

Become an eco-responsible shop

Practical guides
to optimise your shop

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A

Glossary: deciphering the basic concepts

Retail Design

Retail Design embraces all of the disciplines involved in the design of retail outlets. Its purpose is to provide a coherent selling environment and to contribute to the image of the brand and the products it sells, while remaining mindful of the essential elements of retail (customer mobility, point of sale management, etc.).

It also encompasses interior design, product display, lighting, the choice of colours and much more... all in the aim of increasing the turnover and appeal of your retail outlet.

Eco-design

Eco-design is an approach to production that pays special attention to the environmental impact of a product or service throughout its life cycle (from design to end of life).
Synonyms: ecological design, sustainable design.

Retail Eco-design

Retail Eco-design refers to internal and external store design that takes into account the principles of Retail Design (functionality, accessibility and appearance), as well as environmental impact (re-use of materials where possible, sustainable material choices, waste reduction, local suppliers, etc.).

B

Retail Eco-design: a necessity for all, a responsibility for you

hub.brussels, the Brussels Agency for Business Support, is committed to implementing one of the key measures of the Regional Circular Economy Programme (PREC), adopted in 2016 by the Brussels-Capital Region: to stimulate the circular economy in the design of shops in Brussels.

The shops of tomorrow will use eco-design, or they will perish.



Reflecting on the means of producing the goods and/or providing the services required to refit a retail unit, Retail Eco-design subscribes to a circular “zero waste” philosophy: it takes into account both the principles of Retail Design (functionality, accessibility and appearance), and the environmental impact of this design.

Simple and accessible

First and foremost, we must help dispel a few preconceptions... “The term ‘Retail Eco-design’ is often misunderstood”, explains Thibaut Surin, retail design advisor at hub.brussels. “For many business owners, it conjures up a nebulous stereotype of what it means to be ‘eco-friendly’;

they imagine it involves smearing the walls of their shop with donkey milk and yak hair.”

However, Retail Eco-design is both simple and accessible. Salvaging furniture found on second hand platforms is eco-design by nature, and is often cheaper than shopping at the “Swedish giant”.

Ethical and affordable

Advocates of Retail Eco-design use materials or furnishings with sustainable, modular and timeless properties. They also favour short supply chains. Health also plays a role in the choice of materials: they opt for natural, certified materials, free from glues and solvents (Ecocert, LED, FSC, etc.).

According to the Retail specialists at hub.brussels, shopkeepers who adopt Retail Eco-design in their business do so both for ethical and financial reasons.

An eco-friendly space is a space open to all, which operates on the basis of universal respect.

“The business owners who come to see us often have limited funds to invest

in fitting out their store”, explains Nicolas Dehon, Startup coach at hub.brussels. “Generally, the business idea needs

to be circular in order for the store to be designed in such a way. Clear examples are shops selling organic, loose and second hand goods. ”

Coaching sessions therefore present an opportunity to raise awareness of the circular economy and its many benefits to prospective retailers. The Agency's Sustainable Economy department and ecobuild and circlemade services also have a growing address book of designers and architects specialising in Retail Eco-design.

Saving money and the environment are not the only benefits of Retail Eco-design: “Design is the tool used to turn concept into reality and give retail units a visual identity”, Thibaut Surin reminds us. “It allows a business to set itself apart from the competition, by giving its customers a unique experience. ”

Retail Eco-design is therefore a worthwhile trend for any retailer looking to make a difference within their sector. It is encouraging to think that soon “eco” will no longer be a prefix, but the norm when fitting out retail units in Brussels.

What good habits should we adopt before buying materials or products ?

Before purchasing materials, consider the grey energy required to manufacture the product -in other words the energy needed to produce, transport and dispose of materials (more information here: <http://www.ecoconso.be/fr/L-energie-grise-des-materiaux-de>).

- Buy second hand and extend the lifespan of products.
- Choose recycled and/or recyclable materials.
- Choose locally made products (Belgian or European).
- Choose single-material products, for easier recycling at the end of their lifespan. Products consisting of multiple materials make recycling more difficult, or even impossible.
- Take advantage of modular design.
- Choose eco-design products

C

From the window display to packaging: 43 practical tips for an eco-design shop

For your window display, think recycling

1. Displays are changed an average of 15 times a year: opt for modular structures, raw materials or single-material wooden structures, which are easily reusable... all of these options are also recyclable!

30 to 40% of your turnover depends on the relevance and visual appeal of your window!



2. Avoid composite materials such as vinyl, melamine or laminates, which remain difficult, or even impossible,

to recycle. For the base and sides of your window display, choose MDF or OSB panels, low in the formaldehyde (very damaging to health) found in certain adhesives. Not only portable and easy to replace, they are also recycled and recyclable.

3. Use rental services to refresh your displays without generating waste.
4. When decorating the base and sides of your window display, choose eco-friendly paints or linoleum, made from 97% natural materials, 72% of which are rapidly renewable and 43% of which are recycled.

