

# FRAME

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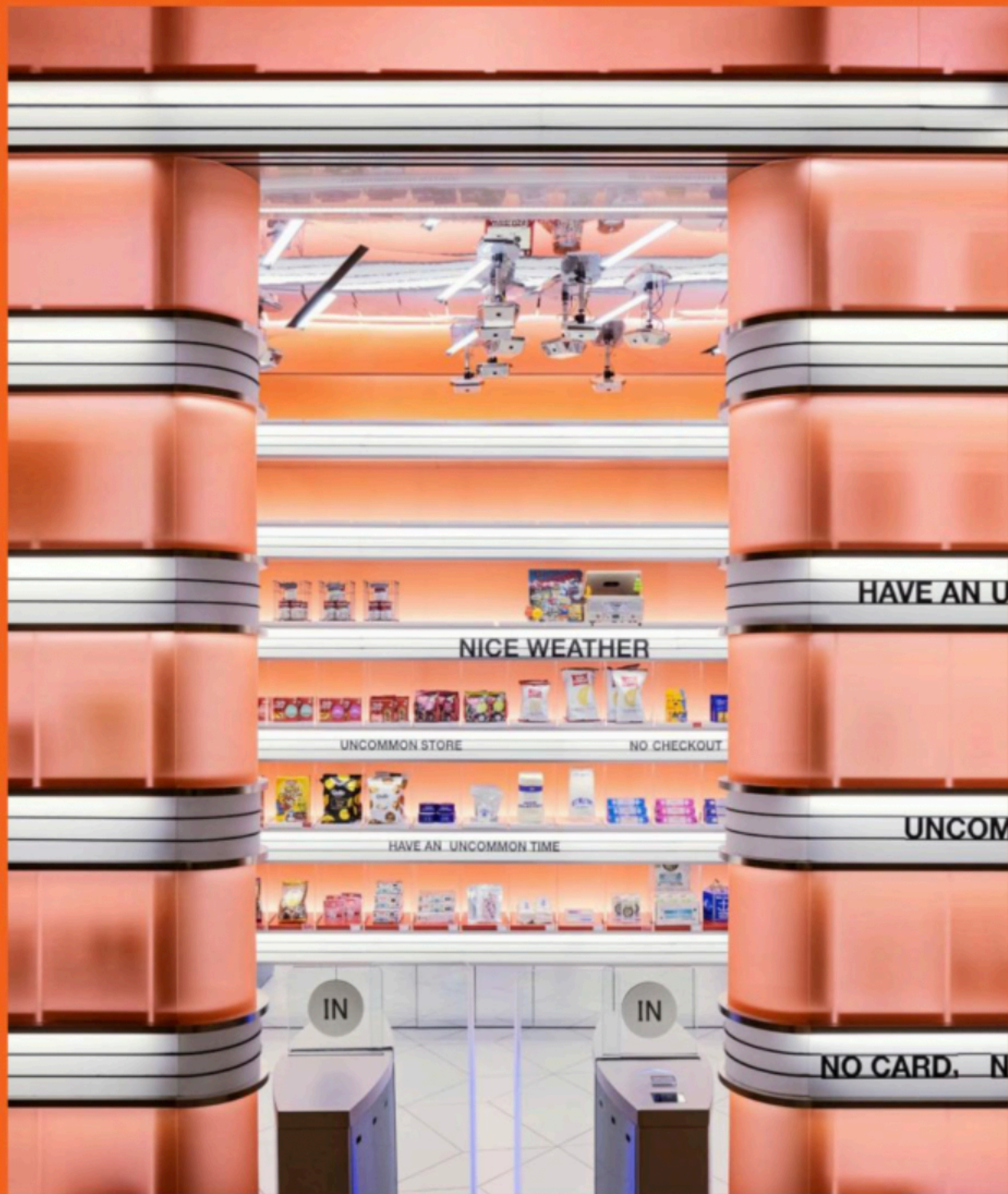
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Photograph courtesy of Uncommon Store

