

Canadien

INTERIORS

CON \$5.95

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2016



19th
annual
**BEST OF
CANADA**
design
awards
winners

— Aesop Toronto — superkül Toronto

— Matte black and titanium finishes started appearing on luxury and performance cars a couple of years ago. Now something like that trendy automotive look makes a bold retail statement at the first Canadian store for Aesop, the Australian skin-care product line. Company philosophy dictates site-specific store design, reflecting the urban context. With its muted industrial aesthetic, the 990-sq.-ft. flagship salutes the historic mix of residential and manufacturing in its Queen Street West neighbourhood. —

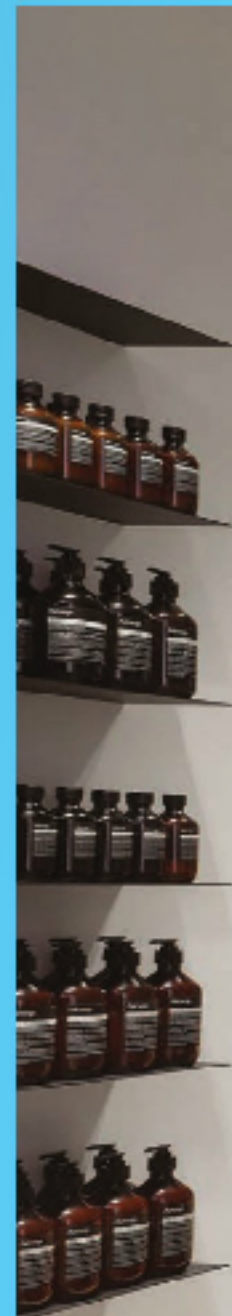
Display and sampling counters are arranged in a linear fashion along the quintessentially Torontonians deep and narrow space, forming islands around which customers can test the various creams, lotions, cleansers and serums. —

The interior was gutted to the existing maple flooring and original brick. This forms the substrate for an unusual art installation-like display system. Toronto artist Kathryn Walter was commissioned to wrap the east wall and part of the ceiling in layers of industrial felt and steel. Long shallow floating display shelves embed in the folds of the pleated wall with no visible means of support. Lacking the techy, mechanical busyness of typical shelving, Aesop's appears clean and seamless, the guts concealed from view. —

The display wall observes Rule Number One of high-end retail: don't junk up the shelves by cramming in too much product. There is, as graphic designers say, plenty of white space around the goods. Calculating the proportion of blank felt wall to the total Aesop-item surface area would reveal parsimonious placement, the better to ensure a calm, serene, upmarket environment. —

The wax coating on the blackened-steel shelves gleams with a soft, glowing lustre. The metal's dark patina contrasts appealingly against the wood, brick and felt. The material recurs in the store's many display tables, counters, sinks and even overhead in the ceiling lighting troughs. —

Could all these non-glossy, non-greasy surfaces be a hidden persuader, to cite Vance Packard's 1957 bestseller on motivational consumer techniques? Skin shine being the bane of portrait photos and selfie shooters, the expanses of matte finish in the store subliminally convey the message that Aesop products keep your skin similarly non-reflective. —



Vandermeij: It's breathtaking. The details in this shop are impeccable. The wall shelves are thin steel that disappear into the drywall with no visible support and the felt installation is dynamic and excellently crafted.