



WORLD WIDE WEAVE

Brand name architecture or the architecture of a brand name

With a façade made of stainless steel wire mesh and glass, the world's largest Louis Vuitton Flagship Store reflects the image of the brand name and the city around it

The world's largest and highly celebrated Louis Vuitton Flagship has opened in Tokyo, a city with a "constantly fluctuating", "eclectic mix of urban topography", as it is often described in specialist literature. The store's architecture responds to Tokyo's urban architectural versatility with optical adaptability, while embodying the traditional products of the House of Louis Vuitton. With his façade construction, architect and rising star Jun Aoki has created a building which "fluctuates" as dynamically as the surrounding cityscape. At the same time, it stands as a synonym for the Louis Vuitton brand in all its variety – as the definitive "ambassador" of the brand name.

Mirror of endless variety

Four different types of specially manufactured woven stainless steel mesh in combination with coloured and mirrored glass, a special illumination system as well as polished and gilded steel produce a pattern which constantly changes. The five-storey building on the famous Omotesando Boulevard, Tokyo's most exclusive shopping "promenade", resembles a pile of "cases" of different sizes and structures stacked on top of each other – recreated through a dual-shelled façade of glass with strips of different kinds of woven stainless steel mesh suspended about 50 centimeters in front of it. The Japanese star architect Jun Aoki, famous for his individualistic, playful language of form, uses his building concept to provoke a range of levels of meaning which comment on the surrounding



environment and on the Louis Vuitton brand. The physical substance of the façade seems optically to constantly dissolve and reconstitute itself, and thus it embodies both Louis Vuitton's brand statement and Tokyo's urban architectural changeability. The latter is evident in the life cycle of Tokyo's buildings, a mere 25 years on average, and in the extreme dynamics and abundance of stimuli characteristic of urban life here. The city is famous for its modern functional buildings without recognizable aesthetic orientations, adorned with neon lights and huge, noisy media screens in the middle of intersecting highways, railway lines and crowded streets.

Adaptable "experiential architecture"

No wonder that Tokyo is so often described with terms like "discontinuity" and "dynamics". Aoki responds to these characteristics by equipping his building with an apparent ability to dematerialise. He had three different types of woven wire mesh manufactured for the project by the Dueren-based specialists GKD - Gebr. Kufferath AG in different, specially designed weaves. By overlaying their complex patterns he creates a third structure, a moiré effect which is purely optical and not inherent in the material itself. In this way, he intentionally creates a constantly changing "illusion" enhanced by a sophisticated lighting and colour concept. In the service of the brand name, on the other hand, the façade represents a homage to the first and lasting success product and trademark of Louis Vuitton: the characteristic case whose particularly light predecessors were carried to victory by increasing social mobility. The changeability of these "woven" cases alludes to the abundance and variety of the scintillating world of fashion, which is constantly reinventing itself anew. The surfaces of woven stainless steel meshes in different patterns and the glass behind them – partly in the colours bronze and copper – take on forms through lighting and the use of mirrored surfaces in ever-different variations. In this way, the building acquires a unique entertainment and experiential value which reflects a



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philosophy committed, in spite of economic recession, to exclusive fashion and shopping as a sensual experience.

Special metal meshes: competence in the service of brand image

For the wire mesh specialists GKD, this project with its four special products and difficult installation requirements counts as one of the greatest challenges of recent years. The company manufactured the material types in the form of 58 separate elements in sizes ranging from just under 10 meters in length and 8 meters in width. Individual strips were as large as 57 square meters and weighed a half tonne. At the architect's request, all the panels were stretched tightly in front of the glass surfaces freely, i.e. without distance holders to stabilise them. For the woven metal mesh specialists and the company responsible for installation, this meant that the strips had to be stretched extremely tightly at the top and the bottom so that they would even be able to stand up to the wind forces of a typhoon without deforming the substructure. The strips were installed using a special "installation box", in particular to make it possible to use a crane to lower and position the elements, even in the narrow "canyons", a mere 0.9 to 1.1 meter wide, between the Flagship Store and its neighbouring buildings. And for the corners of the building, GKD supplied 680 millimeter wide and up to 7 meter long panels which were bent on location in the middle at 90 degrees to make the impression of seamlessness in the building's shell perfect. One of the most difficult tasks facing GKD was the manufacture of the fourth mesh type. This was for a 22 square meter surface which acts as the central element of the façade at the entrance to the building and imitates the chessboard pattern of a new model series of the exclusive product brand. In tedious handwork, every second warp wire group was subsequently removed from a mesh type to create the chessboard-like checked pattern. One non-aesthetic but highly functional special feature for building safety, never before accomplished in this way with façades made of stainless steel wire mesh, is a façade element on the front face of the



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store. This can be raised like a garage door, along with the mesh suspended in front of it, to allow fire-fighters speedy access to the building in the case of fire.

"Luminous Mesh" – a product policy for the growing market in corporate architecture

The Louis Vuitton Flagship Store on Omotesando Boulevard represents a further architectonic component in one of the most exclusive centres of avantgarde architecture in Japan. While Tokyo is otherwise more likely to defy the quality criteria of contemporary architectural criticism, architectonically impressive Fashion Flagships of leading international fashion brand names have emerged here. For GKD, the connection with Louis Vuitton counts as one of the most successful business relationships of recent years. Vuitton has now not only commissioned GKD with the production of a woven bronze mesh for the façade of the administrative headquarters in Paris, but also with the decoration of the Flagship Stores all over the world. Woven wire mesh as a means of expression of brand name identity remains a central theme in GKD's business unit for architecture and design. For this reason, the company will continue in the future to give high priority to product development for the corporate architecture market. The unique material properties of woven metal mesh – its translucency, reflectiveness, stability and formability – combined with GKD's technical competence in the production of specific material types and its intensive advisory services relating to planning and installation are examples of why this manufacturer is expanding internationally with so much success. Product development orients itself to the accomplishment of corporate-specific requirements in order to consistently support brand name identities. Whereas colouring and luminosity of the material could previously only be primarily achieved through painting or illumination, GKD's latest product is capable of assuming light and colour in itself: a luminous mesh whose development is almost complete and which will



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provide an abundance of possibilities for the design of "brand name" architecture.

GKD – WORLD WIDE WEAVE

As a privately owned technical weaver, GKD - Gebr. Kufferath AG is the world market leader in metal, synthetic and spiral mesh solutions. Four independent business divisions bundle their expertise under one roof: Industrial Mesh (woven metal mesh and filter solutions), Process Belts (belts made of mesh and spirals), Architectural meshes (façades, safety and interior design made of metal fabrics) and Mediamesh® (Transparent media façades). With its headquarter in Germany and five other facilities in the US, South Africa, China, India and Chile – as well as its branches in France, Spain, Dubai and worldwide representatives, GKD is close to markets anywhere in the world.

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