



The Tower Salon at Fidenza Village.

RETAIL

# The Reinvention Of Value Retail's Fidenza Village

● The lockdown triggered the reinvention of Value Retail's Fidenza Village luxury outlet to meet the demands of increasingly more sophisticated customers who shop closer to home.

BY LUISA ZARGANI

**MILAN** – “The [hospitality] Apartment at Fidenza Village is one way to escape the cabin fever we are all feeling,” according to Desirée Bollier, chair and chief merchant officer of Value Retail, which operates the Italian luxury outlet.

Fidenza Village, one of the 11 Villages of “The Bicester Village Shopping Collection” by Value Retail, has been going through a sort of “reinvention” during the lockdown, all to better service its customers, Bollier explained.

“There is one thing about Value Retail – our relentless dissatisfaction. It’s constant, it’s in our DNA, and when COVID-19 hit us, we thought, there are things we cannot do but there are certainly things we can do,” Bollier said. “And in the can do, how do we reinvent ourselves during the lockdown?”

Bollier also underscored the importance of further developing the relations and partnerships with the brands, working to understand their needs. “We waived all charges, there were no discussions or argumentations, they paid no rents. That is the normal thing to do, because our philosophy is if we are partners in good times, we are partners in bad times, and we reinforced the partnerships with our brands, building a very strong trust,” she said.

It was also key to continue to engage

with customers, hence the development of virtual shopping. This allowed Fidenza Village, located about an hour away from Milan, to attract “a very strong pool of luxury consumers who would generally be traveling around the world but who were obliged to stay home.” She said that with “top client engagement,” the profile of Fidenza Village was raised in the eyes of those customers, attracting new brands that wanted to open either pop-ups or hold private sales and virtual events. Fidenza Village changed its website and “lured sophisticated luxury consumers now shopping within their radius and their backyard.”

“The teams, I think, have never worked so hard since the lockdown – you would think that a physical destination would be on a sleeping mode but not at all. The staff was allowed to work and engaged with a whole new group of customers that would have perhaps not known Fidenza,”

Bollier contended.

Over the past 12 months, a number of brands – ranging from Giuseppe Zanotti, Bally, Ermanno Scervino and Kenzo to Karl Lagerfeld and Eleventy – opened units at Fidenza Village, which counts around 120 stores. Two restaurants also set up shop: Taglière, with a Ruinart Champagne selection, and Signorvino.

Last year, Value Retail renovated the Apartment in Ingolstadt Village and it was only “obvious” to work on Fidenza’s now. Bollier tapped designer David Thomas – in the past, both had worked together at Ralph Lauren for years.

“Storytelling is part of our DNA and I felt very comfortable to have David as my ally,” Bollier said. Each of the Apartments at the Villages “must have its own personality, the one in Bicester [north of London] is international yet quintessentially British.” For Fidenza, Bollier’s brief was: “Imagine [Luchino] Visconti’s [1963 film] ‘The Leopard’ and this is how I work. I love the art and the art scene and I get inspired by it. This is the apartment of an eclectic woman who loves collecting art, she travels and brings her collections home and is an avid book reader.”

“We do know each other well, we worked together for a long time and we love creating a story,” concurred Thomas.

Bollier offered him “a movie brief, and I get to take that brief and write a feature length film. I knew the Fidenza Village well; it’s quite dramatic, and it has this wonderful cinematic reference in terms



The Library at the Fidenza Village Apartment.

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DESIRÉE BOLLIER, VALUE RETAIL

of architecture. I was thinking of this heroine traveling from Fidenza and then returning, finding a space to escape so I worked to take that cinematic drama from Visconti to the architecture of the village and make it into something comfortable and more intimate. Drama is great, but if it’s not functional, it doesn’t work well and the level of comfort is super important to Desirée and to me and I like to think of the client experience.”

He described the design of the Apartment as a “crescendo,” walking into a garden and “finishing on a high note.”

The Vestibule has teal blue doorways, with bold herringbone curtains in tones of cream, ochre and rust and a one-of-a-kind mirror by sculptor Frédéric Liger, hand-crafted in Paris.

The key design element is the Pietro Fornasetti fish wallpaper, created in the mid 1950s from his whimsical fish designs. The gilt framed colorful drawings complete the Aquarium theme.

The library is defined by rich teal blue lacquer, and there is a collection of paintings, lithographs, pen and ink drawings and photography. Key pieces include a vintage Carlo Scarpa deep blue lacquer table from the mid ‘80s. The table was sourced in Milan, as were most pieces in this room, including the vintage mid-century Italian chairs covered in nubby pink bouclé and the large ottoman in its original sculpted velvet fabric. At the same time, there is a pendant light from Ochre made by hand in London, and leopard carpets are a vintage print from Paris designer Madeleine Castaing.

In the Grand Salon, there are two ellipse-shaped sofas covered in chocolate brown velvet and vintage ‘50s chairs upholstered in fabrics from Etro Home. A large color photograph is a limited-edition print from Paris-based photographer Elna Kechicheva.

The Tower Salon is characterized by a panoramic mural created and executed by Patrizia Volpi, a locally based artist. The sofa was especially designed to fit the room’s octagonal shape and the vintage chairs were found in Milan and covered in fabrics from Rubelli. The sheer linen curtains are made from Armani Home fabrics and the octagonal shaped rug was designed for the room and woven by Limited Edition Belgium. Key pieces include the unusual bronze cocktail table and the two vintage ‘60s bamboo patterned brass standing lamps designed by Maison Jansen. The large-scale Murano chandelier was hand crafted for the room.

There are sliding walls that allow for flexibility for mini events and intimate gatherings, Bollier said.

The Apartment must be reserved in advance and also offers the service of personal shoppers.

Bollier said she has seen a change in behavior in the way people shop. “They want investment pieces and their time needs to be well spent in a super environment, and they want a product that must be stupendous; they are not putting up with mediocrity. There’s a craving to be out, for human touch and community. The feeling is I survived a war, I want to live with better quality.”