

FRAME / BIRKHÄUSER

Dress Code

Interior Design for Fashion Shops

Store
Le Ciel Bleu

Location
Sapporo, Japan

Architect
Noriyuki Otsuka

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'Spatial design appeals most to one's sense of sight, but an interior that stimulates all five senses is crucial.'

Text

Masaaki Takahashi

Photography
Kozo Takayama

Taking inspiration from library shelves, Noriyuki Otsuka filled Japanese boutique Le Ciel Bleu with books, all entitled *Le Ciel Bleu*.

Interior designer Noriyuki Otsuka is intrigued by the number of excellent libraries that have been built in Japan in recent years. Cafés and internet access have made libraries interactive environments, thus encouraging public use of facilities once thought of as being silent spaces for study and research. 'The general image of a library is that of a place for intellectuals,' says Otsuka. 'With the new trend in libraries aiming more at design, the basic principles behind conveying traditions and cultural values are also changing. In designing the boutique, I've made an attempt to apply the same principles to fashion. When people go shopping for clothes, the sense of power that comes with the purchase of a new outfit is not always apparent. When they visit the library, the sense of power that comes with borrowing and reading books is far more evident.'

Le Ciel Bleu, a fashion label based in Kobe, has expanded rapidly throughout Japan since its inception in 1995. Otsuka has done the retail design for all the brand's outlets, including number eight, the one featured here. Located in Paseo - an underground shopping street in Sapporo, Hokkaido - this boutique surprises visitors with book shelves lined with nearly 2000 volumes. Although the covers and pages are completely white, on closer inspection each book bears the same embossed title: *Le Ciel Bleu*. Passers-by catching a glimpse of the book shelves may think they're looking at wall-paper, a decorative gimmick that Otsuka did consider before consulting a graphic designer who does bookbinding as well. The advice he received was that making books and placing them on the shelves was not only the less expensive option, but also an obvious way to heighten the sense of realism. Covered with a thin plastic film, the books are easy to maintain. They are uniform in height and width, but vary in thickness. Otsuka's lighting scheme gives the books a casual, inconspicuous presence.

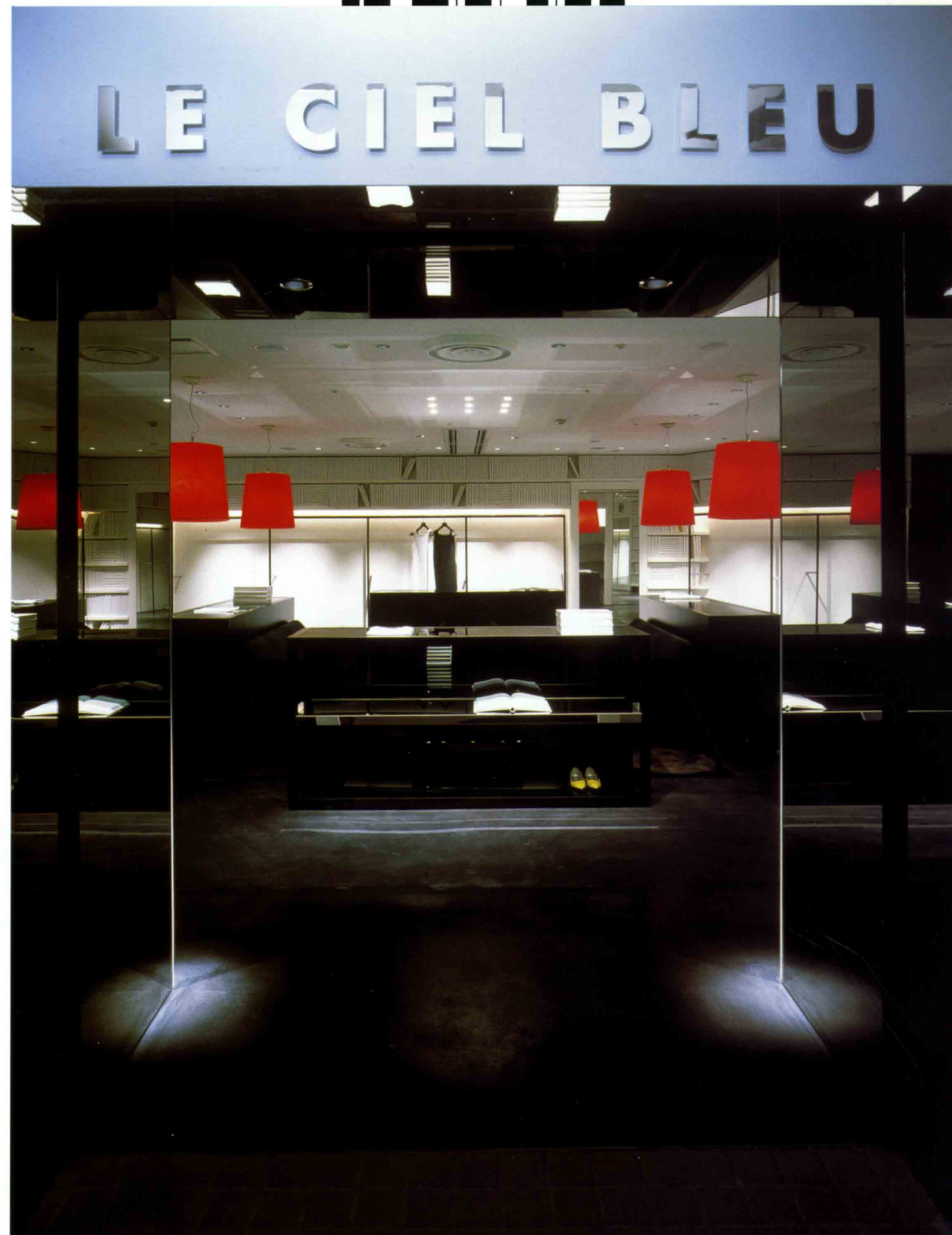
The entrance is a scant 2.2 metres wide, but bronze-tinted mirrors inside the entrance, wall mounted to form a kind of gate, reflect the surroundings and make the entrance appear to be bigger and more open than it is. Otsuka realized that a larger entrance would provide easier access, but he elected to grab shoppers' attention with a design that would rouse their curiosity and lure them inside, where mirrored reflections continue to shape the ideal ambience. Display cases feature black-tinted glass of the same type often used in car windows.

