

MO Studio

Q & A

Chapter I. Prelude: Design Strategy and Brand Vision

Q: When you first received the commission for the Hennessy experience space in Ningbo, what was your initial vision? Did you aim for a traditional boutique or something more experimental?

A: Upon receiving the commission, we were faced with a relatively blank local context. Although Hennessy enjoys immense brand recognition, a deep, experiential understanding of Cognac culture was still missing in the local retail landscape. Our vision was not to create a conventional luxury counter, but to build a "Silent Academy." We wanted to design a space where, from the very first second a visitor steps inside, they can feel the profound heritage, the power of nature, and the craftsmanship behind the brand—embodying MO Studio's guiding principle: "Every moment is an occasion."

Q: In today's retail environment of "instant gratification," MO Studio proposed the concept of a "Silent Academy." Does this mean you deliberately abandoned typical "engagement traps" in favor of long-term brand education?

A: Precisely. If we only focused on display within 42 square meters, it would be a "warehouse." By defining it as an "academy," we turned it into an interactive process. Traffic is flat, but memory is three-dimensional. Rather than having people just take photos for social media, I care more about whether they can feel the complete logic of Cognac here—from the vine to the oak barrel, and finally to the passage of time in the cellar. Our strategy is "restraint," using layers of light and materiality to guide customers to slow down. This insistence on "slowness" is, in itself, the best endorsement of the brand's value.

Q: MO Studio's slogan is "Every moment is an occasion." In a retail project like this, what is the most profound "occasion" or "moment" you hope to offer visitors?

A: I hope to give them the "right to linger." In busy commercial centers, people are always in a rush. Through meticulously designed lighting, textures, and art, we want visitors to slow down in this space—to observe the amber hue of the liquid in a crystal glass or to contemplate the grain of the wood. If this space allows someone to have a genuine aesthetic experience with Cognac at that specific moment, then our mission as designers is fulfilled. It is not just a retail success; it is a respect for that specific "moment."

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Q: Within the consumerist context of "instant gratification" and "high sales per square foot," your "Silent Academy" strategy seems to "rebel" against fast-paced habits. Is this a risky move in terms of business logic?

A: It's less of a "rebellion" and more of a "filtration" and "interaction." If we only do display, it's a warehouse, not a space. The future of luxury retail lies in "immersion." Cognac culture involves a complex history of *terroir* and distillation; we translate this profound narrative into a sensory experience through the "Silent Academy," allowing people to "learn" the art of Cognac intuitively. This strategy requires time to settle, which carries risk, but consumers are smarter than we think—they crave intellectual pleasure during their shopping journey. A brand's patience stems from an understanding of deep loyalty; true connection is built through education and emotional resonance, far outlasting a simple transaction.

Chapter II. Breakthrough: Spatial Reshaping and Narrative Structure

Q: Given the limited scale of only 42 square meters and rigid constraints like non-removable structural columns, how did you break the traditional "subtractive" logic of small spaces to transform narrow physical boundaries into a grand narrative field?

A: In design, constraints are often catalysts for creativity. We didn't view these 42 square meters as an obstacle, but defined it as a "miniature theater" or a "vessel of woven time." We transformed the structural column into a "vine stake" and the "burning oak within a barrel," elevating it from an architectural burden to a narrative anchor. Regarding the sense of space, we did the opposite of subtraction, employing a logic of "spatial folding": using inward-tapering wall designs to create a perspective depth reminiscent of entering a wine cellar. The essence of the design isn't to "look big," but to "look deep." By distorting the perception of physical scale, we turned a narrow boundary into a psychologically vast theater, allowing the space to breathe and tell the epic story of the brand's heritage.

Q: As the column transitions from an architectural obstacle to the "protagonist" of the space, what role does it play in the actual experience? How does it stitch abstract brand philosophies like *terroir* and time into this 42-square-meter "miniature theater"?

A: It is the "guardian" of the space and a "testament" to the brand. Positioned at the center of gravity, it imperatively guides the flow of movement, allowing visitors to unconsciously read the brand's history as they walk around it. It silently supports the architecture while loudly proclaiming

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the philosophy of *Terroir*—that Cognac must be rooted in the earth and follow the rhythms of nature. It is more than a pillar; it is the core thread in this spatial theater that sews "time" and "space" together, giving the brand narrative physical weight. It allows visitors to perceive the depth of growth and support within a few square inches.

