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What relevance do brick-and-mortar stores have when online retail dominates? Ministry of Design's strategy for the new Durasport store at Jewel Changi Airport pairs the magnetism of high-performance design with the resonance of immersive experience.

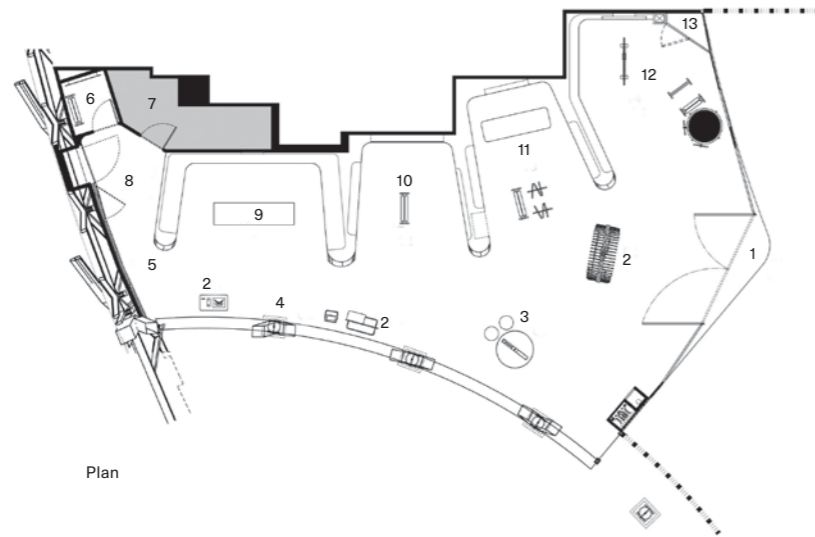
Upping The Game

Durasport, by Ministry of Design
 Words Luo Jingmei Photography CI&A Photography | Edward Hendricks (courtesy of MOD)



Above: As the gates of Durasport open inward, the customer is beckoned inside by the illuminated arrows that compose the logo's X symbol. Opposite: A stretch-resistant wetsuit is displayed within an illuminated oculus and appended by a magnifying glass that encourages close inspection of its unique silicone coating.





Plan

Durasport is located at the new Moshie Safdie-designed Jewel Changi Airport on the mall's second storey, close to many other sporting goods stores. However, it looks nothing like its neighbours, whose brightly coloured interiors are chock-a-block with apparel, accessories and sporting imagery.

The ubiquitous storefront mannequin displays are also absent from Durasport. Instead, multidisciplinary design firm Ministry of Design (MOD) draws attention to the shop through transparency (an element of Jewel's retail design guidelines), materiality and a strong graphic language.

A dynamic-looking facade comprising high-grade stainless steel grilles incorporates the brand's logo – an X, representing the catalyst at the beginning of experiments – which pulls apart as the gates open. Already, an impactful first impression melding branding and spatial design is made, and the message is clear: Durasport is not about trends but performance and unique encounters. Within, brevity in product display reflects a premium status, and rightly so; Durasport's target demographic is a growing and apparently untapped market segment of ultra-performance athletes and sporting enthusiasts.

Aside from designing the space, MOD also worked on the brand strategy, signage and graphic design, and co-curated the inventory with the client Durasafe. A futuristic interior with high-performance, anti-slip rubber flooring and hairline-finish stainless steel all round sets an appropriate tone.

"We were inspired by the high-tech research-and-development laboratory environments where many of the products were developed, and wanted to find an alternative to the conventional big-brand sports store," says Colin Seah, MOD's Design Director. He continues, "The interior design conveys seriousness and focus, yet allows the products – which tend to be colourful – to really pop in contrast." Jewel's triangulated windows as well as circular motifs designed by MOD (such as light features and the cashier's stand) strengthen the overarching graphical language.

A three-stage strategy to "excite, immerse and (subsequently) convince the customer" governed the store's design and layout. The compelling facade and interior character cover the first step. Next, an immersion process is offered through highly customised and detailed display units that illustrate the uniqueness of particular products while educating customers. Hands-on experiential zones allow customers to test the products, aided by machines that simulate the activities they were designed for.

An interactive 'spine' delineates zones for cyclists, skiers, climbers and triathletes. One can test the world's first graphene bicycle constructed with aerospace expertise and Formula 1 technology; strap on rigid-yet-flexible ski boots and attempt to beat the fastest time logged on a pro ski simulator; or test out climbing shoes on a rotating climbing wall. In the Arctic zone, a 'magic mirror' allows customers to try on garments virtually and email a photograph of the outfit to themselves to aid the decision-making process.

Technology is well harnessed to add value to the retail experience. This is all the more exciting for customers, as it is the first time some of these products have been available in Singapore. Niche, high-performance products naturally fetch higher prices – the bicycle is \$30,000 – so the ability to assess the products in simulations of the extreme conditions they were designed for manifests the third step of Seah's retail strategy: to give the customer a tantalising taste of just how they could up their game.

MOD's approach demonstrates that physical shops remain relevant in the digital age – but not in their traditional forms. It is important that customers are offered new experiences and refreshing ways of interacting with products – even more so in a niche market like ultra-performance sports retail. Understanding this need and responding to it helps win customer appreciation and foster connection to the brand.

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Legend: 1 Entrance | 2 Product Display | 3 Help Desk And Cashier | 4 iPad Stand | 5 Hanger Wall | 6 Fitting Room | 7 Store | 8 Measurement Wall | 9 Trizone Immersive Zone | 10 Climb Immersive Zone | 11 Arctic Immersive Zone | 12 Cycle Immersive Zone | 13 Window Display.

Opposite, top: The 'Magic Mirror' allows customers to 'try on' ski clothing and email photos to themselves, without physically putting on the ski outfits. Opposite, bottom: Clickable stainless steel display shelves latch onto groove lines within the walls, allowing displays to be customised when new inventory is introduced. Pages 128-129: An indoor interactive non-motorised climbing wall with a rotating surface simulates climbing without height risks.



CLIMB

High-Performance Display System

A customised 'load and lock' shelving system easily latches onto and detaches from groove lines within the stainless steel panels. Explains Colin Seah, "The flexibility of the system and the built-in lighting enable it to display a wide range of products that are different in shape, size and display requirements. Also each time Durasport brings in new products, they are able to 'clip in and clip out' the custom-designed shelves to configure a new shelving display for that zone."

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