

07 Field Notes

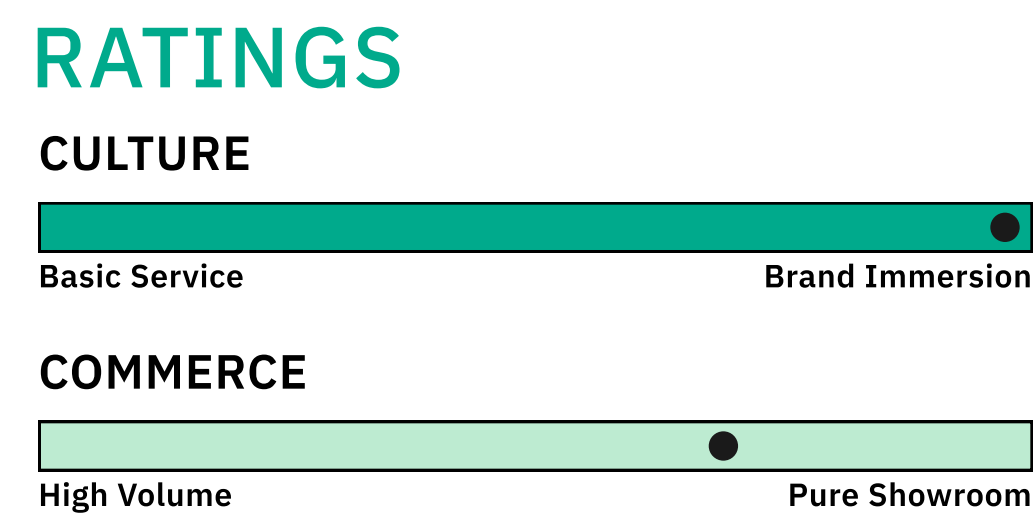
from **Future Commerce⁺**



LOCATION: Madison Ave., NYC
VISIT DATE: Summer 2025
FORMAT: Flagship
ADJACENT STORES: Baccarat, Moncler, Celine, Peter Millar, Tod's, Roger Vivier, IWC Schaffhausen
COMPETITORS: ST Dupont, Pelikan, Rolex, Cartier, Tag Heuer, Smythson, Mulberry, Dunhill, Berluti, Tumi
WEBSITE: www.montblanc.com
SOCIAL: IG: @montblanc

About the Brand: In 1906, German technician August Eberstein teamed up with Hamburg entrepreneurs Alfred Nehemias and Claus Johannes Voss to create a line of writing instruments with non-leaking technology. Today, Montblanc's artisans combine traditional craftsmanship, precision, and modern production techniques to create aspirational collections.

Store Summary: Montblanc has a revered legacy that supports its universe of luxurious products, services, and rich storytelling. While the overall analog sentiment has an elegant approachability that caters to affluent customers, it also leaves the door open for new, curious customers who want to learn more about the brand and its products. The brand (and product price points) can be very intimidating, but the store environment and salespeople were extremely gracious and customer-friendly.



STORE BASICS

STORE DESIGN & NAVIGATION

The flagship featured gorgeous and very thoughtful merchandising—a mix of playful and elegant, opulent yet still welcoming. This was clearly a "shoppable showroom" focused on immersing the customer in the Montblanc story.

Minimal navigation was required through the space. There was a subtle separation among writing instruments, watches, and leather goods, while fragrances and sunglasses were stationed toward the rear of the store. All writing instruments and watches were in cases, except for a dedicated testing area called the "Nib Bar."

There was a small "lounge" toward the back of the store, with two comfortable chairs and a digital display featuring product imagery and brand storytelling.



AESTHETICS

Leather goods were a fixture in window displays. This was a wise choice as it illustrates the breadth and depth of the assortment beyond writing instruments.

