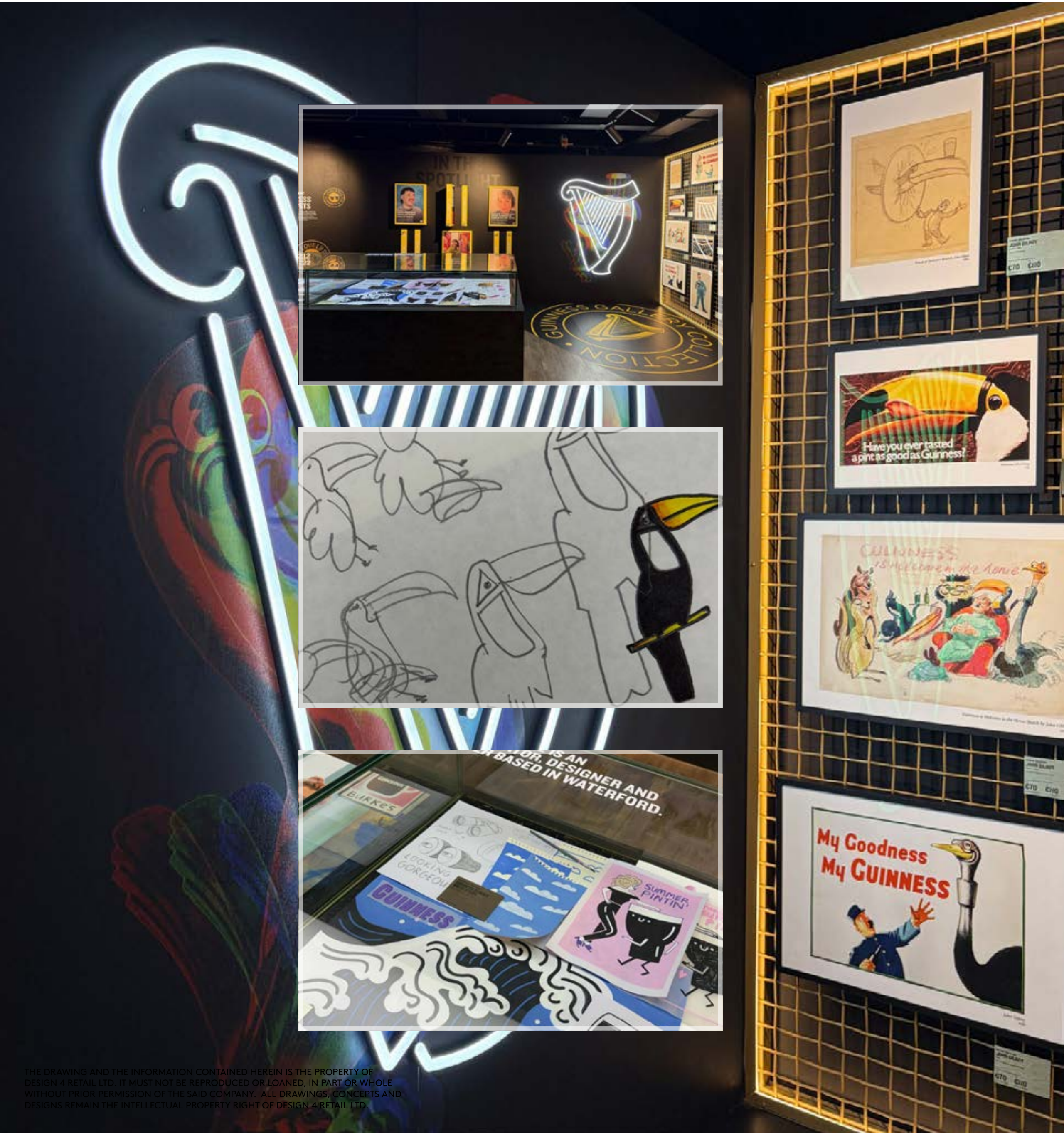
SolidNature and OMA/AMO’s stone supermarket demonstrates how the language of food can extend beyond the dining table. By combining immersive design with powerful cultural narratives, the project transforms ordinary groceries into extraordinary objects, creating a memorable experience that celebrates both gastronomy and design.-



10

Stone appetit.

