

Commune

Design Firm Commune Collaborates with Oliver Peoples

By Kelly Carson



Visionaries: Larry Leight, left, founder and creative director of Oliver Peoples, pictured with Commune designer Roman Alonso, right, at the new Oliver Peoples store in Malibu.

The November 2007 unveiling of the new Oliver Peoples boutique at Malibu Country Mart marked the company's 20th anniversary as a world leader in optical and sunglass design, and showed off the shop's new modern look for the future. The finished product is a sleek white hangar of functional geometry that is streamlined to a tee. "It's kind of like a spaceship; it's so automatic and rare," says Larry Leight, founder and visionary of Oliver Peoples, of the new home for his luxury eyewear collection.

The creative group that collaborated with Leight to give Oliver Peoples its innovative upgrade is Commune, a 5-year-old Los Angeles-based design firm, operated by partners Roman Alonso, Pamela Shamshiri, Ramin Shamshiri and Steven Johanknecht, whose focus is enhancing image through design. Commune has fast become Los Angeles' "big fix" for commercial, residential and identity design and redesign. They are responsible for such store designs as Kiki de Montparnasse in New York and L.A., and Juicy Couture worldwide. They receive high acclaim for their ultra-chic aesthetic and "mission accomplished" work ethic. "We don't see a project as a problem," says Alonso, who led the Oliver Peoples venture. "We don't see a problem as a problem. We see a problem as a challenge."

Staying true to the original concept of Oliver Peoples flagship store on Sunset Boulevard in West Hollywood and creating something up-to-date and futuristic for the company was Commune's task at hand. One of the elements that Leight thought worked so perfectly in the original store was its use of *light*. "Oliver Peoples," says Alonso, "is a California brand — so it's all about light. We would never put in a dark mahogany room. You could display eyewear beautifully in a room that's mahogany and pin-spotted in glass cases. That could be gorgeous, but it wouldn't be California and it

wouldn't be Oliver Peoples. Also, opening this prototype in Malibu, it made sense to make light be part of the space somehow, not only with natural light, but to really illuminate the product properly."

Unique to Oliver Peoples Malibu is its spacious 360-degree showroom made possible by its original eight-sided cement foundation. The circular bend allows plenty of room for customers to "roam easy" and gives a nostalgic vibe to the store. "One of the things that made it easy for people to buy and shop [on Sunset]," says Leight, "was the music and the comfort of being able to walk into the store and freely try on frames. The fact that he [Alonso] kept that same feature is what really complements our [brand]." The music that has been an integral part of the Oliver Peoples retail experience is now for sale right alongside the eyewear. Bookshelves and iPod stations have been added to accommodate the customer who wants to groove while skimming shades or later when chilling at home.

As long as they've been a company, Oliver Peoples has projected a very straightforward image — simple, stylish, quality eyewear. Over the years, Leight's classic designs have been adorned by some of the most progressive and recognizable tastemakers in fashion, music and film. That same taste and culture has been reproduced at Oliver Peoples Malibu. "The best compliment," says Alonso, "has been from someone who felt it was really 'on brand' — meaning that the merchandise looked really good, that it really fit the place. Objectively, that's award winning to me."

About his own design, "I think it elevates things a little bit; it makes [Malibu Country Mart] less of a strip mall."

Oliver Peoples Malibu
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