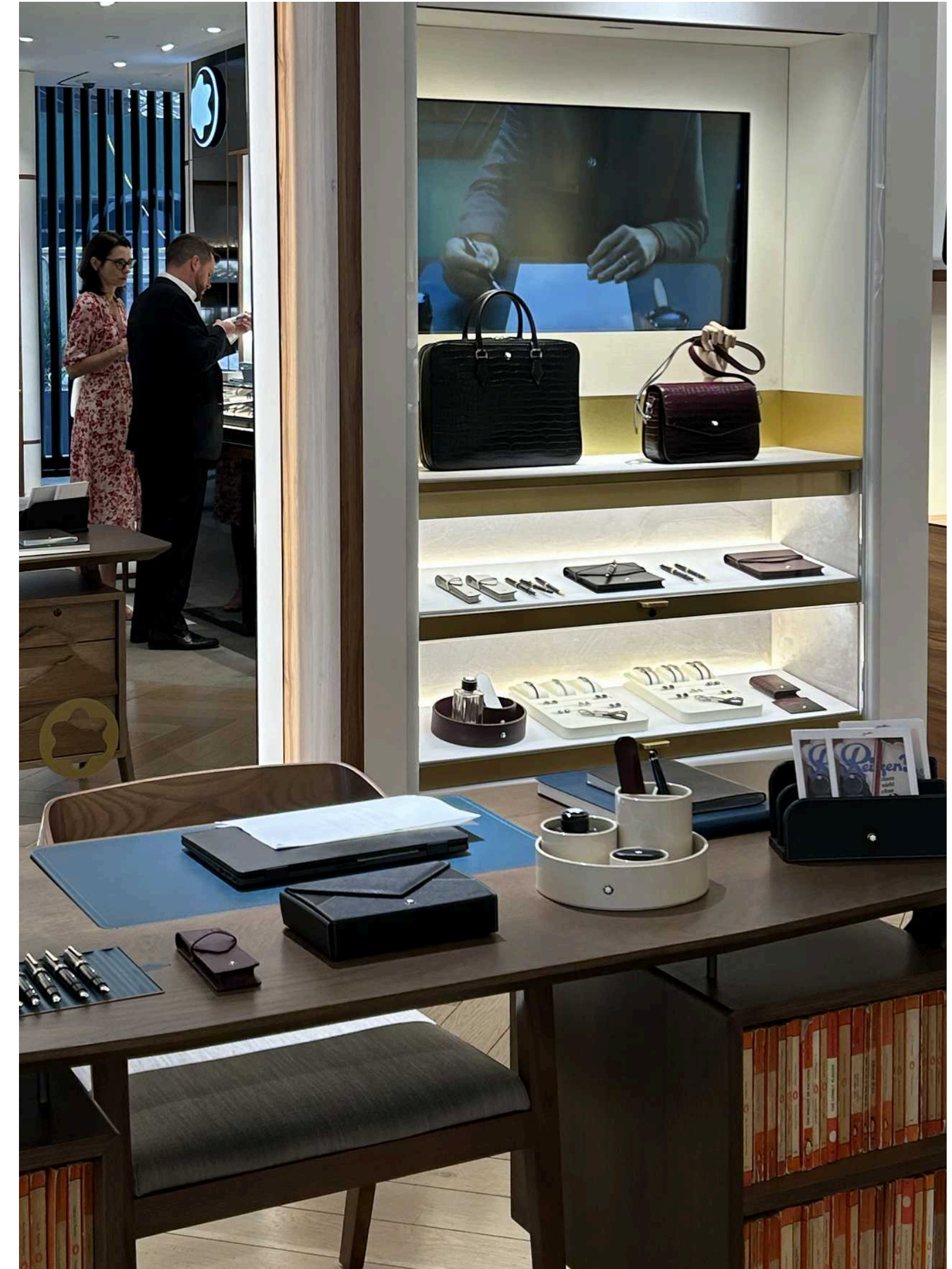
There was no detectable scent in the store, even near the fragrance area. When tested, scents subsided quickly and did not disrupt the store experience.

Although music was playing in the space, it was very subtle and hard to identify.

CUSTOMER DATA CAPTURE, FOLLOW-UP, LOYALTY/REWARDS PROGRAM

There was a very subtle "data capture" moment with a Montblanc associate offering his card and availability so he could be contacted at any time. In turn, I offered my card and received a standard, but lovely and engaging "thank you" email that included a rich storytelling video.

The brand sent emails daily, sometimes twice daily. They were all on-brand and beautiful, but the outreach was excessive for such a high-luxury brand. I opted out of receiving email communications as a result.