Q: In contemporary architecture, designers often try to hide or eliminate structural flaws. You chose to "embrace" that non-removable column. How do you ensure this figurative translation doesn't feel too literal, but finds a balance between "cold geometry" and "storytelling"?

A: Attempting to hide a pillar is essentially an escape from architectural reality. We refused simple "visual hiding" and instead chose "definitional reshaping," turning it into a narrative pivot—a form of "using the opponent's strength." It is no longer an obstacle but a "narrative anchor" connecting the physical environment to the brand spirit. We don't seek superficial imitation; we use this psychological suggestion so that while visitors perceive the structure, they instantaneously touch the most primitive starting point of Cognac craftsmanship.

Q: How do you handle the conflict between "narrative integrity" and "commercial efficiency" in a boisterous retail environment? How do you ensure the "internal-external contrast" isn't jarring and ultimately convince the client?

A: This contrast is a necessary psychological prelude—the start of the narrative. We use the marble facade as a "filter," using changes in light and texture to switch the visitor from "consumer" to "explorer." As for efficiency, I believe it's a pseudo-proposition: in high-end spaces, efficiency depends more on "length of stay" and "emotional conversion" than the number of shelves. Through an "invisible" strategy, we used custom furniture to integrate storage, treating precious "white space" as the customer's "right to breathe." I emphasized to the brand the high premium brought by narrative—a "theater" that allows people to stay, touch, and feel values builds much higher brand loyalty than a warehouse piled with goods.

Chapter III. Resonance: Material Aesthetics and Sensory Experience

Q: In this Hennessy space, can time be touched? Can nature be heard? How did you engrave the marks of time and nature into every inch of the space?

A: This is the core of our "Silent Academy" strategy: letting the materials become the language.

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- **Stone Fissures:** Recreating the memory of chalky soil, telling the story of vines breaking through the earth, giving time a tactile quality.
- **Interplay of Light and Shadow:** Simulating the "breathing" of liquid aging in oak barrels, giving the atmosphere "temperature."
- **Resin Color and Texture:** The custom resin walls gradient from metallic copper to smoky amber, as if capturing countless sunrises and sunsets in the Cognac region. This visualizes the aroma of the spirit, turning abstract flavor into a perceptible spatial poem.

Q: The lighting design creates an intensity akin to "roaring flames." Does it serve a role beyond simple illumination?

A: Lighting here is an "atmospheric chisel" rather than mere illumination. We meticulously simulated the warm, amber shadows of Cognac distillation, allowing light to refract through the resin textures to visualize the aromatic rhythm of aging spirits. Through the sharp transition from the bright mall environment, this lighting design creates a "psychological spacetime," stripping away the noise and placing the visitor in a ceremonial state enveloped by nature and time.

Q: When customers stop in a noisy mall, how does the Hennessy store use that first impression of tranquility and mystery to bring them into a world of natural power?

A: We utilize the strong contrast between the mall's bright environment and the store's deep, warm tones to create a psychological shielding effect on the facade. This dramatic shift in light instantly transforms a "hurried consumer" into an "immersive explorer." From the first glance, they feel an escape from the clamor, returning to an orderly sense of time governed by nature.

Q: You mention "black pepper, smoke, and honey"—flavors of Cognac—but architecture is a visual and tactile art. How do you "design scent" through material means?

A: This is "Synesthesia" design. We are no longer just drawing; we are blending the "aroma of matter." When your eyes glide over amber resin and your hands touch warm oak, the brain involuntarily triggers a physiological association with the richness of aged Cognac. It's like a cinematic montage—using material contrast and light to create psychological suggestions. Contemporary retail is moving from "visual consumption" to "ultra-sensory experience." Vision tires easily, but the touch of materials and the atmosphere of light hit emotional memory directly.

Q: What narrative roles do the custom thermoformed resin and dark oak play in the space?

A: Materials are the codes of the brand's history. The **custom resin panels** simulate the flow of liquid under light, symbolizing the passage of time across countless sunrises and sunsets. The **dark oak veneers** provide a warm sense of envelopment, metaphorically placing the visitor inside a smoky oak barrel or a cellar. This combination reinforces the authentic immersion of

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"*Terroir*" and the "distillation process," allowing visitors to read Hennessy's profound heritage through their senses without needing a single word.