As a contrast to the monochrome space, Otsuka chose lighting from Spanish company Metalarte in a shade of red, a warm colour that he believes fosters human interaction. Many photographs of the interior distort the colour, making it seem bolder than it is in reality; fluorescent lighting in the shop softens the red to a pinkish hue. (A good photographer himself, Otsuka designs lighting that can be adjusted to create the photographic image desired.) Because primary colours and subdued interiors highlight much of Otsuka's work, his spaces breathe an air of deceptive simplicity that fails to reveal all the effort leading up to the final solution. Otsuka nearly always begins with a rather more complex concept and with a number of elements that, as a result of trial and error, are either pared down or discarded along the way. 'It's easy to create a sense of fullness with lots of furnishings,' he explains. 'At first glance, an interior may look simple, but it's been carefully pruned to reveal a crisp design.' Attention to the detailing and knowledge of all the calculating that's gone into the design process will show, he says, that it's not easy at all. 'Spatial design appeals most to one's sense of sight, but an interior that stimulates all five senses is crucial. For example, even ceiling heights can affect the human psyche. An environment designed for comfort and relaxation stimulates the urge to buy. And a profusion of mirrors gives customers something to look at while also creating something tangible, something that can be felt.' When first commissioned to create Le Ciel Bleu's interiors, his thoughts went immediately to the relationship between spatial dimensions and light, a combination that led him to the design of comfortable retail interiors.

'As internet shopping continues to grow in popularity and sales, real shops can draw customers only by displaying fresh designs with a strong impact on the senses. People want a place where they feel in control, a place staffed by employees, who are becoming more and more important.' 'Europe has a long tradition of collecting art and cultural artefacts, and of passing such objects on to future generations. It's a tradition that may benefit design. Asian design, however, is heading in another direction, and Otsuka is an advocate of Japan's non-Western trend. 'I would like to see fashion as the focal point of our era. Although some designers ascribe to a neo-decorative style, there's still evidence of an increase in casual, trendy fashion. Why not a revival of the fashion-conscious shopper? One who cares about her appearance and wears the right outfit for every occasion?'

