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**Next level retail – the experience is everything - by Faith Hope Consolo**

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As advanced technology continues to revolutionize the way we shop, retailers understand that shoppers continue to expect more. The misconception is that online shopping has declined the demand for in-store shopping; however, shopping habits have just evolved. Providing a brick-and-mortar space is essential for brand awareness and capturing the demand for the shopping experience that millennials covet, all while exceeding expectations. More significantly, the key is providing an element that is intangible creating a compelling draw. One thing is for sure; experiential retail is the future.

Check out this trio of new and innovative hybrids of museums, shopping and dining. Story at 144 10th Ave. at 19th St. is the retail outpost that reinvents itself with a new theme every couple of months designed as an Instagram studio; complete with an LED infinity mirror, dozens of hanging, color changing lights and a silver metallic Mylar photo wall. SPYSCAPE, at 928 Eight Ave. and two blocks from MoMA, is a view into a secret world featuring a café, a book shop with rare and first-edition spy books, a gift shop filled with spy gadgets, smart technology and multiple event spaces that can host private parties for 600 guests. The Spy Museum is divided into different galleries; encryption, deception, hacking, cyberwarfare, intelligence, surveillance and special ops. Sugar Factory, the international sweetshop, is opening the world's first Museum of Candy in the converted Chelsea church in the Limelight Club space at 656 Sixth Ave. which was once home to the city's techno music scene. Visitors will find 15 rooms dedicated to candy of all different types, adorned with Instagram-friendly backdrops. The museum will include the world's largest gummy bear, a unicorn made out of candy, and other decadent exhibits. The cherry on top will be a restaurant with an outdoor café and a dessert marketplace.

On Madison Ave., Apriati jewelry from Greece now at 655 Madison Ave. Celebrity stylist Sally Hershberger is partnering with Barneys for her first salon inside a retail store at 660 Madison Ave. Bottega Veneta's latest and largest Maison debuted at 740 Madison Ave. New & Lingwood from England at 793 Madison Ave.

On Fifth Ave., Tiffany & Co., at 57th St., unveiled its reimagined, one-of-a kind fourth floor with a new home and accessories collection. Kate Spade has opened the doors of its newest location in Rockefeller Plaza at 49th St. offering exclusives selected specifically for this locale. Beauty chain L'Occitane moving its flagship down the Ave. to number 555, opening this summer.

On the Upper West Side, Drybar has its newest location at 243 West 99th St. Children's clothing boutique Stoopher and Boots has expanded, on Amsterdam between 78th and 79th Sts. Barry's Bootcamp is at 72-74 West 69th St.

In Herald Square, Macy's is opening its doors to pop-ups in a new marketplace concept called The Market @ Macy's offering pods of space to brands who will promote or sell products.

In Times Square, Swarovski Times Square now sparkling at 1565 Broadway. New Style Spa for pampering at 336 W. 46th St.

In SoHo, Brett Johnson's luxury Italian-made menswear is here, 109 Mercer St. Gucci with 10,700 s/f of ground-floor block through retail space at 375 West BRd.way. Valentino VLTN debuted its men's collection with a sport-themed store at 121 Spring St. Hermès planning to open at 63 Greene St. Louis Vuitton opened a sneaker spot in advance of the worldwide launch of the Archlight sneaker, 122 Greene St. Designer Philipp Plein has his first ever pop-up concept store titled "No Mercy On Mercer St" at 40 Mercer St.

In Greenwich Village, mattress start-up Casper opened its first permanent store, where shoppers are encouraged to try out the products in their "sleep shop" at 627 Broadway.

In the East Village, Popup Florist plant and floral design company, at 63 E. Seventh St., between First Ave. and Second Ave., is a favorite of fashion clients including Barney's and Net-a-Porter.

In Hudson Yards, Dallas-based luxury brand Forty Five Ten will open its first store on the east coast, a 16,000 s/f location, March 2019.

In Nolita, India-based custom-made shirt brand for the modern gentleman Bombay Shirt Company, has its first U.S. brick-and-mortar shop, 223 Mott St.. First FitHouse exercise studio will be at 276 Bowery with more to follow.

In TriBeCa, luxury basics brand Jason Scott opening a second NYC location at 102 Franklin St.

The fusion of retail and entertainment is enticing shoppers and engaging them to linger longer and share their experiences via social media platforms (think The Webster, a well-heeled fashion boutique and Instagram-able haven, opened in December at 29 Greene St.). At the forefront of every brand's mind is how to reinvent, adapt and position themselves on the cutting edge of fashion, culture, food and art, by becoming an experiential destination. Through engaging and immersive experiences, retailers can remaining on-trend, luring shoppers in this "retailtainment" era.

Happy Shopping!

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