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In store

HONG KONG on edge

Famed for its corporate towers and shopping emporia, the world's most vertical city also has a few outposts of bohemian chic.

DIVIA HARILELA reports

Sip an organic coffee in the comfy confines of SoHo boutique Forest Bird

Hong Kong prides itself as the shopping capital of Asia thanks to its countless designer boutiques and glittering mega-malls. And while these cater to the Chinese nouveau riche and ladies who lunch, it's the hip and edgy concept stores that are grabbing the attention of the seasoned global shopper. Following a similar model to boutiques such as 10 Corso Como in Milan and Colette in Paris, these lifestyle stores offer shoppers an experience that goes beyond the fashion realm, merging creative power with art, food, design and lifestyle.

DRESSCODE



Bothos

Clockwise from above: customised belts; accessories on display; the Goat lko and Ballistic Boshay bags



Sonjia

Sprawling rows of hip wares fill this trendy store (above), which includes racks of the owner's bespoke evening gowns



Forest Bird

European selections (right) paired with the best of local accessories (above), which use sustainable materials wherever possible



Located off the beaten track in the up-and-coming Star Street neighbourhood, **Sonjia** (sonjiaonline.com) is a favourite with the fashion crowd for its obscure labels and bespoke pieces. You'll find draped tees from Italian brand Improvd, vertiginous lizard skin platforms by Chrissie Morris, and uncut evil-eye diamond pendants from Lebanese jeweller Selim Mouzannar. Owner Sonjia Norman loves antique hunting and finds unique jewels which she then customises. Locals also seek her out for her bespoke evening gowns, which feature antique Japanese kimonos.

At the back of the store is a small room devoted to her other passion, interior design. Eclectic homewares and furniture are crowded into the tiny space, including hand-painted espresso cups, magnifying glasses, water decanters, candles, silver tea sets and other curios. The shop is a sensory treat in more ways than one – Norman also showcases the work of a new local artist every month.

Luigino Bottos, owner and founder of **Bothos** (bothos.com), also promotes the arts and borrows paintings from nearby galleries on Hollywood Road to decorate his walls. As such it's a hub for photographers and other creative types looking for inspiration or to show their work. Antique bird cages and leather busts etched with Japanese illustrations sit alongside vintage Louis Vuitton steamer trunks and an antique Venini chandelier (all for sale). The fashion merchandise is inspired by Silk Road and includes a travel and unisex bag collection made from goat and buffalo leather, linen and canvas for a chic yet utilitarian look. Other favourites are the distressed trainers by French brand Phillip Model, leather iPad cases and chunky sterling silver belts which can be customised with a range of skins from leather to crocodile.

At the back of the store is SETHA by Bothos, a shop-in-shop featuring handmade jewellery by a Chinese artisan who works with Bottos in a nearby atelier. Sandalwood beads mix with chains, leather tags are inlaid with silver coins and vintage diamond bracelets appeal to the ladies. You can also take home Bothos' own range of body products, which are custom made in Thailand.

Forest Bird (forestbird.com.hk) houses some of the best European fashion in Asia and is located in a chic four-storey boutique in SoHo. Specialising in brands from owner Ulrike Pohl's native Germany, the beautiful colour-coded racks feature a mix of feminine and edgy pieces from emerging designers like Perret Schaad, Miriam Ocariz and Irwin & Jordan. These are complemented by local accessories brands such as Niin jewellery, which uses sustainable materials wherever possible, and Mary Ching shoes. Pohl's favourite art works line the walls, while a gallery space features exhibitions by urban artists from around the world. Once you're done flexing your credit card, take refuge in the tranquil terrace outside or sample some of the best organic coffee in the city and macaroons at the café on the first floor. With shopping like this, who needs the European capitals? ■