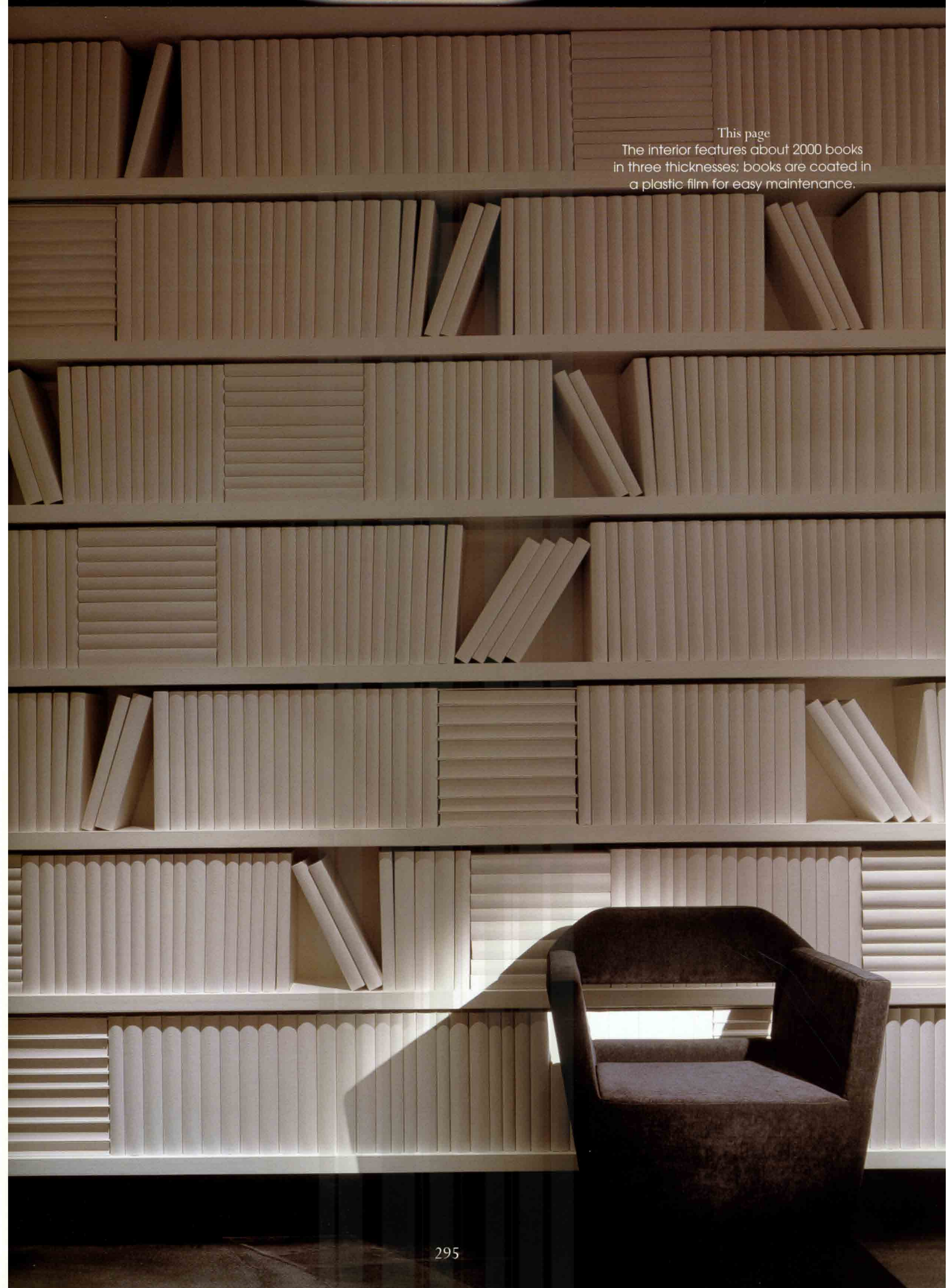
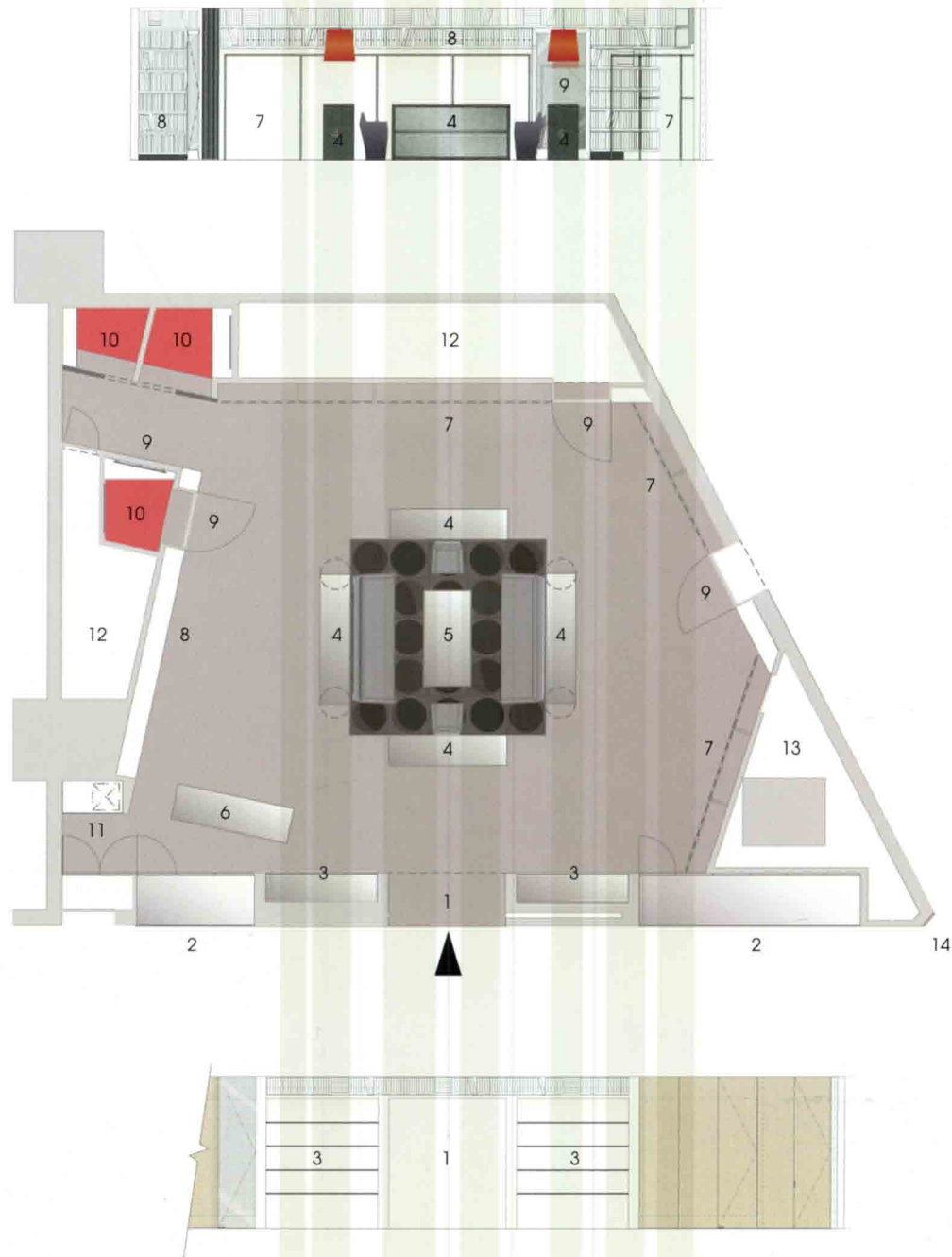
Le Ciel Bleu

LE CIEL BLEU



Preceding page
Bronze mirrors are mounted on the walls and ceiling of a rather narrow entrance area; passing through, the shopper is invited inside by the sight of fashions surrounded by shelves of white-covered books.

Floor plan and sections
1. Entrance
2. Shop-window display
3. Shelf display
4. Display table
5. Sofas and table
6. Counter
7. Hanging display
8. Book shelves
9. Mirror
10. Fitting room
11. Cash desk
12. Office
13. Machine room
14. LED display



This page
The interior features about 2000 books in three thicknesses; books are coated in a plastic film for easy maintenance.

Below
Bathed in the rosy light of the interior,
customers can sit on centrally positioned
sofas and leaf through catalogues of
Le Ciel Bleu merchandise.



Bottom left
A wooden counter expresses the
library theme. A purpose-designed
carpet covers the concrete floor.



This page
Mirrors make the space appear wider
than it is. The concept of a place
where people meet and exchange
information led to the library theme.