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On the way towards a retail metaverse

Right on time for the Euroshop 2023, retail expert Jons Messedat tells us about the latest trends in the new *Retail Design International Vol 8*. How does metaverse come into play? Where do high-tech and high-touch meet? What do young consumers expect? With contributions, surveys and outstanding projects, he provides insight. Read an excerpt:

High-Tech meets High-Touch

Through the connectivity between various cultures, technologies and living environments, the retail industry is becoming more diverse and experimental. Creative processes as well as analogue and digital elements which address all our senses are currently providing impulses for retail design. On the way towards a retail metaverse, high-touch meets high-tech. At the same time, the uncertainties of recent years show that the free international trade between countries and continents is a fragile good.

Turn of the times – from crisis to realignment

The recovery in the retail industry that was starting to emerge in spring 2022 was nipped in the bud by the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. "We are experiencing a turning point. And that means that the world afterwards will no longer be the world it was before", said German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in the government statement on the war to the German parliament in Berlin on 27 February 2022. Since then, international trade chains have been interrupted and energy and raw materials are in short supply. With the pandemic

already having drained many company funds, rising energy costs and inflation are causing hardship for both retailers and their customers. "For retailers, poor customer sentiment is a huge challenge. After the two extremely challenging and economically difficult years of the pandemic, they are now having to cope with soaring energy costs in their own businesses. The strain is immense and may endanger entrepreneurial livelihoods and jobs," says Stefan Genth, general manager of the German Retail Association (HDE), as he describes the current uncertainties in a recent HDE study published in the Börsenblatt magazine.

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Retail design in in-between spaces

Today's customers can choose between real and virtual platforms in almost all product segments. From multi-channel, omni-channel, and cross-channel to everywhere commerce – many of these neologisms describe the same effect: In the future, an equal presence on all levels will be needed, whether physical or media-based.

In-between spaces with opportunities for retreat and feel-good places can become a safe haven and contribute to resilience in the post-coronavirus era.

At the same time, many people are deeply mistrustful of the digital universe and the way it encroaches on their lives. On the journey into the still unknown retail metaverse, brands, retailers and consumers meet where they are at the time. In-between spaces with opportunities for retreat and feel-good places can become a safe haven and contribute to resilience in the post-coronavirus era.

Back in the 1980s, future researcher John Naisbitt coined the term high-touch to describe the interaction between the experiential quality of touching "real" surfaces and smart connected housing technology.

The classical components for a healthy internal environment include the choice of materials and colours, light and sound as well as really good air quality. Authentic wooden surfaces, natural fibres, mineral- and plant-based paints as well as intelligent ventilation systems can help to reduce the particulate material in the interior air. Back in the 1980s, future researcher John Naisbitt coined the term high-touch to describe the interaction between the experiential quality of touching "real" surfaces and smart connected housing technology. High-touch thus meets high-tech in the form of multisensory experiences.

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by Jons Messedat



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Through the connectivity of different cultures, technologies and living environments, the retail sector is increasingly varied and experimental. At the same time, the uncertainties of the last two years have shown that free international trade between nations and continents is a fragile asset. Retail chains have been severed and the availability of energy and raw materials is limited. Creative stopgaps, as well as analogue and digital elements that appeal to all our senses, give new impulses for urban retailing. On the way to a retail metaverse, high-touch meets high-tech.

Dr. Jons Messedat is an architect and industrial designer. After work with Sir Norman Foster in London and in Berlin, he completed his doctorate at the Bauhaus University Weimar on the subject of Corporate Architecture. He teaches the Construction and Space module at HAWK Hildesheim and is a jury member in architecture and design competitions.

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