

20 September 2019

Iconic Apple Fifth Avenue blends history, placemaking and innovation

Apple today reopened its landmark Fifth Avenue store, located on the corner of Central Park, one of the greatest public urban spaces in the world. Set against the backdrop of the famous General Motors Building by Edward Durell Stone, the site has a long history; a sunken urban plaza in the 1960s that was filled-in at turn of the Millennium, it was later transformed in 2006 into one of the most photographed attractions in the city with the insertion of the iconic glass cube, Steve Jobs' defining symbol for Apple Fifth Avenue.

Through the careful peeling back of layers of history and the sensitive restoration of the cube, Apple Fifth Avenue seeks to revive the plaza by making it more accessible from three sides, reinforcing the progressive and innovative spirit that is emblematic of Apple. The project is the result of a close collaboration between the design team at Apple led by chief design officer, Sir Jonathan Ive and the integrated design and engineering teams at Foster + Partners.

Sir Jonathan Ive commented: "The Fifth Avenue store was and is a continuation of Steve's vision for Apple, with its iconic transparent cube, which is one of the most visited places in the city. The new design seeks to build on the original idea and create a public plaza that celebrates the vibrant nature of New York City. It gifts Manhattan its greatest new urban room, a celebration of city life, diversity and creativity."

The plaza is the perfect stage for celebrating Apple's passions: photography, music, art and design, coding, and more. Wide steps along the edges invite people up into the space, to gather in a bustling epicenter of urban life. Stone seaters shaded by trees and bordered by linear fountains along the edges of both 58th and 59th Streets create a place to rest and a quiet buffer from the busy traffic, alongside two discrete auxiliary entrances that enhance access to the store below.

Nine beautiful innovative mirrored 'Skylenses' are arranged in a grid either side of the glass cube. These public sculptures allow visitors to interact with the famous New York City skyline in a completely new way. Their seamless curved surfaces create a place to sit while providing a reflected perspective of the city's architecture. The skylenses feature an innovative circulatory cooling system beneath the top surface, designed to absorb solar energy and offer frost protection, allowing people to use them throughout the year. The mirrored glass floods natural light into the expanded store – double the size of the previous space.

At the center of the plaza is the distinctive glass cube, signifying the hub of activity and drawing life into the store below. Visitors descend under the light-flooded glass cube, down a new circular lift and

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spectacular stainless-steel staircase. Each element from the elevator drum to the stair treads is made with mirrored stainless steel, creating a kaleidoscopic effect and reflecting the sights and energy from the surrounding area. The carefully chosen materials completely dematerialize the form and the infinite reflections of light and the skyline create an exciting and stimulating experience.

A grand hall beneath the plaza matches the energy of the public square above, with a backlit, cloud-like ceiling made from a three-dimensional curved fabric innovatively combines artificial and natural light to match the changing tones of daylight through the day – producing an experience that has never been achieved before. Even in low-light conditions, the intensity is higher around the skylights and gradually recedes away from it, giving the impression of natural light flooding the interior. A ring of lights around each skylight contains focus lighting that highlights the products on the display tables. The ventilation system is discreetly integrated within the stone floor and responds intelligently to the levels of occupancy and outdoor weather, optimizing energy usage.

Stefan Behling, Head of Studio, Foster + Partners, said: “Inspired by the original vision of the sunken open-air plaza, we wanted to completely dematerialize the roof of the store and flood the interior space with daylight. The Skylenses literally bring the skies underground and the innovative tunable white light ceiling allows us to match the exact wavelengths of sunlight at different times of day, blurring the boundary between inside and outside.”

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