Other sustainable solutions employ materials such as wood panelling, wallpaper, cotton, linen, hemp, wool, coconut fibre or bamboo panels, metal, glass, ceramic, cork, natural stone, plant-based materials, etc. More info at: <http://www.ecoconso.be/fr/Peintures-environnement-et-sante>

5. For your “decor items”, choose timeless pieces that can be reused for multiple seasons and events.
6. Scour flea markets and second hand stores for decor items.
7. Adjust your lighting according to the time of day: contrary to popular belief, window displays need less lighting at night than during the day. A window that receives a lot of light during the day needs more light to contrast with the natural brightness. Ideally, opt for a system that changes lighting levels automatically according to the time. Remember that certain anti-light pollution regulations require lights in window displays to be turned off at a set time. Be sure you are aware of the current regulations in your municipality.
8. Turn your window displays off at night and actively participate in a shared effort to reduce waste. In France, for example, turning off the lights in shop windows between 1 and 7 am has saved the equivalent of the annual electricity consumption of 750,000 households since 2015, preventing the emission of 205,000 tonnes of CO₂ and saving 200 million euros. It also helps safeguard biodiversity by preventing unnecessary light pollution.

When decorating your boutique, think second hand!

9. You don't always need new furniture to display your goods and showcase the products you sell. By giving old furniture a new lease of life or repurposing salvaged materials, you can create inspirational and unique displays.
10. When we talk about interior design, and store layouts in particular, we often reference trends. Our society is constantly searching for aesthetic codes and identity markers that reflect a given ethos. The very essence of a trend is to define new values intrinsic to a particular time period or group of individuals. Therefore, it goes beyond mere fashion: it can be a platform for sharing our commitment to the environment.

11. For wooden furniture, think local (Belgian or European). Because even if it comes from a sustainably managed forest, a wooden object that has travelled thousands of kilometres has a larger environmental footprint than its “plastic” alternative. It is therefore worth checking where the product was manufactured, if possible. Avoid exotic timbers!

Unlike plastic, steel or even aluminium, wood comes from a renewable source. As such, it is generally considered a sustainable material. But how can we choose wood and be sure of its origin?



12. Choose objects made from wood treated with natural products.
13. Look out for the right label, proving that the wood comes from sustainably managed forests.

To recognise these easily, visit: www.ecoconso.be/fr/Du-choix-du-bois-comme-materiau

Manage your energy better

14. Invest in good insulation: the cheapest energy is the energy you don't use!
15. Choose natural insulation, made from cellulose, wood fibre, cork, hemp, flax, coconut fibre, etc.
16. Install false ceilings: they reduce the space that needs heating. But be careful not to damage the original features of your building, such as old cornices or murals...

Heating and air conditioning account for 50 to 75% of your electricity bill! By choosing a condensation heater, you can save 30%. By installing a heat pump, you can reduce your consumption in kWh by 70%.



17. When temperatures rise, a phenomenon that looks set to increase, create green walls and/or use green plants to reduce the air temperature. The difference in temperature between a bare wall and a green wall can be up to 10°C. Think carefully about alternative

solutions before investing in an expensive, energy-hungry and polluting air conditioning system.

18. Install a thermostat and regulate the temperature in various areas, for example, the stockroom, shop floor and fitting rooms.
19. When considering air conditioning, explore clean, alternative solutions, such as passive cooling (a means of temperature control that aims to cool the air in a building without resorting to machine refrigeration), adiabatic cooling (which cools the air by causing water to evaporate; when this system is used in an air-handling unit, the air pumped in can be cooled), solar air conditioning (using solar panels) or a heat pump. The latter option is growing in popularity because it is effective, reversible (producing heat/cold), economical (after installation costs) and eco-friendly.
20. Adapt to seasonal temperatures: in summer, a 5°C contrast with the outside temperature is enough to give customers a pleasant sensation of coolness; in winter, a temperature of 19°C is comfortable.
21. Turn down the heating at night.
22. Do not be afraid to shut the door of your shop: a study carried out in Antwerp in 2015 and 2016 by Stadslab2015, Eandis and Unizo has demonstrated that customer footfall and sales do not suffer from a closed door. However, an open door has a large impact on energy consumption.

To find out more, check out the full study (only available in Dutch) at:

<https://stadslab2050.be/energie/klant-binnen-verlies-buiten/winkeldeuren-hoeven-niet-open-voor-shoppers%20>

Lighting, a factor to finetune

23. Remember that lighting not only draws attention to your product, but also makes colours and materials stand out more. Light generates emotions, stimulates the senses and helps give your shop its identity and personality. Modern lighting techniques allow us to create different atmospheres, which can spark a desire to buy. It is therefore a key strategic element in your store design (read our full energy guide here). Lighting wholesalers offer free, personalised surveys, showcasing the latest innovations and allowing you to visualise the end result.

24. Opt for energy efficient bulbs: they consume less energy than other types while providing the same amount of light. Choose category A (LED) or B (Compact fluorescent lightbulbs).
25. Choose lightbulbs with an ecolabel; they have a lower environmental impact.
26. Make the most of natural light, for example with an unobstructed window.

