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For more information contact:
Piritta Törrö
+358 400 255612
piritta.torro@inspiredconnection.fi

gia Global Honorees 2018
Part 3, Germany: Manufactum

From The Roots

by Michelle Hespe

At the 2018 IHA Global Innovation Awards (gia) in Chicago, German retailer Manufactum was announced as one of the top five most innovative stores in the world. Here we take a look at what makes this retail store so great, and so grounded.

In today’s technology-driven world, where so much of life is lived online, and there’s a distinct lack of human contact and social context, it’s refreshing to come across businesses that still take pride in producing high-quality products that also come with the story of the creator who produced them.

Manufactum from Germany has its roots firmly planted in the real world, making it an attractive prospect for people in search of pieces for their lives that are not merely products that were born from a passing trend or a new idea. Instead, Manufactum stocks products that mean something, and just as importantly, that are made to last.

The product offering at Manufactum is as expansive as it is diverse — gardening tools, sports equipment, toys (for young and old), office supplies, kitchen tools, housewares and body care to name just some categories — and all products seamlessly blend form and function.

Manufactum also encourages customers to meet the creators of its products, to learn about how and why they came to be. In other words, every product stocked at Manufactum has a story, and the store itself has a story that binds the products together. Customers are free to wander around, browse the selections and get inspired, especially at the many events held at Manufactum’s focus point: the workbench. That’s where the magic happens, as customers can see designer-makers at work, and learn about products before they purchase them.

“Our retail concept stems from the notion that products, even everyday items, have been turned from long-term companions into fashionable consumer goods that are not built to last, but rather to be replaced with the next fashion fad,” says Kadir Dogan, Head of Marketing. “Besides their snazzy looks, these items often fail to perform, especially when they are used repeatedly in daily routines. Manufactum searches for functional, reliable and repairable products; and responsible, sustainable and socially equitable manufacturing is our focus.”

It’s fitting that the latest Manufactum store is housed in a place with history and heritage at its heart, and one that is also crafted from old materials. It opened in 2016, and it’s nestled in the heart of Bremen’s old town, in a historical building that was formerly the Bremen City Bank. This stunning building was erected around 1902 as a typical example of Renaissance Revival architecture.
Customers enter the building by several entrances, including a grand hall under a breathtaking stained-glass roof. Monumental columns punctuate the hall, and the floor was crafted from intricate, handmade designs of marble and wood. Modern lighting solutions showcase the 8,000 or more products on display in the 750 m² (8,072 ft²) space. The lighting combines perfectly with the choice of old-world décor and a setting so rich in history, a warm, even subtle scene is created. With the white walls and complementary dark hues in the woodwork, products are presented like precious gems in a museum. This again demonstrates to customers that pieces are all chosen with care, and that they are products to be treasured.

“Our location is in line with Manufactum’s philosophy,” says Kadir. “In addition to the presentation of our goods, our stores provide customers the opportunity to touch, feel and hold our products. This gives customers the story behind them, and also offers further information about their usage and maintenance in everyday life.”

Like reading a story, guests can literally follow their interests from one themed assortment of products to the next, and they can take a break in the cozy 130-seater bistro. Just like a café in an art gallery or a museum, it’s a perfect place for visitors to reflect upon what they’ve seen and what they might like to take home.

Sampling, tasting and trying is all a part of an experience at Manufactum. “At Manufactum, you just need to take a closer look to realize: there is more about this place than just the product. It is about attitudes and perception,” says Kadir. “Everyday life is often underrated and unjustly has such a poor image, but in the end, a large part of our life happens in the everyday world. Therefore, it is our mission, our passion, to find exceptional goods for everyday usage, to discover their story and to share this knowledge with our customers. We encourage customers to make conscious choices and to experience joy in their daily routine. This way, we became a pioneer in sustainability and conscious consumption.”

Although the physical experience of visiting Manufactum is both inspirational and aspirational, and it embraces an old-worldly feel in the bricks and mortar stores, the business is impressively active online — with almost 60,000 FB followers and over 14,000 followers on Instagram. The online shop is a beautifully, cleanly designed reflection of Manufactum’s philosophy and style, offering those who visit it an immersive experience that highlights the dedication that the company has to showcasing the creators of its products.

In Autumn 2018, a pivotal expansion of Manufactum will take the store outside of Germany, with a department store opening in the central, historic inner city of Vienna. “When searching for an ideal location for the first store outside of Germany, it was important that a place with historical importance was chosen, but also one where urban living has evolved,” says Kadir.

In Chicago in March, the gia judges and jury were thrilled to announce Manufactum as one of 2018’s top retailers in the world. “In this landmark store with such beautiful, historical architectural and design elements, you can really feel the history around you,” one judge said. “Great attention has been paid to the product selection, bringing interesting traditional things into the mix of unique products that have been thoughtfully designed. Basically, customers can find things at Manufactum that they can’t find anywhere else.”

To learn more about Manufactum, visit www.manufactum.com.

For more information about the gia (IHA Global Innovation Awards) program, the co-sponsors, or participating in 2018-2019, contact Piritta Törrö at
piritta.torro@inspiredconnection.fi. Additional information on the gia program is also available online at www.housewares.org/show/gia-retail.

For more information about the International Home + Housewares Show and to pre-register for the 2019 Show, taking place in Chicago on March 2-5, 2019, please visit www.housewares.org.