

The complexity in locating a new retail environment for Benetton in Tehran is self evident. **Benetton's international reputation for asking provocative questions about society, media and fashion is presented in Iran with perhaps the most potent set of questions it has yet to address.** How do we negotiate the relation between a multi-national retailer and the specific circumstances in Tehran? How might a new building address issues of branding in an urban context and establish a platform for the negotiation of sexual and spatial politics present here?

The opportunity to design two stores within one overall context is a challenging one but which present an opportunity to demonstrate how a single identity can mutate and adjust according to different urban conditions. While both stores lie on Valian Arts street, the contexts vary greatly from the leafy and refined northern suburb of XXXX to the grit and activity of XXXX. We have therefore understood the project as an opportunity to design a new Benetton store type for Tehran, which can vary between locations but which, in each location stands as a particular response to that place.

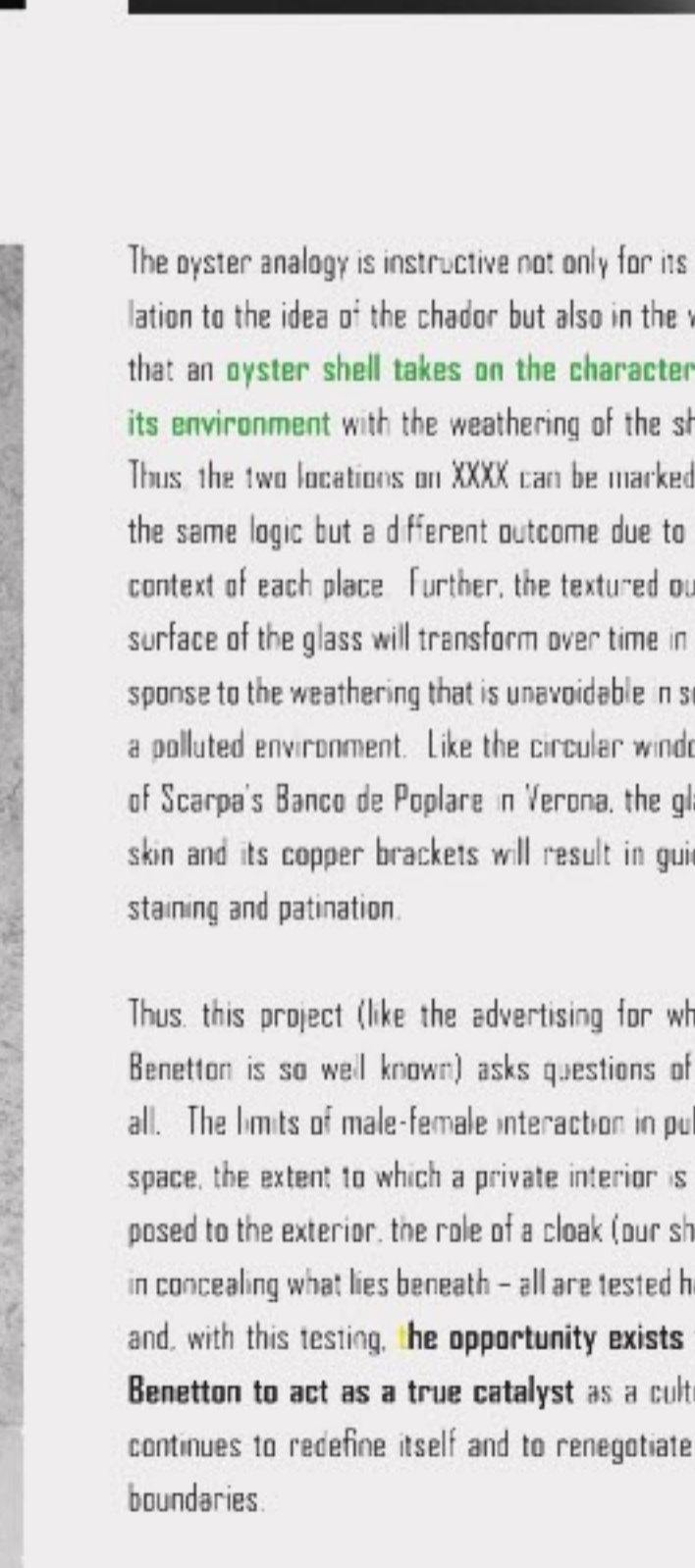
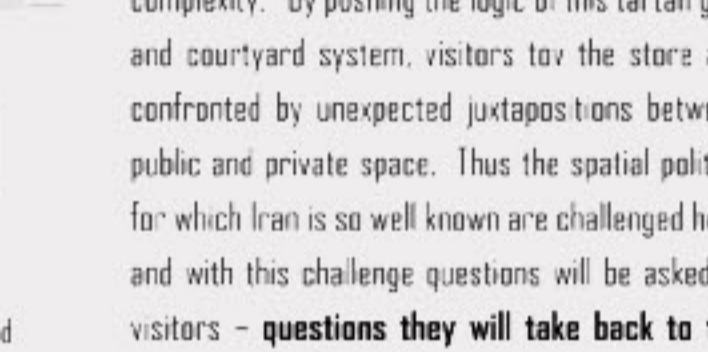
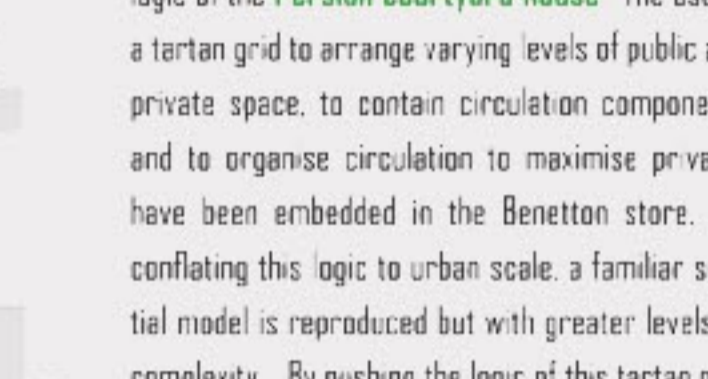
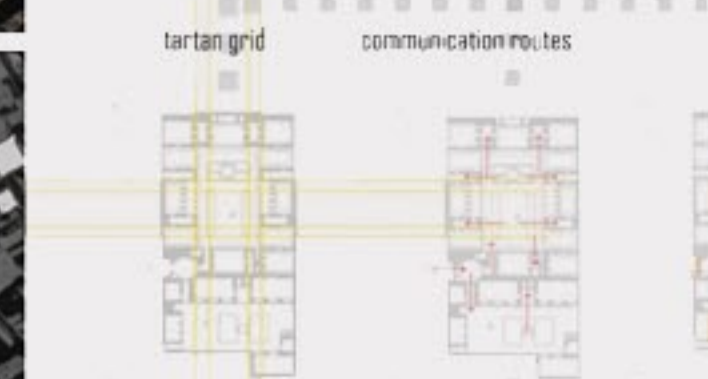
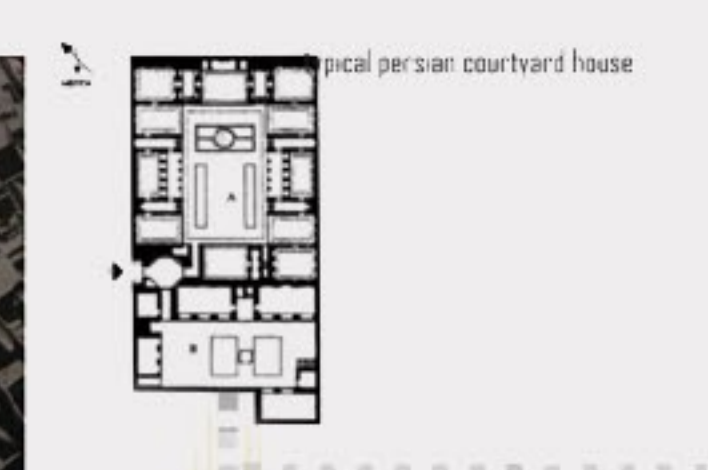
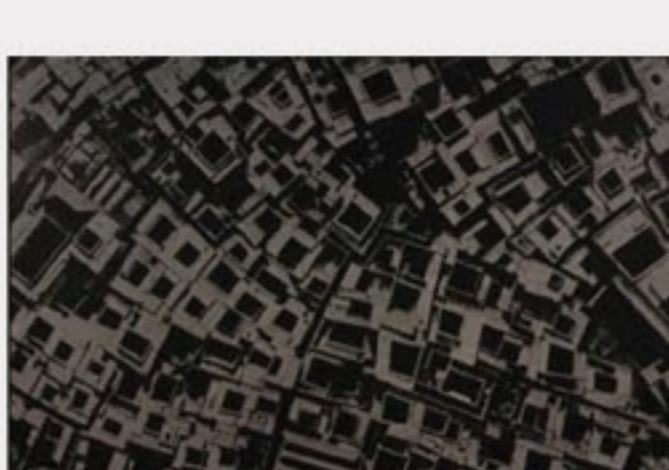
The confluence of these two issues – the politics of the retail project in this environment and the opportunity of working on 2 sites has led to our approach.