EXPERIENTIAL 'WOWs'

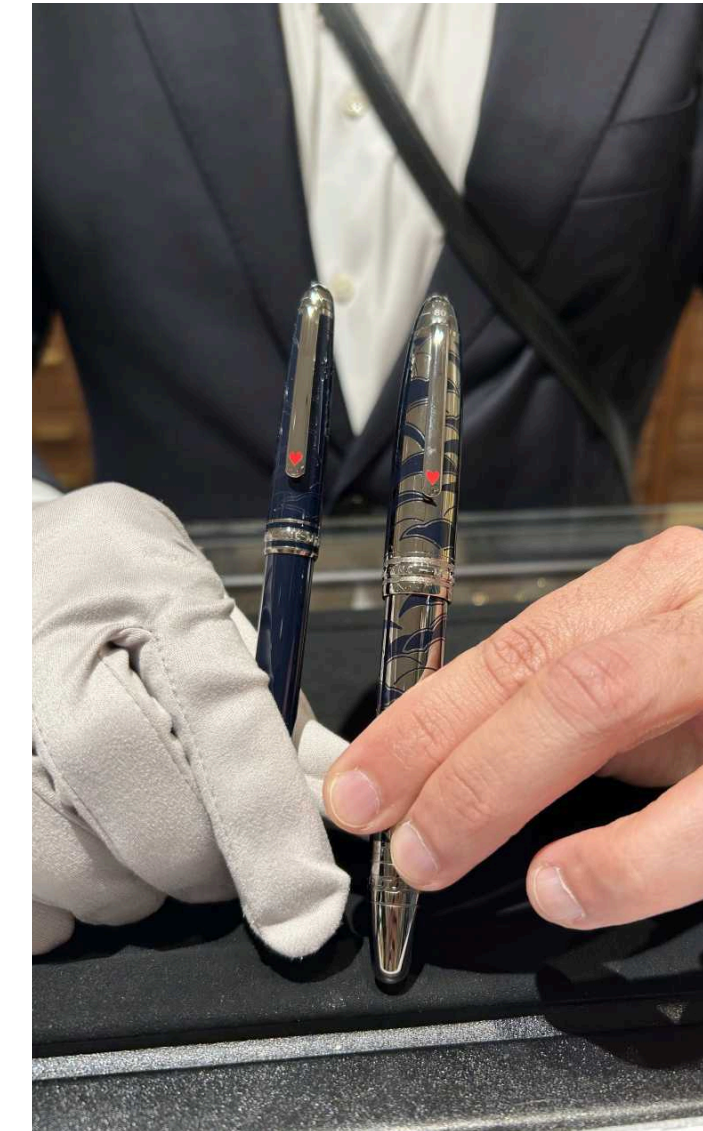
The most surprising “wow” was how inviting, approachable, and welcoming the salespeople were! They weren't judgmental or pretentious in any way. In fact, quite the opposite; they were eager to demonstrate the products and tell the Montblanc story.

Shortly after entering the store, I was greeted by an associate who asked my name and offered me a beverage, which was brought in a small bottle with a separate glass and a branded, embossed napkin. He then led me to the Nib Bar, an extremely engaging "wheel" that lets customers test all nibs and ink colors. As soon as I began engaging with the Nib Bar, he enthusiastically explained the differences of each option in a very conversational way.

All customers are offered quaint postcards to test the pens (even write letters!) and drop them in a charming mailbox, after which Montblanc will mail these notes and letters anywhere in the world.

Salespeople encouraged shoppers to photograph the store—largely the storytelling displays and the Nib Bar—and share the experience on social media. However, customers were politely asked not to photograph special product launches or exclusive collections for confidentiality reasons.

Limited-edition writing instrument collections typically include fewer than 10 pieces, with prices reaching up to \$180K each. These aren't just writing implements to collectors; they're art pieces. After all, many are made with precious metals, including sterling silver and gold.



EXPERIENTIAL NOTABLES

STORYTELLING

The brand's history and legacy were beautifully explained throughout the store through various merchandising elements, such as digital screens, engaging signage, charming shelf accents, and thoughtful displays.

Salespeople powerfully communicated the brand heritage and promise. They not only knew the intricate details of all products but also told the brand story with genuine enthusiasm and admiration.

