

Japanese Watchmakers Draw an Audience on Manhattan's Lower East Side

JPDA's new boutique prototype for retailer Dedegumo turns the watchmaker's craft into performance art.

New York, NY - April 2012 - While on a business trip to Japan, Jack Guest happened upon a small watch shop while strolling through the cobbled streets and tea houses of Kyoto. Inside he could hear the ping of hammers and the whirring of motors; curious, he prodded the watch shop owner, Izumo Senko, to get a glimpse behind the scene. A wooden divider hid a small workshop where two artisans were busily crafting the faces that would soon become watches. "The connection between the watches on display and the actual craft of them being made in the next room immediately struck me as something special." He was so enchanted he approached Izumo about opening a New York outpost of the little Kyoto shop.

Back in the states, Jack sought out the help of Brooklyn based Jordan Parnass Digital Architecture (JPDA) who proposed placing the most important aspect of the watches, their creation, at the front of the space, as opposed to the back room as might be expected.

The result; a small, highly efficient workshop is contained within a meticulously crafted wooden volume projecting through the front of the shop. The watchmakers can be spied through louvres from within the store or from the sidewalk outside. They work late, drawing spectators from the LES night-life crowds, turning the workshop into performance space while highlighting the artisanal nature of the product.

The workshop, display wall and reclaimed table were all custom designed by JPDA and fabricated in Brooklyn from reclaimed Douglas Fir timbers. The maple flooring was likewise recycled from an old chair factory in Massachusetts. The pieces read as Asian-inspired minimalist insertions within the exposed brick urban infill space, synthesizing the product's Kyoto origins and the gritty nature of its new Lower East Side home.

The Asian roots permeate the shop in subtle ways. Low light from the floor and shelving maintains an intimate, reflective, 'non-retail' atmosphere. A hidden door to the back of house is concealed within the joinery of the Doug Fir woodwork. Merchandising draws on opposing themes of mixing precious man-made objects with simple natural forms. Each watch is accompanied by a card which is hand signed with notes by the watch maker, then placed in a custom designed sake box and wrapped in a traditional Japanese Furoshiki.

Ultimately the real reward for the shopper is the opportunity to meet the artisan whose hand had crafted their watch and witness the process of it being custom tailored to their specifications.

About JPDA

Jordan Parnass Digital Architecture is an interdisciplinary practice incorporating architecture, interiors, digital media, branding, and experience design. JPDA creates people-centric experiences that touch users with authentic, innovative and memorable interactions. For more information, visit www.jpda.net and follow us on twitter @jpdainfo.

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