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POSTER CHILD

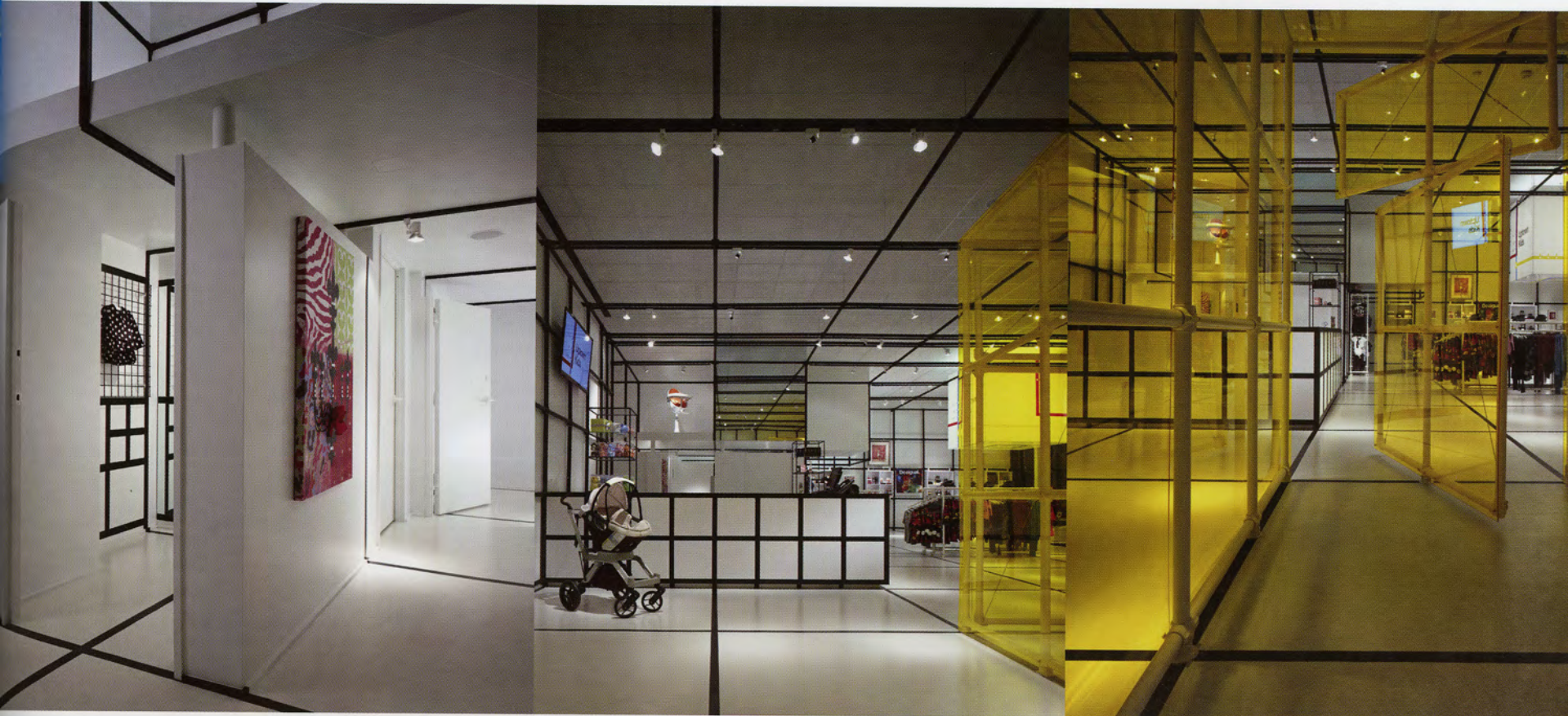
Uptown Kids - Oklahoma City, USA
Elliott + Associates Architects



For this retail commission – about 500sq m of upscale children's clothing, toys and strollers – Rand Elliott and his team examined the confines of traditional infant retailing... and threw them into the waste basket. While the enormous power of child branding can be off-putting, there's simply no avoiding the fact that the economy for anything related to tots – be it clothing, toys, educational aids, etc – is gargantuan. And not only in America; witness the domination of the 'little princes (and princesses)' phenomenon in China. Let's face it, we turn into jello in the face of market influences peddling things for our children, grandchildren, godchildren, nieces and nephews. They're just too cute.

The name for this business says it all. Uptown Kids is not your average shop for tots. The clothes are decidedly upmarket; well made and designed, and aimed squarely at customers who can afford to show their adoration of children through their purchasing power. Elliott and Co needed to provide a suitably posh environment for the goods, but that didn't mean it couldn't be fun, enticing, rewarding and (sorry) kid-friendly. Although the retail concept here was that kids' clothing could be like art, no one was talking the Louvre here. The architects wanted to create a space that was lively, colourful and visually interesting.

И В ТАЙ ЭТРАФЕ



Uptown Kids is contemporary, and plays off the store's logo, which resembles a subway map, to produce a series of 'frames' for the art that is the clothes. A slightly Mondrian-esque result presents strong primary colours and plenty of bright white surfaces. An area encased in yellow-tinted glass is devoted to play. A number of sculptural pieces by Desmond Mason are accommodated. Lighting and display suggests contemporary art gallery as much as mercantile activity. Frequent fashion shows feel right at home, and seminars for new mothers – or those expecting to be – also find a place here. Over it all rules the grid, produced by narrow black lines of framing screens, shelving, lighting fixture silhouettes and swing doors. If the goods on offer were crowded in, it might all be too much, but Uptown Kids takes to a fairly minimalist display approach, so it works.

Retail design is hard, caught perpetually between the requirement to be original enough to catch shoppers' attention, and stable enough not to overpower product or pass too quickly into outdated trends territory. Visually sharp simplicity often pulls this off best, and that's one thing, among many, that Rand Elliott knows how to do.