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## A jewel of a retail boutique



**Top:** Curved entrance displays and showcases slanted enticingly draw the viewer into Montreal's Orly jewellery store for a closer look. **Above:** The curving lines of the rear area evoke a gentle wave washing up on shore. **Below:** A single bank of showcases, with rear niches at regular intervals from front to back, sets up a rhythm that slows and soothes the journey through the store.



### Orly Jewellery Store, Montreal Dimitri Smolens Design, Montreal

Despite the constraints of a diminutive, awkwardly shaped site, Dimitri Smolens and his colleagues have managed to create a gallery-esque jewellery store that compels unhurried investigation.

First among equals in a collective known as Le Groupe Design, Smolens collaborated with colleagues Hervé Legrand and Pascal Marthet for the store's design. Smolens, who holds degrees from the Leonardo da Vinci Fine Arts Institute in Cairo and the Applied Arts Institute of Montreal, has specialized in commercial design since 1972 and has won numerous awards for his work.

Hervé Legrand trained and began his career in his native France; he helped create EuroDisney. He is a founding member of the Quebec Interior Designers' Society and he specializes in exhibition-booth design.

Pascal Marthet is also a native of France, and has won acclaim for his furniture and lighting designs. In addition to his product-design work, Marthet teaches interior design at College Marie-Victorin in Montreal.

Located in downtown Montreal's tony Place Ville Marie, the store has a layout that presented an interesting challenge. At less than 13 feet wide and about 40 feet long, it resembled a long and pinched little tunnel. Some designers might have instinctively tried to counteract the closeness of the walls. Instead, Smolens and his team chose to make it integral to the rhythmic flow of the design. "The store was so narrow that any attempt to make it seem wider wouldn't have worked. So why not accentuate it and even add to the feeling of depth?" he says.

A long, smooth counter that stretches down one side, a sensually curved ceiling, and maple plank flooring installed lengthwise create an irresistible flow that leads shoppers from the entrance to the bright translucent glass walls of the backstore service area.

Not that the interior functions merely as an expressway. A lilting rhythm slows and romances the journey, thanks to a succession of recessed niches on one wall and spotlight oval showcases tilted welcomingly toward the visitor on the opposite wall.

Enhancing the sensual mood are soft baize walls, muted materials such as aluminum and wood, and a long oval of blue neon lighting that curves overhead.

The store's narrowness sparked the designers' conception of a single counter along one side, its displays highlighted by spotlights arranged in the same even rhythm as the standalone showcases on the opposite wall. "We suggested that the salesperson could make a better presentation side by side with the customer, out from behind the counter," Smolens says. "That changes and softens the relationship, so that she becomes a consultant or guide."

The tiny store is like a quiet art gallery set among the flash of Montreal's premier retail and professional plaza. Its quiet curves and colours beckon passersby to pause and look, and once inside, to explore more deeply.

"In a way, we're playing with people's minds," he laughs, "to create contradictions of light and shadow, long and short, straight and curved. The whole idea is to eliminate indifference, to create tension and interest — especially being such a small store among all these big fancy competitors."