



“The same brands trotted out again and again,” is how Tyler Brûlé, the editor-in-chief of global business and lifestyle magazine, Monocle (below), described the duty free and travel retail industry last week.

As the 'Inspirational Keynote' speaker at the ACI Europe Airport Trading Conference last week, Brûlé (*right*) told his audience that there was a lack of innovation in the airport retail offer and that "something has to give in Europe at this point".

He said of airports: "There has been an evaporation of mystery, and it needs a comeback. The product mix is the same and lacks originality... with little in the way of pleasant surprises. It is a world of placeless places."

Brûlé – who was also the founder of influential style and fashion monthly, *Wallpaper**, in 1996 – believes that airports are missing a trick by focusing too much on the high-spending Chinese passengers without doing the research to take advantage of other nationalities such as Thais and what he calls “post-luxury consumers” such as the Japanese.



He said: "It is not all about chasing flights from Beijing and Shanghai.

General managers in hotels in Tokyo will tell you that it's not the Koreans and Chinese but the Thais who are the serious spenders. Mexicans too have emerged as serious luxury consumers."

POST-LUXURY

On the post-luxury consumer, Brûlé added that mature consumers such as the Japanese have moved on to product that offer a full story of tradition and craftsmanship and that luxury conglomerates such as Kering and LVMH are eagerly looking into this.

On the brand/supplier side he warned that, with the advent of digital, there was the temptation to talk to the consumer all the time. But Brûlé said: "By doing this it completely demystifies the brand which then becomes less attractive after a while."

Airport's that the editor-in-chief commended included Helsinki for its authentic products – although he voiced concern that a global travel retailer [WDFG] was about to take the retail reins there; Narita for its "excellent landside offer"; Oslo for the uses of solid materials for the design; and Sapporo for its fresh food market offer.

[A full report on the 23rd ACI Europe Airport Trading Conference & Exhibition will appear in the May issue of *TRBusiness*.]