

ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

PROJECTS

Known for black and white Minimalism, Michael Gabellini gets colorful at **ULTIMO**, a shop in downtown San Francisco.



by Karen Stein

Geary Street, to open a West Coast version of her Chicago design emporium, Ultimo.

The Ultimo store in Chicago presents clothing and accessories culled from the collections of some 30 designers and assembled in an almost curatorial fashion. The shop's reputation rests on an interpretation of the current fashion scene offered to its customers: Weinstein and her buyers review what is available, choosing items that are considered most appropriate for the "Ultimo customer," who Weinstein describes as "very urban, very sophisticated." When Ultimo opened in a former antiques shop 28 years ago, a lack of funds shaped its initial design: red-painted walls draped in African fabric. "The fabric was \$2.50 per yard. That was what we could afford then," recalls Weinstein.

Though the business has flourished over the years, and Weinstein has since opened other shops in Chicago, she now answers to a board of directors. The board asked three prospective designers to present ideas for the San Francisco shop. Gabellini was chosen because he responded to the retailing attitude of the company, says Weinstein. "I thought he understood Ultimo—the drama and theater of it," she recalls. "And he's easy to work with," which is no small point for someone who spends a good deal of time accommodating what may seem to be con-

Michael Gabellini, AIA, is known as something of a company man in architectural circles. Since completing fashion designer Jil Sander's showpiece Paris boutique, the first free-standing shop outsider Sander's native Germany [RECORD, September 1993, pages 90-95], the architect has designed some 45 Jil Sander outposts for the Hamburg-based clothier. With the recent unveiling of her menswear line, Gabellini says his output for Sander will now increase to more than 20 projects around the world per year, a quantity made even more striking when considering his New York City office staff numbers 20 and he and his high-profile client are known for an almost fanatical attention to detail and craft. These days, however, Gabellini is extending his reach, not only to other fashion companies, but also to new materials and colors.

A case in point is the Ultimo shop in San Francisco, recently opened on Geary Street, a bustling downtown shopping artery. Gabellini's client, Joan Weinstein, owns, among other designer boutiques, a Jil Sander store in Chicago designed by Gabellini. When Weinstein decided to open a Jil Sander shop on Maiden Lane in San Francisco in 1996, Gabellini was the natural choice. Less obvious was Weinstein's decision to take advantage of a potential internal link between the Sander store (in a building that is known to film aficionados as the location of a pet store in Alfred Hitchcock's movie *The Birds*) and another building, which fronts

ULTIMO PRESENTS CLOTHING IN AN ALMOST CURATORIAL FASHION.

flicting viewpoints among strong-willed, visual-minded fashion designers. Of the meeting of minds between architect and client, Gabellini says: "I managed the design of the shop. She managed the relationships with the clothing designers."

Project: *Ultimo, San Francisco*

Architect: *Gabellini Associates—Michael Gabellini, AIA, design principal; Dan Garbowit, AIA, managing principal; Carmen Carrasco, AIA, project architect; Thom Burns, Lily Chiu, Ben Fuqua, Vincent Laino, Elmer Lin, Cathy Jones, Lisa Monteleone, Lily Rutherford, project team*

Architect of Record:

Dennis R. Smith & Associates

Engineers: *John Rutigliano (structural, base building); Thorton Tomasetti-Cohen Barrieto Marchetas (staircase); Glumac International (M/E/P)*

Consultants: *Focus Lighting, Inc.*

(lighting); Swenson Stone Consultants (stone); Donald Kaufman Color (color)

Construction Manager: *Dinwiddie Construction Company*