

Role Call | Christian Lahoude, Architect

Christian Lahoude, architect and founder of Christian Lahoude Studio, says "good retail design is when a space makes you feel something that connects with the brand."



There are few sectors of the economy that offer as wide and interesting a range of career opportunities as fashion. Role Call highlights some of the industry's most interesting jobs and the talented people who do them. For more information about fashion industry roles like this and others, visit [BoF Careers](#).

NEW YORK, United States — Christian Lahoude is an architect and the founder and creative director of Christian Lahoude Studio, a New York-based architecture and design services firm specialising in high-end retail environments. Raised in Paris, Lahoude graduated in 2001 from École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Paris-Belleville, and, in 2004, received his Masters of Design from the Harvard Graduate School of Design.

Lahoude's career began working for Jakob + MacFarlane, an internationally-acclaimed design firm based in Paris, followed by a stint with Peter Marino, the sought-after architect, known for his luxury fashion stores. Lahoude later joined Tiffany & Co. as design director, and then Gucci as lead designer in the store design department. In 2002, Lahoude founded his eponymous studio in New York, which has been responsible for conceiving the retail designs for brands such as Alexander Wang, Michael Kors and Jimmy Choo.

BoF: Please describe your current role.

In the simplest of terms, I design stores for luxury and contemporary fashion brands and retailers. I translate the client's vision into architecture. For each project, my goal is for the brand to have the most beautiful and functional shopping environment, one that is a reflection of their individual identity.

BoF: What attracted you to architecture?

My father owned a real estate agency and worked closely with architects. My mother was a seamstress. Looking back on it now, seeing how my father operated his independent business and being exposed to fashion at a young age probably had a big effect on how I planned my future.

BoF: What prompted you to launch Christian Lahoude Studio?

In 2012, while I was director of design for Tiffany & Co., I was approached by Alexander Wang to help them grow the business internationally. Previously, I worked exclusively on projects for luxury brands with a long history and storied heritage — Gucci, Chanel, Tiffany & Co. — so Alexander Wang was appealing because it was a younger, contemporary brand. Wang wasn't looking for an in-house designer, but rather someone to work on contract. It was the perfect time to start Christian Lahoude Studio, which launched with the Alexander Wang project. The success of this project opened up the opportunity for me to work with other brands, starting with Jimmy Choo. I love the challenge of working with many different brands and different identities simultaneously.

BoF: What constitutes good architecture and design? What are the important things to consider?

Proportion and balance are the most important to me. It is also very important to use materials and lighting to create a special mood for the brand. The great thing about retail is that it touches on all scales of architectural design — the spatial sequence, the furniture, the lighting and the details are all considered and integrated. Good retail design is when a space makes you feel something that connects with the brand.

BoF: What is the most exciting product or initiative you have worked on?

We are currently working on a project that is a total revamp and major rebranding for a New York-based brand, who hope to further reach the global market. We are in the conceptual phase, which for me is the most exciting part about collaborating with a brand. We also recently designed the interiors of the Aishti Foundation, a contemporary art centre and mall in Beirut. Being Lebanese-born, it meant a lot to me. For the fixtures in the mall, we created a single design element which was iterated into product display for various product categories, including clothing, shoes, bags, jewellery and cosmetics.

BoF: How is your role changing? What forces are driving this change?

A part of my role is to constantly be aware of the global market. I always keep up with the retail and fashion worlds. When I was an in-house designer, my role was more defined. As an independent architect, I need to constantly understand how to create specific and innovative retail environments for different brands, and part of that is to understand what a standard, generic retail space is.

BoF: What advice do you have for people who are interested in doing what you do? What tools should people have?

Be passionate, be curious and be ready. You need to work with the fast pace of retail. Paying attention to details is very important. Be open and willing to wear different hats. And don't forget — enjoy shopping.

This interview has been edited and condensed.

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