

T Fondaco sets bar for future European DFS stores

Two years following DFS Groups announcement of its 'first' European store in the heart of Venice, the DF&TR retailer will finally throw open its doors to the public on 1 October. Locals and brand partners have been anxious to see how DFS has transformed a much beloved Venetian landmark into a shopping mecca in the last two years.



TRBusiness was on location for a private guided tour of the store and an interview with group CEO Philippe Schaus.

As previously reported, this is the retailer's first store in Europe and promises not to be the last. After much speculation and numerous reports from international press that DFS would be entering Europe through Paris – at the LVMH-owned La Samaritaine – the Group is finally ready to open its T Fondaco store at the Fondaco dei Tedeschi – a 13th century building, owned by Edizione, a private, unlisted company which is wholly controlled by Italy's Benetton family.

Simultaneously, DFS is of course acting as a retail consultant on the LVMH project in Paris, but the company's CEO, Philippe Schaus said he was not at liberty to discuss this at present.

However, he did say that the group is concentrating on 'digesting' a veritable feast of projects, which have been completed within a prolific 12 month-period and therefore is not planning to open another new store inside the next two years.

Instead the group will concentrate on major bids – Hong Kong and San Francisco airports to name just two – and renovating/improving existing retail space.



"This year has been an incredible year," Schaus told *TRBusiness*. "We've opened in Venice with the Fondaco...Cambodia with the beautiful Siem Reap store, two magnificent Wine & Spirits stores at Changi Airport and City of Dreams in Macau.

TIME TO DIGEST

These are four huge openings and now we have to digest them. So in the next two years we are going to be focusing on making these stores work, but also renovating existing stores, such as those in Sydney,

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Auckland and Bali.

“As you know we are also in the process of rebidding in some locations. Hopefully we will stay there and then we can do something very different to what was there before. So there will be a lot of focus on existing stores. **And then beyond these two years...we'll see.**”

But for now at least, DFS Group will be working very hard to ensure that the first few days, weeks and months of trading at the Fondaco meet high expectations which have no doubt been set for it by majority shareholder, LVMH. *[DFS Group is also partially owned by Robert Miller, co-founder of the company].*

This project has not been a simple or straightforward process, and at times has been painstaking, as the company has had to adhere to strict guidelines set by the city of Venice's cultural organisations, to maintain the integrity of The Fondaco's architecture, which dates back to 1228.

It was first constructed as a place of exchange for German merchants, and used for centuries to trade spices, silk and other goods between the Orient and Northern Europe. Located in the city centre, DFS believes it has reasserted the building as a 'commercial and cultural destination'.



A wall of Jo Malone at the Fondaco dei Tedeschi.

SPACE IS A PREMIUM

The project is a departure from the group's ultra modern gallerias found in Asia and its efficient, cross-category duty free stores in airports dotted around the world.

Space is a premium and the traditional Venetian architecture has been preserved at all costs. Only minor changes to the interior structure of the building have been made with the approval of Edizione.

The project and DFS Group have come under scrutiny from numerous cultural organisations in Venice who were anxious to see if their beloved Fondaco had changed beyond recognition.



Store with a view

DFS Executive Vice President Europe and Middle East Eléonore de Boysson, told TRBusiness that the reaction so far has been positive from local residents and media who have been pleasantly surprised by the end result.

Although the building is opening on time, the adjacent Ponte Rialto (bridge) is still undergoing renovation – something which has been ‘paid for’ by fashion brand Diesel (says DFS), which explains an intimidatingly large billboard fixed to the bridge itself.

PONTE RIALTO

The restoration is expected to be complete by the end of this year. The Ponte Rialto acts as a main artery through which millions of tourists cross the Grand Canal every year [a local Venetian tour guide told TRBusiness that the city received 30 million visitors last year].



Venice received over 30 million visitors in 2015.

Although Venice has an excellent public transport system, concerns were raised over the infrastructure surrounding the building itself and whether congestion would impact the city.

