

Luxury Meets Sustainability

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With a relationship spanning more than 200 projects, French luxury designer Christian Louboutin and New York-based multidisciplinary design firm 212box are no strangers to each other. Having collaborated on locations from Dubai and Singapore to Paris and San Francisco, the two were the perfect pair for the Christian Louboutin (CL) brand's new flagship store in Miami's Design District—a project that has been nearly four years in the making.

In fact, the two-story, 3,874-square-foot space replaces the original location of CL Miami's flagship store, also designed and built by 212box, which was showcased at Art Basel in Miami in 2009 along with two temporary retail outlets that were open while the project was being completed. The previous Louboutin store, located on 40th Street, was torn down as part of a new master plan for a rejuvenated Design District with a vision that is responsive to its historic, urban, and tropical context, according to Eric Clough, principal at 212box.

"It's a unique, kind of beautiful moment in the Design District, as they've launched a whole new plaza and courtyards, etc., and we are right on one of the [standout] corners of that moment," Clough explained. "We wanted something striking and artistic. A lot of those Miami buildings are clean, white, modern boxes with really beautiful detailing. You come across ours, and we've clad the entire façade in bark, so it's a complete contrast to a lot of those surrounding buildings, but a real nice gesture of bringing a lot of natural materials to that corner and to the Design District."

The new flagship store is inspired by the Palais de la Porte Dorée in Paris, and reclaimed panels from a 1970s Parisian office building line the mezzanine to create a dramatic colonnade within the space. The program consists of a dedicated CL Beauté corner and the women's footwear and handbag collections on the ground floor, which connects to the men's shoe and leather goods collections on the mezzanine via a grand staircase featuring a large, dramatic skylight that allows natural light to flood the space. Locally sourced Oolite stone, white travertine, and coral stone used throughout the interior and exterior add another level of elegance and uniqueness to the space.

interiors+sources recently spoke with Clough about the CL Miami flagship store and the role that unique (and sustainable) wallcovering and cladding products from Bark House played in creating a one-of-a-kind retail experience.

interiors+sources: Given the number of projects you've worked on with Christian Louboutin, how did you approach the new Miami location to give it a sense of uniqueness?

Eric Clough: The wonderful thing about Christian is that every store is different. We were both interested in bringing in the local craftsman, trades, and different cultures and histories of cities that we were building in. I think there are 136 freestanding stores worldwide. We've done lots of concessions as well, so [we've completed more than] 200 projects with them. What's nice is no store is the same. When we got to Miami in the Design District, it was always about being part of Art Basel and being a part of creating a very artistic piece."

i+s: The use of Bark House's products both inside and out was an incredibly unique approach. Did you previously work with the company?

EC: We test drove some of [Bark House's] materials on about five or six different stores throughout China, Singapore, and there was another little concession in the Miami Nordstrom location. And one after the other, [it received] rave reviews. The product [works as] kind of a backdrop to push that beautiful sparkle of the shoes, and the spikes and other detailing that Christian does. It was a wonderful contrast to that. Bark House has created a palette of materials for us that has really resonated through the stores and the products. A lot of Christian's artistic desires are being true to materials, and also the craft behind it and keeping things as found objects, which are kind of funky moments and quite playful.

i+s: Why was sustainability an important consideration for the CL Miami flagship store, and how did Bark House's products help achieve this initiative?

EC: We hope that the new Christian Louboutin flagship building becomes a testament to the sustainability effort

in Miami led by the Design District and Craig Robins [president and CEO of Dacra, a prominent real estate development firm in the area]. The materials chosen for the exterior and interior of this two-story men and women's retail store are straight out of nature's library. The exterior is completely clad in Poplar tree bark, while the interior has softer bark walls of white birch, gold birch, and pin cherry accents. The materials have softened and enriched a lot of the interior design, allowing their natural beauty to resonate. We tried to keep the use of the materials simple by puzzling various patterns of bark or relentlessly coating entire surfaces to create a new painting of nature as a backdrop to the elegant sculptures of each of Christian's shoes.

Photography by Nick Rochowski