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It's the most magical time of the year in New York City! - by Faith Hope Consolo

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It's that time of year again, with retailers unveiling their holiday window displays and seasonal markets setting up shop, illuminating the city streets with holiday cheer. The sparkling, enchanting department store windows are a sight to behold with magical glass-encased holiday-inspired spectacles.

Barney's New York's iconic Madison Ave. window displays feature the messages "Make Change" and "Change Matters" set against a wall of pennies. Located at 660 Madison Ave., at 61st St., the window displays as well as interactive designs throughout the store are made from real coins, which will themselves become a donation to the global humanitarian organization Save the Children to support their efforts to reach at-risk children throughout the US with early education programs.

Bergdorf Goodman's 754 5th Ave., at 58th St., window displays are extra sweet this year, a dreamlike world filled with gilded treats, sugary inventions and decadent sweets. The mannequins are sporting candied and lavish designs that truly make the displays a dreamlike, Willy Wonka-inspired wonderland. Each window in the Bergdorf Goodies display is dedicated to a different kind of holiday treat; cotton candy, gingerbread, chocolate, or cake.

Bloomingdale's theme this year at 1000 Third Ave. is The Grinch Stole Christmas with the story unfolding in each window illustrating the cheerful town of Whoville and how the Grinch progresses from a loner to a loving, giving creature. Sequins, sparkles, crystals, glitter and interactive elements have transformed the windows into something even the grouchiest of Grinches would fall in love with.

Van Cleef & Arpel's windows at 744 Fifth Ave. feature their latest high jewelry collection, Les Quatres Contes de Grimm. Inspired by the legendary Brothers Grimm fairytales, each window depicts idyllic scenes and characters from one of Grimm's fables, like The Town Musicians of Bremen, The Golden Apple, The Three Feathers, and The Twelve Dancing Princesses.

Louis Vuitton's Fifth Ave. windows were decorated this year with trees, but not necessarily the ones you'd expect. Inspired by the traditional adorned tree, the holiday windows showcase iconic trees from around the world decorated with dazzling ornaments. The Joshua tree, bonsai, the cacti and palm tree are all generously decorated with ornaments that playfully portray traditions from around the world, including a piñata, a lucky cat, and a croissant, as well as references to Louis Vuitton's bags and shoes.

Be dazzled at the ever elegant Tiffany & Co., the iconic jeweler's 727 Fifth Ave. flagship's 2018 holiday windows feature a series of playful scenarios that pay homage to the legendary visual artist Gene Moore's imaginative displays from the 1960s, including a chrome articulated drawing figure first seen in Moore's windows. Each of the windows in the storied flagship store feature a cast of characters alongside iconic jewelry collections, like this the holiday hero, putting the finishing touches on a robot made of Tiffany Blue boxes. In one scene, a handmade Tiffany Blue stereo player fills the space and a white porcelain mouse, in contrasting scale, appears to be listening to a holiday mixtape on tiny headphones.

Henri Bendel's 123 year old 712 5th Ave. retailer's final holiday season, the brand's longtime fashion illustrator, Izak Zenou helped create a multidimensional New York skyline in Bendel's iconic brown and white stripes for their wish list window, paying tribute to the city where it all began. The store's mezzanine will also be wrapped with Izak's NYC cityscape scene, allowing shoppers to capture their own Henri Bendel stories. Brooklyn-based artist Shinji Murakami also designed retro gaming inspired heart and star LED sculpture panels for the windows, a theme that can also be spotted in the artist's limited-edition design collaboration x Henri Bendel.

The Cartier Mansion at 653 Fifth Ave. is more than just windows, the entire building is wrapped in a giant bow in their signature red. The shining red ribbon stretches across the entire 52nd St. and Fifth Ave. façades while festive garlands outline all of the ground floor windows.