STONE SUPERMARKET, AMO/OMA X SOLIDNATURE, MILAN DESIGN WEEK



11

The art of Guinness.

GUINNESS GALLERIES, DUBLIN

As gastronomy continues to evolve in the design world, Guinness Galleries at the Guinness Storehouse in Dublin transforms drink heritage into an immersive cultural experience. Drawing on decades of iconic Guinness artwork, archival materials and contemporary creative collaborations, the new gallery invites visitors to explore the stories, craftsmanship, design and visual identity that have shaped one of the world's most recognisable brands.

The concept shows a movement across the hospitality and gastronomy sectors, where dining and food culture are increasingly intertwined with design and storytelling. By showcasing both historic works and modern interpretations, the space demonstrates how brands can create deeper emotional connections with audiences through culture and creativity.

At a time when experience-led hospitality is becoming more important than ever, Guinness Galleries highlights how heritage and design can come together to create a destination that resonates far beyond food and drink, turning a brand's legacy into a meaningful cultural journey.

“Creating immersive brand experiences that celebrate Guinness' rich creative legacy while inspiring visitors to engage, discover and connect with the brand in new and meaningful ways.”

DALZIEL & POW

One to *watch*.

MAYOR ZOHRAN’S NEW MUNICIPAL GROCERY STORES

LET HIM COOK

NYC Groceries is reimagining what a modern food retailer can be, combining the everyday function of a supermarket with the public mission of a civic institution. Planned as a network of city-supported grocery stores across New York's five boroughs, the initiative aims to make fresh food more affordable while tackling longstanding gaps in access to quality groceries.

As discussion around the project has grown, attention has turned to how they will represent themselves. Rather than relying on the conventions of commercial supermarket branding, NYC Groceries presents an opportunity to create a visual identity rooted in

trust, accessibility, and community. The challenge is to build a brand that feels welcoming and recognisable while reflecting the values of a public service.

