

Esprit opens unique store in Cologne

The focus is on a carefully selected product range, innovative architecture, handcrafted details and a relaxed atmosphere.

Cologne, November 2011. Cologne's popular shopping street, the Ehrenstraße, is always full of hustle and bustle, especially in the run up to Christmas. From 17 November 2011 the new Esprit store is offering a relaxing place for shoppers to unwind and take some time out. The starting shot will be an opening party on the evening of 16 November 2011. During a music performance and video installation the invited guests will be able to gain their first exclusive impression of the new store concept and enjoy organic slow-food and Van Dyck premium coffee from Cologne.

In memory of the year 1986, when the first German Esprit store opened in Cologne, the label has decided to test one of three new store concepts for the first time in the cathedral city.

These so called lighthouse stores are part of the transformation program introduced in September 2011 that will continually strengthen the company's brand value and profitability over the next four years. After the new store concepts have been successfully tested, they will eventually be implemented in the reconstruction process of all directly managed Esprit retail stores. The fashion brand has decided to invest over 280 million euros till 2015.

True to the motto "back to the roots" the snapshots printed on wood in the changing room area and the Californian plants in the conservatory pay homage to San Francisco, the birthplace of Esprit. In combination with large overhead skylights and relaxed seating, the garden area emphasises the friendly, laid-back atmosphere of the store.

The material mix developed by the creative team in cooperation with the architects from Reich & Wamser in Düsseldorf is impressive: walnut and oak meet brick walls, raw steel and exposed concrete, in exciting contrast to opulent draped fabrics in the changing rooms. Inspirational naturalness and authenticity play a key role.

The same also goes for the presentation tables, which with their harmonious, soft shapes, either oval or rounded, fit perfectly into the overall interior design. There are also references to the subject of sustainability in the store – like for example the fact that all items of Esprit clothing are hung on coat hangers made from recycled wood.

“No detail is small” is the indicative maxim of Bernd Gloerfeld von Thenen (Architecture, Esprit), who was able to set new milestones at Esprit with an array of architectonic innovations.

Antje Ludwig (Development Visual Concept, Esprit) was given absolute free rein in the store’s redesign. The result: an inspiring mix of lovingly, handcrafted details, which clearly show how much passion and love to detail were invested in the overall concept. Mannequins decorated with floral stamps or hand painted like the canvases stretched over frames, the cash desk which has been creatively shrouded in a pleated fabric, a packaging material that was designed especially – the new store is unique in every respect.

The store concept is based on a modern, feminine and cosy urban loft. It should be a retreat where customers can unwind from the stresses of hectic city life, relax in the conservatory, and chat with the store’s staff about the latest fashion trends, cool cafés or great new locations in and around Cologne.

“The customer should feel like they are visiting their best friend at home. An urban, authentic, but relaxed atmosphere is particularly important to us,” explains Mike Ross (Project Manager, Esprit).

The collection was specially compiled for this store, at this particular location: alongside selected Esprit items for women and men, seductive bodywear, shoes and accessories, customers can also buy and browse local products, like individual retro bicycles from the brand Eisenherz, artistic coffee-table publications and unusual plant books. Even the music was specially chosen for the new store and will also be available to purchase there. With freestanding furniture, similar to the interior of a home, the store is maintaining its flexibility, which will enable it to constantly surprise and inspire time and time again.