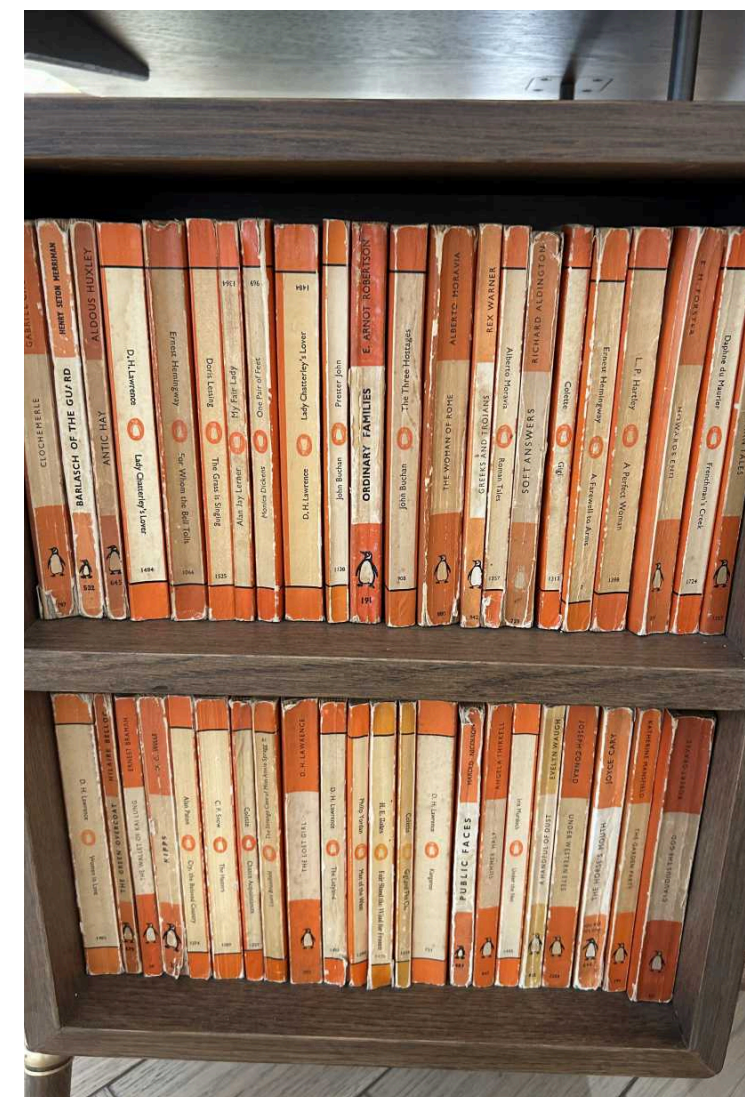
Core collections are updated two to three times a year, featuring specific artisans, while new limited-edition collections, such as Jimi Hendrix, Ferrari, and The Great Gatsby, are released annually. "Muses" collections featuring iconic females like Marilyn Monroe launch every two years. Salespeople knew these release cadences and avidly communicated the lore behind each.

MERCHANDISE ASSORTMENT

Most of the store's assortment focused on writing instruments (not referred to as "pens") and inks, ranging from "basic/core" collections to extremely limited collections and artisan pieces, all made in Germany.

The average classic pen costs approximately \$480, while the "entry" pen collection is available only online, starting at approximately \$320.

Since some collections have fewer than 20 pieces so they are often already sold out before launching to the public.



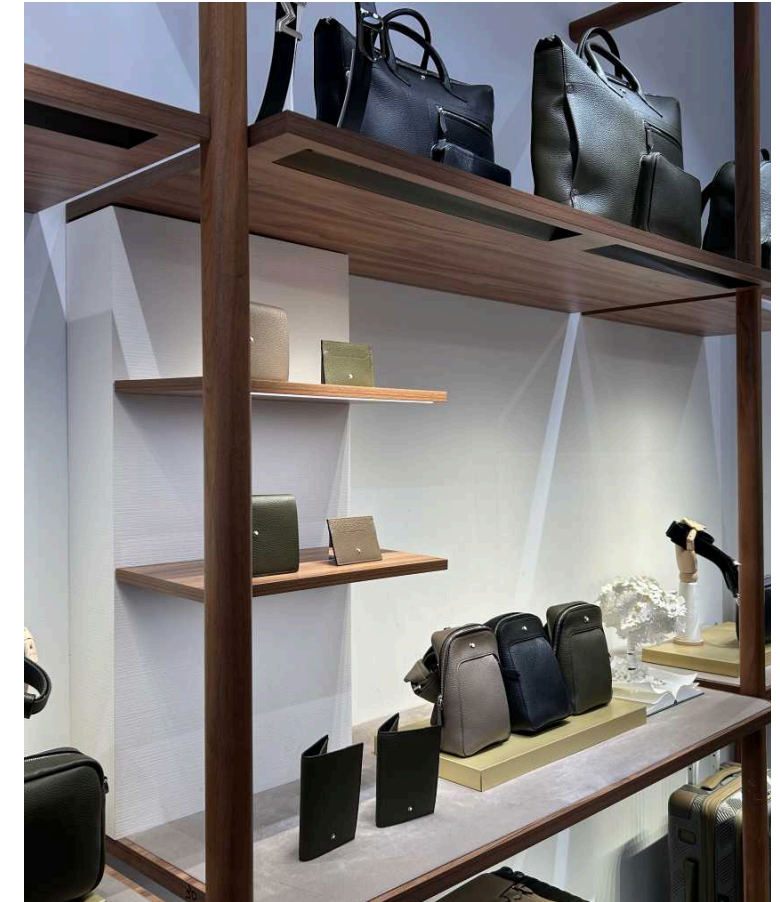
According to a salesperson, 60% of sales are self-purchases, while approximately 40% are purchased as gifts. The JFK pen is one of the brand's most popular gifts.

