



Obakki

**OBAKKI'S
FUNCTIONAL
CRAFTSMAN**



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In a vintage Vancouver building, Obakki's sophisticated design combines art and function.



Above The store features exposed bricks, concrete walls and floors and a functioning work of art which doubles as a countertop.

Left Hanging merchandise for men and women is displayed on angular racks, suspended below a dropped ceiling that is outlined with a fluorescent-lit cove.

Lauded as one of the world's most liveable cities, Vancouver is a centre of Canada's international trade and tourism. As the country's largest port, it has the Pacific Ocean on three sides and a mountain range on the fourth. Its own distinctive design aesthetic has become a major attraction.

Vancouver will host the 2010 Winter Olympics. This has encouraged major investment and growth in infrastructure, residential, and business development – including the retail sector. Local designers are not afraid to try out new concepts, testing standards and creating new traditions. Obakki is a successful new boutique that is attracting locals and visitors alike with its distinctive selection and intriguing store design.

Obakki was founded in 2005 by Treana Peake, Vancouver area resident and wife of Ryan Peake of rock band Nickelback. "I was attending a lot of red-carpet events and noticed that

some of the most interesting outfits came from local clothing and accessories designers who are scattered around the city in small shops and showrooms," she explains. "I got to know several of them and realised that, even with their very singular talents they didn't have the time nor the resources to significantly grow their businesses."

Peake left her career in healthcare management to initiate the Obakki label as a platform for local designers. "There's talent all around us," Peake believes. "It just required some sort of business model and exposure."

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Obakki is a play on the Chinese word for change or transformation. "We are really a design collective, now representing over 30 designers," she points out. She believed Vancouver's regional



Above The three chandeliers are a softened interpretation of the artwork/countertop dubbed *Shattered*.



Right Each of these wall hung jewellery display panels are covered in white leather and display a single piece of jewellery.

population of 2.5 million would support her fashion concept. "Our style is constantly evolving each season, so we needed a store design that could support equally well whatever direction the future inventory will turn out to be," she says. Peake calls her look "rustic luxury ... refined, yet comfortable and classic." She invested in a 220m² space in a c.1889 building in the city's trendy Gastown neighbourhood, with manufacturing facilities in an adjoining building. The raw shell for the street-level store features exposed brick and concrete walls, a concrete floor, and overhead tracks fitted for metal halide fixtures. Architects McFarlane/Green/Biggar of North Vancouver were awarded the design commission.

"Then Treana told us that she wanted to open the store in time for last year's holiday season," says architect Michelle Biggar, principal in charge of the project. "That meant we had three months to complete the design and construction on a very tight budget,"

she recounts. The solution devised by Biggar and her team was to produce the finished product in the required time by implementing a limited number of strong design elements within an artisan approach to merchandise display and lighting. They defined an open and flexible plan for the space, which measures 24m long by 9m wide.

Biggar's overall design approach was sleekly contemporary and minimal, an interpretation of the Obakki collection. Peake's definition slotted it as a "high-end luxury line with a casual feel and some surprise touches."

Peake also commissioned Vancouver wood craftsman Brent Comber to design and fabricate fixtures and display elements for the store. He worked with the architects to create a functional work of art, and delivered a wood countertop 10m long that he titled *Shattered*. It became the store's signature design element. "As seen in plan view, the counter's

surface is formed of irregular pieces of wood, like a crystal goblet that has shattered, been smoothed out, and then reformed into a single layer of random-shape shards," Biggar points out. She intersected the top with solid surface folds for jewellery and the future tea bar with hidden but functional millwork for the point-of-sale and storage.

Comber sculpted a large, low display table for the back of the store. "These blocks can be split apart, in the same visual theme as the main counter, to allow for the flexible display of product

and the reconfiguration of the store," Biggar points out.

A softened interpretation of *Shattered* was applied to the three chandeliers that mark the point-of-sale and fir block display table. Biggar translated the countertop into a design for a trio of floating, illuminated sculptures that she envisioned as a customised addition to the store's aesthetic. "They would represent the surprise visual touch that contributes to the shop's overall image," Biggar notes.

Hanging merchandise for women and men is displayed on angular racks





Above Obakki is based in a 220m², 1889 building in the trendy Gastown neighbourhood.

Right The Obakki store's flexible open space has been used for shows, put on for Vancouver's style leaders, to highlight the latest in the Obakki collections.



suspended below a dropped ceiling that is outlined with a fluorescent-lit cove. Accent lighting is beamed from the dropped ceiling panel by strips of luminaires housing PAR-38, 50-watt lamps.

Two circular changing rooms in the rear of the store are enclosed by floor-to-ceiling curtains, retractable behind backlit walls hung with full-height mirrors. Additional fabric panels alternate between widths of the exposed brick wall. "We sew the panels in our own workrooms next door, so they can easily be changed for the seasons or a special event," Peake says. "They can be fully drawn back to reveal the patterns of the original brick."

Functional craftsmanship is also evident in the wall-hung jewellery display panels. Each white leather-covered panel typically displays a single piece of jewellery. Measuring .61m long by .2m wide by .06m thick, they can be lifted off the wall for customer inspection.

Peake has used the store's flexible space for shows from the Obakki collections that she stages for Vancouver's style leaders.

Peake has used the store's flexible space for shows from the Obakki collections that she stages for Vancouver's style leaders. In addition to apparel, Obakki promotes local and speciality designers of accessories, including an assortment of bags, totes, scarves, and jewellery.

Obakki was named a winner in the 2008 Architects' Institute of British Columbia award programme. "We've raised the bar for retailers in the area," claims Peake, "while preserving the essence of the neighbourhood, not forcing something foreign onto the urban environment". ■

By **Vilma Barr**, a freelance writer based in Philadelphia and a regular contributor to *NZRetail*.

OBAKKI CITED IN THE LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR OF BRITISH COLUMBIA AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE IN ARCHITECTURE

Designed by: McFarlane/Green/Biggar Architecture + Design Inc., North Vancouver, Canada.

The award announcement stated: "This small but impactful Gastown store is the embodiment of simplicity, in keeping with the modern-day fashions to be found within. Signature millwork helps to connect the modern aesthetic with the rugged brick and concrete of the original building. The end result delivers on the flexibility and creativity that the client required. And it does so with a spirit of sustainability. The project demonstrates a minimal design philosophy that brings something truly unique to the retail environment."

Commented one of the judges: "... the interior design demonstrates a high level of resolution ... it is very beautiful and poetic."