



York's Broadway in 2000; three years on, *fashionistas* and architecture pilgrims have a new reference point on their global compasses with the completion of the biggest Prada flagship store to date in Tokyo, designed by Herzog & de Meuron. At a cost of £52 million, budget, it seems, is no object, despite falls in company profits (down from £36 million in 2001 to £19 million last year, though the Asian market is still apparently buoyant). The Swiss partnership has also been charged with converting a piano factory for the house's New York head office and designing a new production centre in Tuscany. Such creative interaction represents an intriguing shift in the cultural landscape of architecture. Whereas a generation ago architects' imaginations were exercised by helicopters and yachting wire, now it is high fashion and modern art.

Prada Tokyo is in Harajuku, an area famous for both its couture and street fashion, manifest by the parades of exotically attired young Japanese who cruise up and down the broad main drag of Otomosando, which, with its trees and cafés, is Tokyo's closest approximation to a Parisian boulevard. At its east end it tapers and morphs into the city's Bond Street, an elegant ghetto of deluxe flagships clinging staidly together, like first class passengers in the Titanic's lifeboats, for succour against the blare and dislocation of modern Tokyo. In a city with virtually no public space in the European sense (land is far too precious a commodity to remain empty), Herzog & de Meuron's first move is a bold and urbanistically generous one, stacking up the shop and office accommodation into a stumpy five-sided block to create a small piazza at its base. The piazza is enclosed by an angular wall covered in soft green moss that will gradually flourish, a reminder of the slow beauty of organic life in the midst of artifice. Hemmed in on all sides by low-rise buildings, the forecourt provides a breathing space for meeting, socializing and window shopping. It also makes the tower more of a distinguishable object in its own right, like a chunky bubble-wrapped bauble on a tray.



location plan

Like a modern Medici with matching accessories, Miuccia Prada and her eponymous fashion house have become synonymous with a shrewdly intrepid approach to architectural patronage. Since 1999, Prada has embarked on a programme of new store designs and brand expansion through a select stellar cabal of the avant-garde (Rem Koolhaas, Kazuyo Sejima, and Herzog & de Meuron). Though the worlds of architecture and fashion have a fertile and

often colourful reciprocity, this goes beyond the periodic tasteful fit-out into a more serious (and big budget) exploration of the radical that aims to reinvent the simple act of clothes shopping into a singular experience – consumerism as culture or religion and shops as carefully choreographed environments or temples. (Perhaps not so different from the Medicis after all.)

The first so-called 'Epicentre' store designed by Koolhaas was unveiled on New

FASHION STORE, TOKYO, JAPAN
ARCHITECT
HERZOG & DE MEURON

UNDER THE NET

Wrapped in a crystalline grid, this new store in Tokyo marks the latest step in Prada's plans for world fashion domination.

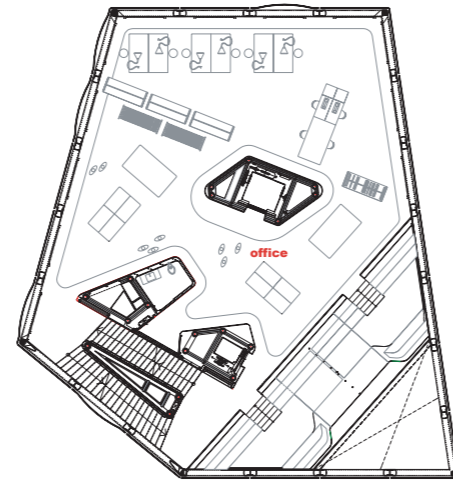
1 The Prada tower draws back from the edge of its site to create a small public piazza.
2 Detail of the rhomboidal grid with its glass infill panels that envelops the building like a huge net or piece of bubble wrap.