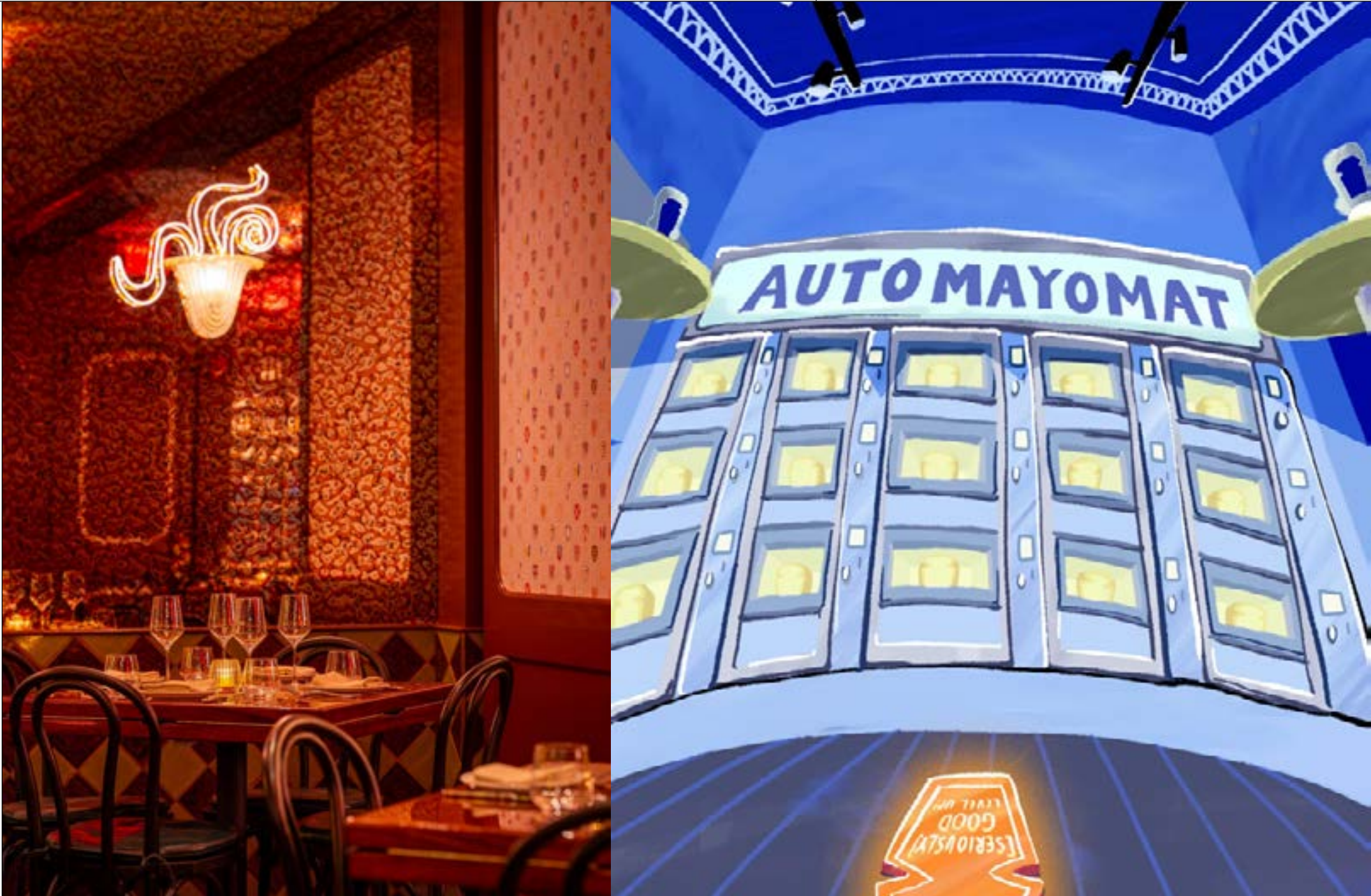
Positioned somewhere between a neighbourhood market and a civic resource, the initiative occupies a unique space in the gastronomic world. Its future identity will need to communicate affordability and practicality without sacrificing character, helping New Yorkers see the stores as a shared investment in the city's food culture, instead of just another place to shop. The result could become a new model for how gastronomy, public infrastructure, and design work together to serve communities.



FORESIGHT

Hungry
for design.

THE ART OF NOURISHMENT



RESPONDING TO CULTURAL SHIFTS

Designing for a culture of gastronomy means recognising that food culture now extends far beyond restaurants. As culinary experiences become a stronger cultural influence, retail spaces are evolving to capture the discovery, connection and excitement that surround food-led moments. Rather than relying on simple tastings or promotions, brands are using gastronomy as a storytelling tool to shape richer customer experiences.

We're seeing a shift from transactional retail to immersive food-inspired destinations. Through market-style environments, chef collaborations and cuisine-led concepts, brands are creating spaces that celebrate culinary culture and encourage exploration. The focus is not just on the product, but on creating memorable experiences.

This evolution is transforming retail into a participatory experience. From tastings and live demonstrations

to workshops and exclusive collaborations, consumers are looking for ways to engage with food culture rather than simply purchase from it.

At its core, the rise of gastronomy reflects a desire for shared experiences and human connection. The most successful spaces use storytelling, sensory design and cultural references to bring people together, turning food into a powerful catalyst for community and brand engagement.

Backed by insight, the D4R *difference*.

HELLO, WE'RE DESIGN4RETAIL

Our strategy teams stay up to date and tapped into culture, always keeping an eye on what's happening. That way, we can create more meaningful experiences by using strategic insights to guide every step of the project.

OUR DISCIPLINES,

- Brand storytelling
- Customer experience
- Pop-ups & activations
- Retail identity
- Store design & fit out



An aerial photograph of a beach with gentle waves washing onto the shore. Several dark, rounded rocks are scattered across the wet sand. The water is a pale, milky blue, and the sand is a light tan color. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

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