Saks Fifth Ave. is the "Theater of Dreams" dedicated to the grandeur of the Broadway stage. The windows debuted accordingly, with a fantastical performance that included over one hundred Broadway dancers in a one-of-a-kind number live on Fifth Ave., produced exclusively for Saks Fifth Ave. by Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS, and industry-based HIV/AIDS fundraising and grant-making organization. The windows bring to life an imaginary shopper's visit to the theater, where she dreams of Saks Fifth Ave. The Fifth Ave. windows each depict a different scene from the shopper's dream, including her personal Fifth Avenue Club visit, her search for the perfect shoe, and her trip to a spa room for pampering on the beauty floor. Fifth Ave. and 50th St.

This year, Macy's famous Herald Square Flagship at 34th St. at Herald Sq. featured snow-studded windows that share a tale of friendship, family, and adventure starring Sunny the Snowpal as she and her friends work to save Christmas. Award-winning designer and Macy's national director of window presentation, Roya Sullivan, created the 2018 Christmas windows with LED backdrops and animated characters and scenery that bring energy to the holiday scenes. A custom interactive video game let guests race Sunny through snowflakes in pursuit of Santa's sleigh.

There's no better way to celebrate than by a shopping adventure at the New York holiday markets for unique items and artisanal gifts and crafts. Union Square Holiday Market, an open-air holiday market, houses more than 150 vendors lining winding aisles in the square's South Plaza, drawing thousands each year. Visitors will find an upgraded look with new sub-sections such as "Little Brooklyn" a lounge and warming station, a children's art studio with crafts and live musical guests throughout the season. Over on the Upper East Side, The Columbus Circle Holiday Market is legendary for its food offerings as well as gift shopping. New this season is its "Holiday Lounge" featuring phone charging stations, photo booths and hot beverage samples. The Grand Central Holiday Fair, located indoors in the grand historic train terminal, focuses on American-made and handmade products with locally-sourced materials. Bryant Park's Winter Village is one of the prettiest and most centrally-located, surrounded by a skating rink in the middle of Bryant Park for the most magical atmosphere.

On Madison Ave., Canadian outwear label Mackage landed at number 814. Thomas Pink at 520 Madison has undergone a major renovation, unveiling a new store in time for the holiday season.

Gemma by WP Diamonds is coming to 485 Madison Ave. featuring one-of-a-kind designer and diamond jewelry.

On the Upper West Side, Target is adding to its New York City footprint, creating another small-format tri-level store at 1865 Broadway.

In the Flatiron District, BuzzFeed took 110 Fifth Ave., for its new store Camp, a toy store with a twist, featuring children's toys and an experiential area designed for social media photo sharing that will change its theme throughout the year.

In Union Square, Filson, the American heritage outdoor lifestyle brand, has announced it will open a second New York location at 876 Broadway.

In SoHo, Perfumania is reinventing and relaunching at a pop-up space called Fragrance Destination, 542 Broadway. Athleisure brand Terez unveiled its first immersive and interactive pop-up at 158 Mercer St. Online beauty brand Glossier's second and largest permanent shop at 123 Lafayette St. offers a new layout which serves to enhance the user experience, both in the store and online; the beauty brand is implementing experiences such as a "wet area" where customers can test out products as they would in their own home. Fashion brand The Arrivals has launched its third annual holiday experiential pop-up in collaboration with tech company Dyson at 67 Greene St. for a futuristic concept store offering design-focused gifts. Home décor and furniture brand One Kings Ln. has opened its flagship at 143 Spring St. (at Wooster St.) offering a range of styles and price points with access to a breadth of a curated assortment intended to feel like a New York apartment.

In NoHo, Gwyneth Paltrow's lifestyle brand Goop has opened its first permanent store on the East Coast, Goop Lab offering ready-to-wear fashion, jewelry and the brand's beauty and wellness products at 25 Bond Street.

In The West Village, French handmade jewelry brand Atelier Paulin known for its special technique of hand shaping precious metal wire, recently debuted at 23 8th Ave..

In the Meatpacking District, Parisian-based brand Zadig & Voltaire gets a makeover, celebrating the reopening of their shop, 831 Washington St. French luxury brand Dior has popped up at 400 West 14th St.

Our winter wonderland is like no other place in the world!

Happy shopping!

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