

# Valextra

MILAN - JOHN PAWSON

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VALEXTRA ENLISTED BRITISH ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNER JOHN PAWSON TO CREATE A NEW FACE FOR THE BRAND'S MILANESE BOUTIQUE.

The iconic via Manzoni space has been through several aesthetic reinventions, in parallel with the company's own creative evolution. By tradition, the brand hands over the store to a different architect or designer every year, merging its luxury leather expertise with the worlds of design, art and architecture. Each creative voice who added to the Valextra story has contributed to the brand's evolution and strengthened its artistic legacy. The past four years have represented an aesthetic journey through conceptual interventions, and each project has unveiled a new moment in the brand's growth: designer Martino Gamper's brilliant ingenuity, architect Bernard Dubois' brutalist softness, American design duo Snarkitecture's monochromatic experiential tactility and Japanese architect Kengo Kuma's ultimate interpretation of the natural world have forged the company's identity to reveal a multifaceted, rich personality.

The latest chapter in this creative narrative is a sum of these experiences and a return to Valextra's original purity: after these successful visual experiments, their creative apex is represented by a new, complete vision for the space. The brand worked with John Pawson on a longer-term interpretation of the store marrying the minimal, clean elegance and restrained luxury of its minimalism with Pawson's own philosophy of space. By choosing to collaborate with one of the ultimate pillars of contemporary architecture, Valextra combines its history with the philosophical stance of the architect, merging its heritage with Pawson's own legacy. This intervention will act as a flexible canvas for Valextra, functioning both as a retail space for its products and as a gallery for a series of art exhibitions.

Pawson's project considers the space as a whole, incorporating key aspects that have come to define his work, from a monochromatic palette to the use of light and the seamless integration of new elements within the existing architecture. From the street, passers by can see all the way into the store, which has been opened up structurally to create a welcoming, immersive, luminous environment, reinforcing the impression that this is Valextra's home in Milan. Inside, guests are encouraged to walk through a sequence of three rooms, each incorporating the subtle drama of a different light identity.

The design is based around a series of compositions featuring suspended shelves finished in plaster tinted to blend with the existing ceppo di gre floors. With each individual piece fabricated by hand, the installation, much like Valextra's bags, reflects the commitment required to realise an apparently simple vision. At the back of the store, the floating elements are replaced by a generously scaled table that visually anchors the space. A sequence of mirrors offers graphic glimpses of the surroundings, enhancing the sense of openness that lies at the core of Pawson's work.

The space appears rigorous, monumental; this is an all-encompassing, pure architectural project which entirely redefines the scope of the store's interiors. The vision of the intervention is not simply to create a container for the product, but a spatial narrative that enhances the experience of proportion, surface and scale. The architectural language of simplicity produces a gallery-like interior, whose charged character derives from the restrained use of colour and light.

As a debut for the new face of the Via Manzoni store, Valextra presents its Spring/Summer 2019 collection - a series of classic pieces featuring bold, graphic motifs. The brand's most iconic bags, from the Iside to the Brera, are presented in a bright palette of emerald green, cedar and lobster red, contrasting with black and white shapes and alluding to 90s graphics. Located within the context of Pawson's sensual but rigorously pared back installation, these colourful pieces will speak powerfully of the dynamism of Valextra's aesthetic vision.

















## JOHN PAWSON

John Pawson was born in 1949 in Halifax, Yorkshire. After a period in the family textile business he left for Japan, spending several years teaching English at the business university of Nagoya. Towards the end of his time there he moved to Tokyo, where he visited the studio of Japanese architect and designer Shiro Kuramata. Following his return to England, he enrolled at the Architecture Association in London, leaving to establish his own practice in 1981. From the outset his work has focused on ways of approaching fundamental problems of space, proportion, light and materials, rather than on developing a set of stylistic mannerisms — themes Pawson also explored in his book *Minimum*, first published in 1996, which examines the notion of simplicity in art, architecture and design across a variety of historical and cultural contexts. Early commissions included homes for the writer Bruce Chatwin, opera director Pierre Audi and collector Doris Lockhart Saatchi, together with art galleries in London, Dublin and New York. Whilst private houses have remained a consistent strand of the work, subsequent projects have spanned a wide range of scales and building typologies, ranging from Calvin Klein Collection's flagship store in Manhattan and airport lounges for Cathay Pacific in Hong Kong, to a condominium for Ian Schrager on New York's Gramercy Park, the interior of a 50-metre yacht and sets for new ballets at London's Royal Opera House and the Opéra Bastille in Paris. Over the years John Pawson has accrued extensive experience of the particular challenges of working within environments of historic, landscape and ecological significance. Key examples including the Sackler Crossing — a walkway over the lake at London's Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew — the Cistercian Abbey of Our Lady of Nový Dvůr in Bohemia, the interior renovation of the basilica of the Benedictine Archabbey of Pannonhalma in Hungary and the remodelling of the former Commonwealth Institute in London, opened as a new permanent home for the Design Museum in 2016.

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