# CASHIERLESS STORES

**In terms of their spatial design, most automated retail concepts we've seen to date have simply deleted checkouts from the equation. Aside from speeding up the process, how could technologies such as Amazon's Just Walk Out revolutionize the entire shopping experience?**

Last year we wrote about the fact that Amazon's investment in automated retail clearly looked set to benefit from the pandemic. Indeed, in March, the company opened its first store outside of the US, in London's Ealing Broadway, with four more London arrivals within as many months. It also stood to reason that other brands would be quick to follow up on what was a somewhat underinvested area of retail near-futurism, often in tandem with the e-commerce giant. In the last half year, airport retailers Cibo Express Gourmet Markets and Hudson News have been some of the first to adopt Amazon's white-label version of the Just Walk Out technology that powers its Go and Fresh stores.

Others are looking beyond Amazon's ecosystem. The last year or so has seen French retailer Monoprix testing cashierless stores, KFC adding contactless collection lockers in Japan and Dunkin' Donuts musing its own checkout-free pilot; meanwhile, in our home base of the Netherlands, AiFi recently announced a partnership with convenience chain Wundermart to create up to 1,000 new unattended locations across the brand's international store network. Cashierless checkout start-ups like Standard Cognition have also found it easier to raise money, with a \$150 million Series C round lead by SoftBank's Vision Fund 2 announced earlier this year, while others, such as Berlin's Nomitri, have chosen 2021 as the right moment to emerge from stealth mode.

Thus far, however, there's been little to indicate how this inflection point in the future of FMCG retail will transform store design, other than the removal of checkout lanes and their attendant impulse-purchase-driving infrastructures. But even that could alter the way such spaces are designed in the future. 'An average supermarket could reclaim roughly 15 per cent of its floor area by eliminating checkout counters,' says Mark Landini, whose firm Landini Associates has reimaged supermarket floor plans for the likes of Esselunga, Walgreens, Loblaws, and Aldi. This, he says, could lead to a store's overall footprint becoming more adaptable. The space saved could be used to expand a store's offering, whether through products, services or amenities. Or

full-service supermarkets could simply shrink to fit into spaces once considered too small. This, says Landini, would open the door for more supermarkets in a larger number of urban neighbourhoods and 'food deserts' worldwide. In general, the architect sees huge potential for rethinking store layouts based on this technology. 'For example, "just walk out" can also mean "just walk in, anywhere", which opens the door to 360-degree entry and exit points, and frees designers from traditional approaches to space planning.'

Aside from such conjecture, one early signal of what's to come can be read in the launch of the Uncommon Store, part of new shopping centre The Hyundai Seoul. Designed by Atelier Archi.Mosphere, the collaboration between Hyundai IT&E and Amazon treats this new format with far more ambition than any of the latter's proprietary spaces. Given the hyper-active phraseology surrounding automated retail ('grab and go' and 'just walk out') most existing examples copy the cramped, circuitous floor plans of their analogue forebears. Similarly, while one of the key benefits to retail operators of these data-rich stores is reactive stock keeping, something that should result in a more tailored, and thus streamlined, product offer, many still carry an overwhelming number of SKUs – not exactly the sort of environment that encourages throughflow, or a shopping experience that prioritizes efficiency. A store that knows what you want shouldn't need to give you so many options.

Whatever your feelings about Atelier Archi.Mosphere's retro-futurist look, the maximalism of the laminate, acrylic and metal treatment – apparently inspired by 1960s theatre frontages – only works in such a small space (33 m<sup>2</sup>) because it's countered by the lack of freestanding units and limited (yet curated) product selection. As the logo above the store indicates, you should shoot through this space like an arrow. That interior therefore has to make an impression at speed, while also getting out of your way. If the destiny of convenience retail is automation, surely the design needs to be as dynamic as the stores they serve? **PM / TI**