- The remainder of the store's product selection was watches, leather goods, and small fragrance and sunglasses collections.
- There was a wide assortment of watches, predominantly men's, and priced at \$2,800+.
- The fragrance collection ranged in price from \$99 to \$150, which is surprisingly affordable for such a luxurious brand and could be an entry-level category for new customers. The top scent, Legend, has a very loyal fanbase.
- Sunglasses styles vary by market, depending on local preferences and trends.
- All luggage is manufactured in Japan with German wheels and assembled in Italy.

HUMAN INTERACTIONS

The level of human engagement and service in this store was impeccable. Whether a shopper was new to Montblanc or a longtime, artisanal collector, the focus was on cultivating personal relationships and catering to every customer.

Salespeople were incredibly courteous, gracious, and non-judgmental. They were authentic and enthusiastic about assisting customers, inviting them to interact with the brand and its products. However, they always followed the customers' lead, tailoring their approach to whether folks were lightly browsing or seeking to purchase a specific product.



If an existing customer entered the store, salespeople typically knew why they had returned, often to pick up an engraved item or a pre-ordered gift.

TECHNOLOGY ELEMENTS

Unobstructive QR codes were featured throughout the store, connecting visitors to various Montblanc writing classes, whether or not a purchase was being made.

Three very subtle screens were stationed near the entry, in the leather goods section, and in the small lounge area. These tech elements didn't disrupt the flow or overall experience in any way. Instead, they incorporated rotating brand storytelling elements that enriched the experience.

The POS was not overly technical with standard tap-to-pay features.



THE SENSES MATRIX

SIGHT

- Warm lighting and dark wood made the space feel modern without being cold.
- The store's navigation was seamless, creating a smooth flow between product lines and collections.
- The store incorporated refined vintage touches—like a curated shelf of classic books—that referenced the brand's heritage.

SOUND

- Subtle jazz enhanced the space without overwhelming it.

TOUCH

- Customers were encouraged to interact with and test the products to truly appreciate the brand's heritage and craft.
- The Nib Bar area was the centerpiece of this experience, allowing customers to try and feel the various pen nibs and ink colors.
- The high-touch service and thoughtful elements, such as the lounge area, added to the store's tactile nature, guiding visitors through the Montblanc brand and product story.

PALATE

- There was no detectable scent in the store, even in the fragrance section. This store was clearly focused on sight and touch.

SIXTH SENSE

- With a brand as rich as Montblanc, technology can easily distract consumers from the magic. The sparing use of technology was clearly an intentional decision.
- Any technology elements (QR codes and digital screens) were used to augment the storytelling and connect consumers to the brand's digital content.

FIELD TEST

Ask these questions to benchmark key learnings against your branded environments

1

How can you incorporate easter eggs from your brand history throughout a store, whether through "props," signage, or VM storytelling?

2

Do your products require customer interaction, testing, or customization to help them make the best decision? What in-store vignettes and service moments can support this depth of engagement?

3

Is the human element critical to the overall experience? How are salespeople meant to engage with customers to further your brand story?

About the Analyst: Kate Fannin is a strategic Retail Realist passionate about customer-first, immersive experiences that engage shoppers (or don't!). With her strong focus on ROE (Return on Experience) and "connecting the dots" between customers and brands, she reinforces the mantra "People Buy Things. They Pay for Experiences." Kate has 18+ years of expertise in Marketing, Retail, and Consumer Behavior at The Estee Lauder Company, Nordstrom, Neiman Marcus, and Gap.

