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Toronto-based interior design firm Burdiflek applies a new design language at The Hyundai Seoul department store in the heart of the South Korean capital



MOTHER NATURE

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The department store displays a mix of products including a selection of contemporary brands



Corrugated metal wall panels and dark marble give the interior a club-like edge



In his 1883 novel *Au Bonheur des Dames*, Émile Zola depicts the life of workers in one of Paris's glittering new department stores, the first shops to place all the goods of the world under one roof. "It was," Zola wrote, "the cathedral of modern commerce, light but strong, the very thing for a nation of customers." For the growing bourgeoisie, few things felt so fabulous.

A century and a half later, things have changed. Department stores across Europe — including for a time Paris's legendary *La Samaritaine* — have shuttered. Many that remain have been converted to drab chains. Some of the luckiest have become tourist traps visited by only the most gauche of travellers. And the shopping mall, the department store's less rarefied sibling, has become synonymous with bland fit-outs and empty units.

Leave it to Seoul to revivify this ailing typology. From Myeong-dong to Cheongdam-dong, the South Korean capital is a many-layered sundae of retail districts. And The Hyundai Seoul, in the Yeouido-dong political neighbourhood, is the cherry on top. Opened last year, the complex includes

over 600 brands spread over 89,100sq m and 15 floors, as well as gardens, restaurants, a cultural centre and an art gallery. Housed within the Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners-designed Parc 1 development, it bills itself as one of the world's first eco-conscious department stores, melding nature with shopping.

Hyundai commissioned the award-winning interiors studio Burdifilek to design several floors of the department store. Based in Toronto, Burdifilek is led by its two-half namesakes, Diego Burdi and Paul Filek. Throughout almost thirty years of existence it has brought sleek, surprising and specialised interiors to a range of luxury clients, locally and internationally. In 2015, Burdifilek worked to create a distraction-free design strategy for the Galleria department store in Seoul. Its work in The Hyundai Seoul builds on this presence in the city.

Burdifilek's design begins in the white-hued atrium. A skylight brings natural light in, shining on a belt of trees chosen to evoke the Korean countryside. Curvaceous forms and a 12m tall waterfall sculpture complete ☺

The interior design takes its inspiration
from Seoul's surrounding countryside



The Hyundai Seoul opened last year and houses
over 600 brands spread over 15 floors



**"Our solution was inspired by Seoul's surrounding nature.
We chose to bring the outside in and create something
unexpected that plays with scale"**

this organic theme, which aims to instil a Zen-like tranquillity into visitors. "Our solution," says Burdi, "was inspired by Seoul's surrounding nature. We chose to bring the outside in and create something unexpected that plays with scale". Abundant seating and open space allow the public to rest and linger, rather than forcing them straight into the shops. "The building," Burdi continues, "became softer and more conducive to those memorable experiences."

Above the atrium, Burdifilek created two shopping floors. They are remarkably different, though both share the atrium's ecological focus, with abundant use of natural materials, and both contain numerous sculptural units to foster a sense of discovery. The second floor, devoted to women's fashion, has a soft palette of greys and pink. This is a place of rounded

sculptural units, angled feather-light hanging displays and soft lighting. Stone and metallic elements give the whole a warm texture.

On the floor above, which displays advanced contemporary brands, the approach is colder and cooler. There are squares and lines instead of spheres and curves. Corrugated metal wall panels, dark marbled walls and rigid ultramarine hanging displays give the floor a spiky, club-like edge. "Our philosophy," says Burdi, "was to create environments on each floor that would speak to a specific demographic. We also strived to create some commonality through sculptural elements that will resonate with the guests and give a physical experience of wondering and exploring." Burdifilek's work at The Hyundai Seoul might not save the department store the world over. But it shows that there is life in them yet. ■