The building has been understood in 2 parts - an **"INNER"** component containing the shop, office and residential environments and an **"OUTER"** component which modulates the engagement between this inner core and the urban realm. Both components have a degree of variability which enables an infinite degree of variation in terms of privacy both within the building and between the inside and outside.

The inner-outer strategy is, like the grid of the Persian courtyard house, a familiar characteristic of Iranian city organisation conflated to a public scale. The toughness of Tehran's streets when compared to the richness of the apartment interiors is repeated here in the textured oyster shell concealing a sensuous, fine grained interior.

In material terms, the inner areas have a softness which is appropriate to their semi-private nature and a luxuriousness appropriate for a high quality retail environment. Materials such as vitrified tiles recall Persian traditions while colours – red, yellow and green – subtly reinforce the Benetton marque, embedding its colours in the very structure of the building itself.

This pearl-like inner is then protected by a **robust outer shell** which protects it from the elements while also carefully modulating degrees of privacy and exposure to the inner component beneath. Like an oyster, this shell protects the pearl inside but also acts as a filter between external elements and the inner sanctum. The shell is constructed from slumped glass, flat and sheer on the inner surface and rough and textured on the outer. This textured outer surface recalls both ancient Persian glass technology and provides further opportunity to manage different degrees of opacity and transparency.



tartan grid

communications routes

openings

room arrangement

privacy levels

boundaries

circulation

circulation cores

site B

transition to site A

office 1

office 2

office 3

office 4

terrace

courtyard

toilets

site A

transition to site A

office 1

office 2

office 3

office 4

terrace

courtyard

toilets

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The inner component is organised according to the logic of the **Persian courtyard house**. The use of a tartan grid to arrange varying levels of public and private space, to contain circulation components and to organise circulation to maximise privacy, have been embedded in the Benetton store. In conflating this logic to urban scale a familiar spatial model is reproduced but with greater levels of complexity. By pushing the logic of this tartan grid and courtyard system, visitors to the store are confronted by unexpected juxtapositions between public and private space. Thus the spatial politics for which Iran is so well known are challenged here and with this challenge questions will be asked of visitors – **questions they will take back to the city once they leave the store.**

The oyster analogy is instructive not only for its relation to the idea of the chador but also in the way that: **an oyster shell takes on the character of its environment** with the weathering of the shell. Thus the two locations on XXXX can be marked by the same logic but a different outcome due to the context of each place. Further, the textured outer surface of the glass will transform over time in response to the weathering that is unavoidable in such a polluted environment. Like the circular windows of Scarpa's Banco de Popolare in Verona, the glass skin and its copper brackets will result in quiet staining and patination.

Thus this project (like the advertising for which Benetton is so well known) asks questions of us all. The limits of male-female interaction in public space, the extent to which a private interior is exposed to the exterior, the role of a cloak (our shell) in concealing what lies beneath – all are tested here and, with this testing, **the opportunity exists for Benetton to act as a true catalyst** as a culture continues to redefine itself and to renegotiate its boundaries.