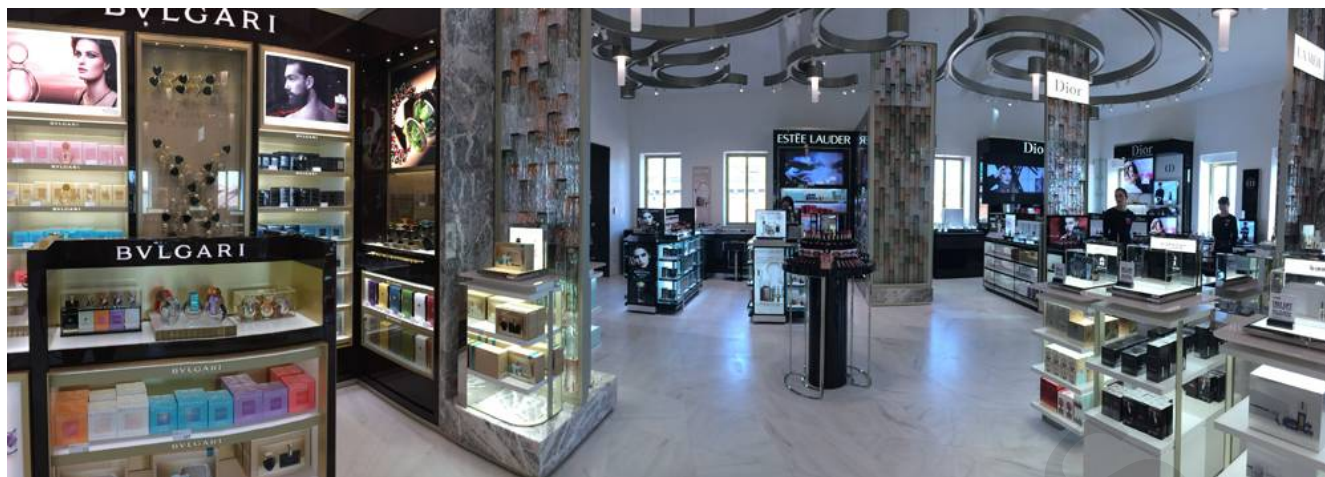
De Boysson said that DFS had considered this when designing the store and has created three different entry points to help facilitate traffic flow and ease congestion.

De Boysson also said that the building has a capacity constraint of 1,800 people that can be in the store at any one time.

WHATS IN STORE?

On the ground floor level, 'originally a bustling medieval courtyard', Gucci and Bottega Veneta, as well as a range of Italian fashion accessories and jewellery, have taken up residence on the Grand Canal side of the building.

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Beauty mecca at the Fondaco dei Tedeschi,

An assortment of food, wine and gifts 'celebrating local craftsmanship and the Italian zest for life' are located on the opposite side.

The ground floor atrium will be home to AMO, a Venetian café/restaurant developed by the renowned interior designer Philippe Starck in partnership with Italy's most revered culinary family.



A fashion paradise for men.

The menu - created by the Alajmo brothers Massimiliano, the youngest chef in the world to have received three Michelin stars, and Raffaele, "maître des lieux" of all the Alajmo family restaurants - will feature 'simple, modern twists on classic Italian cuisine in a space designed specifically to create a sense of conviviality', says DFS.

STRIKE A POSE

The first floor, accessed by a DFS-red escalator designed by OMA, features women's fashion, jewellery and accessories from brands including, among many others, Bulgari, Damiani, Fendi, Lanvin, Max Mara, Tiffany & Co and Valentino.



The second floor introduces Venice's only multi-brand luxury watch area, with a large offering of brands like Cartier, Hublot, Omega and Panerai, along with a curated selection of men's fashion and accessories brands including Brioni, Burberry, Salvatore Ferragamo, Moncler, Ermenegildo Zegna and many more.

A women's shoe salon – one of the store's features which DFS Group is most proud of – and the 'largest offering of beauty and fragrance products' occupies the third floor.

Featured brands on this floor include; Aquazzura, René Caovilla, Jimmy Choo and Giuseppe Zanotti in shoes and Acqua di Parma, Dior, Estée Lauder, Lancôme, and The Merchant of Venice in beauty.

Above the retail space, sits a floor dedicated to events and exhibitions that will be open to the public. The building comes complete with rooftop terrace offering a panoramic view of Venice, reaching from the Grand Canal to the Venetian Lagoon and beyond to the peaks of the nearby Italian Alps.

UNDER WATER

The first exhibition, a video installation entitled "Under Water" by internationally renowned Italian multimedia artist Fabrizio Plessi, will debut with the opening of the store on October 1.