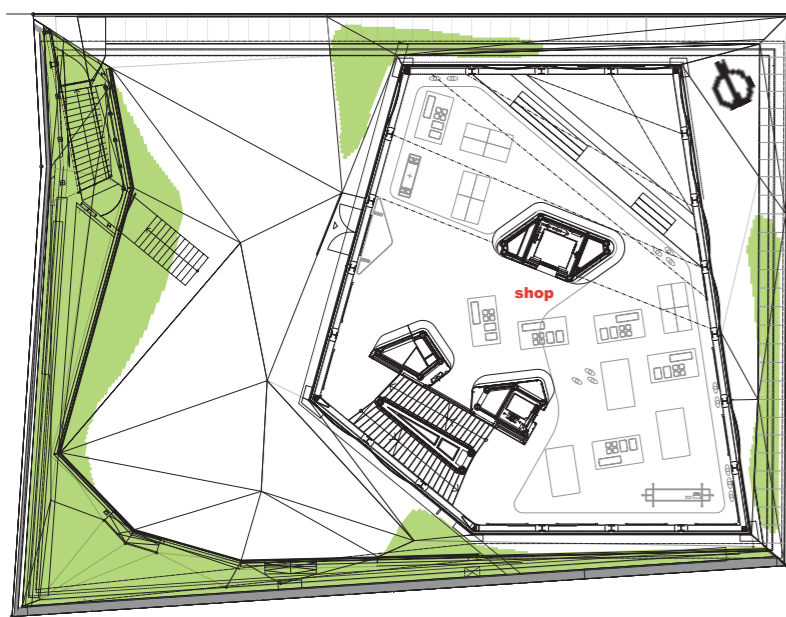
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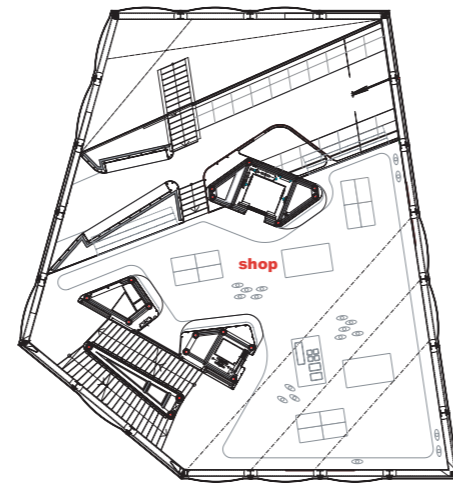
first floor



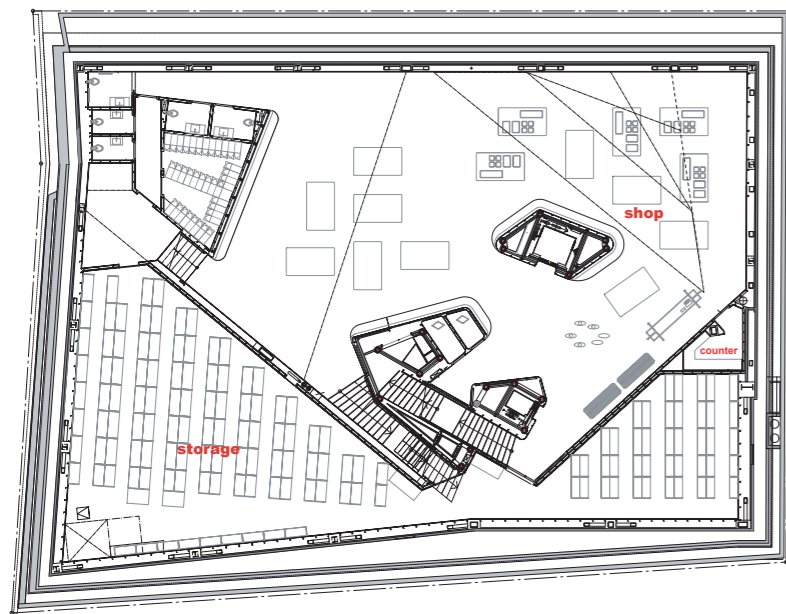
fourth floor



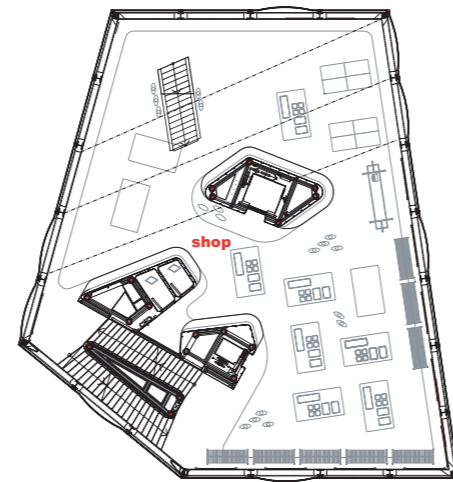
ground floor plan (scale approx 1:250)



third floor



basement plan



second floor



3-5
Views of Tokyo are diffused through the tubular grid. Inside, a seamless white landscape is articulated by the paraphernalia of display.





Though it might appear capricious, the irregular geometry of the tower is in fact dictated by Tokyo's complex zoning and planning laws that have shaped and eroded the basic six-storey block. Herzog & de Meuron's early exploratory models resembled roughly carved pieces of ice, now evolved into a more streamlined and tautly chamfered form. This is wrapped in a rhomboidal grid, like a giant fishing net (or string vest), infilled with a mixture of flat, concave and convex panels of glass. Most are clear, some, where they enclose changing rooms, are translucent. The convex panels billow out gently through the grid like bubbles or puckered flesh (enhancing the string vest analogy). Cunningly, there is no single focal shop window; rather the entire building is a huge display case, generating faceted reflections and an array of changing, almost cinematic, views from both outside and inside. At night, light pulsates through the crystalline lattice, tantalizingly exposing floors of merchandise.