Chapter IV. Sedimentation: Cultural Intertextuality and Commercial Reflection

Q: How does this project maintain French elegance while embracing "Oriental warmth" through specific details like the metal floor inlays?

A: This balance stems from a shared respect for "natural laws." We embedded **24 metal strips** in the floor. Morphologically, they resemble the hands of an ancient clock pointing to the vintage spirits on display, symbolizing the scales of time. Culturally, they align with the Chinese "**24 Solar Terms**," symbolizing that every drop of spirit carries the essence of natural rhythms and the four seasons. This design avoids a pile-up of symbols, achieving deep cultural resonance through the shared logic of "following nature's timing."

Q: How did you ensure that the connection between the "24 Solar Terms" and Cognac culture was logically sound and not just a superficial "cultural collage"?

A: The core of cross-cultural design is finding the underlying "commonalities." Whether it's the aging of Cognac in France or the 24 Solar Terms in China, both are essentially about the "rhythm of man and nature." Cognac aging depends deeply on climate and time, just as the Solar Terms are precise captures of natural laws. This dialogue based on shared values allowed French precision and Eastern philosophical perception to find a perfect balance. Cultural differences cease to be obstacles and instead transform into a deep, transcultural resonance.

Q: You insisted on using art pieces like Karen Swami ceramics and LIAIGRE bronzes, which are "expensive and fragile" for retail. Why?

A: These are not mere ornaments; they are "sensory leads" and "translators." In retail, I want to convey an aesthetic rather than just a sale. **Karen Swami's** cracked ceramics speak to the tension of time; **LIAIGRE's** bronze vases convey the value of refinement and patience; **Cometabolism Studio's** resin vases show a fusion of symbols, reflecting the brand's inclusivity. They bridge the gap between a "cold bottle" and a "cultural luxury," making abstract brand stories tangible.

Q: Why insist on a "handcrafted trial-and-error" process in an era of industrial mass production?

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A: The most grueling part was the resin wall texture. To recreate the flow of Cognac, we went through countless failed samples with craftsmen. Industrial production is efficient, but its precision is cold. We insist on this "irrational" handcrafted process because machines cannot replicate the subtle, time-worn gradients of texture. This is a "resonance of aesthetics." When a visitor touches a hand-polished panel, they feel the warmth of the hands behind it. This "respect through craftsmanship" is a brand asset that cannot be replaced by high-tech marketing.

Q: As a designer, how do you balance your personal aesthetic with cross-disciplinary collaboration?

A: Design is not a solo dance; it's a collective symphony based on trust. I don't seek "dictatorial" execution but a heart-to-heart interpretation. Just as a Master Blender fuzes hundreds of "eaux-de-vie" into a legendary Cognac, the birth of a space is a confluence of many hands. In the repeated sampling of resin, we were "giving life to matter" together. This spirit of collaboration is a spatial enactment of Hennessy's core value of *Savoir-Faire*.

Q: How do you build a sense of "timelessness" in a commercial environment destined for rapid iteration?

A: I don't anti-visualize beauty, but I anti-"designing for the photo." When design is stripped of texture and scale, it loses its soul. I care about the "non-visual experience"—the tactile feedback of resin or the refraction of light on a glass. Regarding commercial lifespan, I believe design's value lies in whether it changes a visitor's experience in a single moment. I don't pursue the illusion of being "forever new"; I pursue "aging gracefully." Natural stone, wood, and metal develop a "patina" over time, which aligns perfectly with Hennessy's "the older, the better" philosophy. If a visitor puts down their phone to feel the materials for an extra five minutes, the space is "eternal" in spirit.

Q: If we stripped away all the brand logos, would people still recognize this as a "Hennessy" space?

A: Absolutely. If a brand space relies on a logo to sustain its narrative, it has failed. We have translated the brand DNA into architectural language—the vine-stake pillar, the amber light, the metallic rhythms of time. In this context, the space itself is the vessel for Hennessy, and the logo is merely the signature on the vessel. When visitors can sense the brand's soul from the very air and texture of the room, that silent narrative is far more powerful than any visual symbol.