On average, lighting accounts for 25 to 50% of the electricity bill of a shop.

By choosing LED, you can save 50 to 70%!

Take the test on the lighting consumption calculator here:

<http://elairage-et-commerce.be/>



27. Choose pale colours for the floor, walls, ceiling and furniture of your shop. They reflect light better, reducing the electrical input needed.
28. Avoid dark colours, rugs and fabric wall hangings: they absorb light.
29. Trick the eye by hanging mirrors around your shop: as well as creating the illusion of space, they reflect and maximise light.

Choose natural paints

30. In order to respect the environment, as well as your own health and that of your staff, choose paints free from solvents and co-solvents. Remember, some water-based paints also contain co-solvents.

More info at: <http://www.ecoconso.be/fr/Peintures-environnement-et-sante>

How to decipher labels with ease:

<http://www.ecoconso.be/fr/Les-etiquettes-sans-prise-de-tete,550#reflexes>



31. Choose paints low in volatile organic compounds (VOCs).

- 32. Avoid paints containing heavy metals or over 1% in additives.
- 33. Natural paints do not contain heavy metals. They use pigments derived from minerals (Sienna, iron, manganese oxide), vegetables (valerian, tea, onion), or animals (cochineal).

Flyers, bags, containers, tarpaulins, stickers... think before you order

- 34. For flyers and other printed marketing materials, choose recycled or sustainably sourced paper.
- 35. Choose print formats that limit paper wastage.
- 36. Choose vegetable inks (plant-based, non-mineral solvents).

The process of manufacturing paper from wood fibre has a large environmental impact (40% to 80%), due to mass deforestation, (disappearance of numerous animal and plant species and emission of greenhouse gases during forest clearances), as well as high energy, water and chemical consumption during the transformation process (shredding, washing, bleaching). The next step, which transforms pulp into actual paper, requires yet more energy and handling of products.



- 37. Choose a printing firm that is aware of the environmental issues. Many inks used in printing are solvent-based. The evaporation of solvents helps ink to dry, but generates a significant amount of volatile organic compounds (VOCs). These colourless, odourless gases are highly damaging to the environment (greenhouse effect, soil pollution, etc.) and health (asthma, cancer, etc.).

To learn more, visit:

<https://www.ecoconso.be/fr/thematiques/papier>

- 38. For banners and stickers, choose polyethylene instead of PVC, which contains chlorine.
- 39. Buy bags, labels, produce wrappers, paper bags,

What makes plastics unique is their low degree of biodegradability. Plastic can take over 100 years to biodegrade. However, water, wind and erosion create smaller plastic particles, which can accumulate in the food chain, in particular when ingested by fish. PVC also gives off hydrochloric acid, formaldehyde and volatile organic compounds, which have a major impact on the environment. This is why PE (polyethylene) is preferable. However, the majority of non-paper marketing materials are still made from PVC to this day. More information available at: <http://eco-conception.be/fr/secteur/20-communication.html>.

To find out more about plastics, visit: <https://www.ecoconso.be/Trier-les-plastiques>



printed documents, etc. bearing the "OK compost" label. Founded in 1994, the "OK compost" label guarantees that containers and packaging materials

Since 1 September 2017, single use plastic shopping bags have been banned in all shops in Brussels.

More information available at: <https://environnement.brussels/thematiques/dechets-ressources/vos-obligations/interdiction-des-sacs-plastiques/interdiction-des>

You can also consult the plastic free best practice Guide at: https://www.surfrider.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/guide_bonnes_pratiques_commerçants_web_fr.pdf



are fully biodegradable in an industrial composting plant.

More information here: <http://www.ecoconso.be/fr/Comment-reconnaitre-un-sac>

- 40. Inform customers of the steps you are taking and give them the opportunity to do their bit

by encouraging them to return packaging for composting: a plus for the environment, as well as your brand image!

- 41.** Encourage customers to bring their own bags or containers.
- 42.** Switch to organic cotton tote bags: as well as helping protect the environment, they are a great advertising tool. If it looks good and has a stylish logo, customers will want to reuse it, increasing the visibility of your brand, free of charge!

D

Who are we?

hub.brussels is the Brussels Agency for Business Support.

hub.brussels is driven by the ambition to make Brussels the most attractive and pleasant place to launch a business.

We offer tailored support, free tools and proven expertise to strengthen your independence, simplify your decisions, and help you succeed in Brussels and beyond.

hub.brussels is also over 200 attentive, dedicated and passionate people, and a promise to support, inspire and propel you, your business, and your most daring projects...

We are hub.brussels; we are with you.

Contact

Got a question or comment on this practical guide?
Want to design a shop interior that is both eco-friendly and on trend? Contact the hub.brussels Retail Design expert, Thibaut Surin, at the following address:
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Thanks

hub.brussels offer our warmest thanks to everyone who has contributed, directly or indirectly, to making this guide a reference on the subject of sustainable shop fitting and design.

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