Tied back to the vertical cores of the building, the tubular steel grid forms part of the structure, so that facade and structure are in effect a seamless entity. The grid acts as stiffening element, bracing the structure against seismic forces. Inside all is equally seamless. A meandering labyrinth of cool white space forms a suitably neutral canvas for the carefully orchestrated display of designer objects. At intervals, the double-

height spaces are penetrated by the diagrid structure, bleached white like dinosaur ribs. Changing rooms are enclosed by panels of electropic glass that can turn opaque at the flick of a switch. Lights and monitors wiggle provocatively on serpentine stalks adding a whiff of *Barbarella* campness, compounded by the puzzling and slightly perverse presence of an array of white fur rugs. And everywhere there are glimpses of the Tokyo streetscape filtered and framed by the giant net. Though Prada is undoubtedly technically sophisticated, you wonder, slightly heretically, if a mere boutique merits such a concentrated application of resources and architectural imagination. But this is the rarefied world of fashion, where normal rules have never applied. PHOEBE CHOW

Architect

Herzog & de Meuron, Basel

Project team

Jacques Herzog, Pierre de Meuron, Stefan Marbach, Reto Pedrocchi, Wolfgang Hardt, Hiroshi Kikuchi, Yuko Himeno, Shinya Okuda, Daniel Pokora, Mathis Tinner, Luca Andrisani, Andreas Fries, Georg Schmid

Associate architect

Takenaka Corporation

Structural engineers

Takenaka Corporation, WGG Schnetzer Puskas

Mechanical engineers

Takenaka Corporation, Waldhauser Engineering

Facade consultant

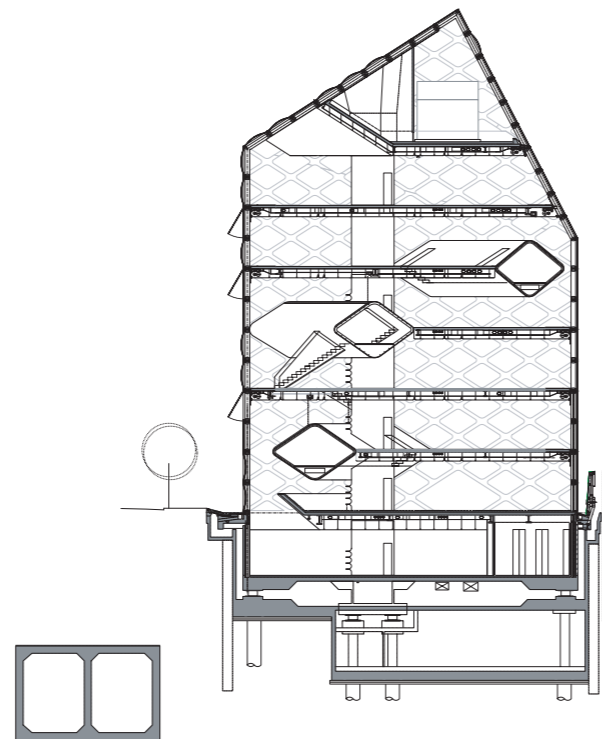
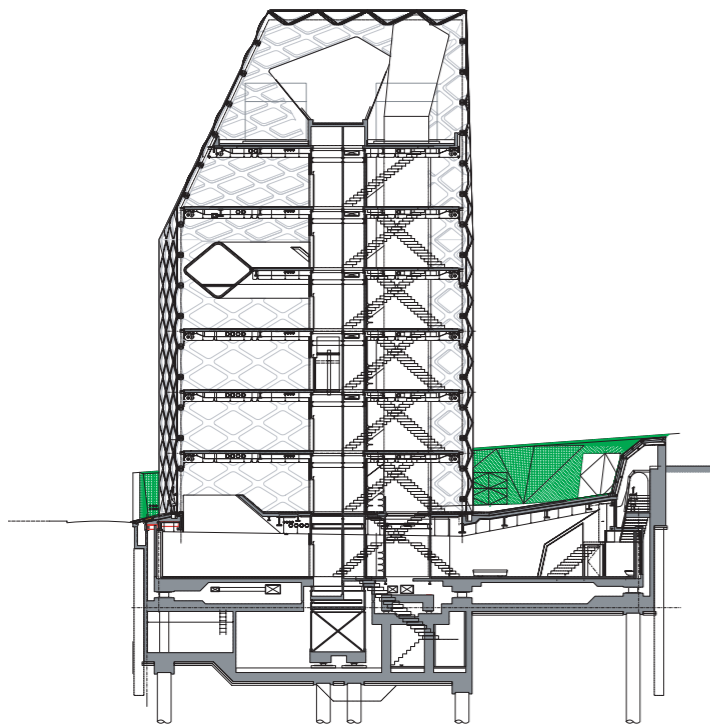
Emmer Pfenninger

Lighting consultant

Arup Lighting

Photographs

Nacasa & Partners



FASHION STORE, TOKYO, JAPAN

ARCHITECT

HERZOG & DE MEURON

6 Inside the seamless white labyrinth.

7 At night the crystalline lattice pulsates with light.

8 Snorkel-like fittings add a camp, futuristic air. The untreated timber floor is a reprise of Tate Modern.

