



ONE-STOP SHOP

THE RETAIL SPECIALISTS

In retail, some of the best shopping experiences can be down to the little things. A smile on arrival, bags carried to the car, instinctively spotting a customer's preference, or simply giving people the space to find that preference, can be key. It's this eye for detail that Schweitzer Group, the northern-Italian shop-fitting specialists, never stop looking for. For over 80 years the family-run business now helmed by CEO Bernhard Schweitzer (*pictured left*), has built a network that includes the independent design studio Interstore Design, the management, prototype and product development service Schweitzer Project, and Interforce – who oversee on-site installation. From its headquarters in Naturns to offices in London and Hong Kong and their production facility in Hungary, for global retail solutions, Schweitzer are field-leaders.

But it's Schweitzer's spirit of collaboration that sets it apart from competitors. Never afraid to embrace outside input to help push design forward, the company knows a successful marriage of concept and merchandise comes from respecting a brand. With this in mind, Schweitzer's work can range from bespoke 360-degree shopping solutions, to prototype and product development, to uniformed large-scale multi-store roll-outs. From the grandeur of Galeries Lafayette in Paris to the modern aisles of Migros, Schweitzer's harmonious sense of vision reflects retail for a global market.

Over 300 craftsmen bring that vision to life, sending specialist shop-fitters, carpenters, light-fitters, metal-workers, refrigeration experts and of course, merchandisers, to sites ranging from the United States to the United Arab Emirates.

Overseeing a diverse retail landscape means Schweitzer is always ready to adapt. And fast and efficient practises come as second nature to a close-knit company where a good idea can quickly go far. The journey from opening pitch to store opening is one that Schweitzer's designers, technicians and creatives pride themselves in sharing with clients. Good store design creates an experience to remember. Great stores – you don't even have to think twice about.

WORKING IT OUT

The buzzing energy in the workshop at Schweitzer's Naturns headquarters comes from a committed staff open to fresh thinking and yet self-assured by their time-tested knowledge of what works. The factory is where experiments in shop design evolve into practical models under the hand of skilled technicians. A team of craftspeople cover a full range of what is needed to create a store, from shop furniture fitters to lighting experts. It's this complete approach that allows Schweitzer to move quickly and efficiently and with a watchful eye on all elements of the process, steering the work, controlling the quality – watched over by Christian Dempfle, Schweitzer's chief operations officer (*pictured below*).



Q&A 1

BERNHARD HEIDEN
CREATIVE DIRECTOR,
INTERSTORE DESIGN
Zürich

What does the Schweitzer store design process involve?

The first thing is to have a meeting and then get to know the client over a few days. We show them projects and works from us and others that we think could be helpful to them. It's really a process and they can jump in any time. It's very important that they feel involved and we include technical expertise from the very beginning so that clients feel assured of quality.

How does collaboration enhance the work?

For us it's very important the shop-fitting company is involved from the beginning, not simply making decisions while everybody else wonders what might be happening. And also for us, it's good because all this technical input allows us to better understand the whole picture.

What is the most important aspect of a shop's aesthetic?

A lot of shops today are overdesigned. You don't have the feeling that somebody would like to sell something. You ask yourself where is the merchandise message? I think a store is good if you have a balance between design and merchandise. You need a good understanding of the message that a client wishes to spread, told in good design language.

How does a family business enrich the working environment?

Being a part of a family company, owned by Bernhard Schweitzer, for me personally it's very helpful. We are very quick and efficient, meaning less waste. Also, there are no "no-gos". Two people have to agree and then we go.

How important is shop design for a business to succeed?

If you have a great actor in a bad movie, the actor will not survive. So I'm not afraid if the products are becoming more prominent than the design of shops themselves. To help bring something to people that they love and will come back to and feel good about is very difficult and this is the work we do. It makes what we are doing great because every project is always completely different.



THE IDEAS STORE

Building a welcoming and exciting store environment requires creative and intelligent design. The Schweitzer process is one that involves store clients from the very start and values understanding and collaboration as crucial components for delivering a successful brand identity. At Interstore's studios in Zürich, the creative team are free to let design take the lead and work on original ideas before consulting with technicians to unite creativity with functionality and ensure no unforeseen practical difficulties arise. In the rare occasion they do, Schweitzer add the experience to their near-century of learning, studying and perfecting the art of store design.



Q&A 2

URSULA VIERKÖTTER
MANAGING DIRECTOR, KADEWE
Berlin

Is retail design important to customers?
We did a market survey with customers and got a very clear request concerning look and feel within KaDeWe.

What elements of the retail environment do you value most?

Never one. It starts with layout and of course the design of furniture and fixtures is important but it's as vital as the presentation of the merchandise itself.

What's the future of store design?
It has to focus on customers' emotions, while being attractive and relaxing.

A PERFECT FIT

From G Siebenföcher in Merano's historic town centre (pictured above left) to the meticulously planned layout of Spar in Austria (pictured centre below), to small and exciting pop-up ventures such as Steffl (pictured left) and the elegance of KaDeWe (pictured right), Schweitzer can adapt to any space and bring a fresh perspective. This comes from the company's dedication to finding the right blend on each unique project – be that a one-off experiment or perhaps 100 identical stores in need of a new vision. Schweitzer's flexible working models allow brands to maximise their strongest current assets because the strength of a store lies in its products. But the success of a store relies on products being perfectly presented.



Q&A 3

KEVIN ROCHE
STRATEGY PLANNING &
DESIGN LEAD, LE BON MARCHÉ
& LVMH
Paris

What makes a good retail design firm?
Building a relationship with clients and having trust is the first thing to establish.

How do you ensure successful design?
There will always be high expectations and aspirations but a lot of great work never happens because of the realities of budgets and schedules. So those realities have to be understood.

How can a business be more competitive through innovative retail?

The common thread for me is a visionary CEO. The outside designers can't really move a retail brand. It comes from top-down innovation. A visionary CEO sees and understands a gap in the market place and then figures out how to fill it. It takes a great client to do great work.

