

The Desigual Brand and the Iberian Archives: Heritage Design and Cultural Memory

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This article explores the impact of design and heritage through a specific case study: the Desigual brand and Iberian archives. The aim is to examine how this configuration of heritage between high and low culture influences the production of archives and memory. By outlining the key themes and concepts addressed, our research exposes how recurring design elements at Desigual, such as motifs and colors inspired by Iberian heritage, create thematic coherence and reinforce the link between design and heritage through the concept of isotopy. The article explains how the latter contributes to the construction of identity, cultural preservation, and the formation of collective memory. It also presents the methodology and multidisciplinary approach that will be used, integrating elements of semiotics, sociology, anthropology, and cultural and architectural studies. By highlighting the relevance of the intersection between design and heritage in the contemporary context, by providing a framework for the essay, the article aims to engage the reader and convey the importance of these interconnected themes, setting the scene for further exploration.

Keywords: design, heritage, Desigual brand, Iberian archives, collective memory

Introduction

Heritage design, which draws on cultural and historical elements to develop objects or visual experiences, plays a key role in how brands create stories and establish an emotional connection with their consumers (Dubois, 2004). In the case of Desigual, this approach is based on the recurring use of motifs and symbols inspired by Iberian traditions, allowing the brand to root itself deeply in a rich cultural heritage while forging a singular visual identity (Mason & Vavoula, 2021). Through this example, Desigual provides a striking illustration of how design can become a powerful vector for preserving memory and heritage in a globalized world, where authenticity and cultural roots have become major strategic issues (Cross, Mesjar, Steed & Jiang, 2025). Heritage design and cultural memory play an essential role in the construction of brands' visual identities, particularly in the fashion industry. This article examines the impact of these elements on the Desigual brand, using Iberian archives to explore how cultural heritage influences the design of its collections and retail spaces. More specifically, we will seek to understand how Desigual uses motifs and colors inspired by its heritage to create a visual isotopia, thereby reinforcing its own identity and its relationship with its consumers. The concept of "isotopy", borrowed from

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semiotics, refers to the thematic unity that runs through a set of signs, making it possible to maintain visual and narrative coherence within a production (Greimas, 1983). In the case of Desigual, this isotopia manifests itself in recurring elements that anchor the brand in a tradition while helping to define its unique image. By studying the use of motifs and colors specifically inspired by Iberian heritage, this research examines the way in which heritage design shapes a collective memory shared between the brand and its consumers. The links between design, heritage, and collective memory are essential to understand the construction of brand identity. By drawing on recognized and symbolic cultural elements, heritage design becomes a powerful vector for evoking a shared history, particularly when it comes to strengthening links with a specific culture or region (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). Collective memory, on the other hand, is constructed through visual symbols that resonate in the collective imagination, linking individuals to a cultural past while influencing their contemporary perceptions (Halbwachs, 1992). To analyze this phenomenon, this study adopts a multidisciplinary methodological approach, integrating tools from semiotics, sociology, anthropology, and cultural and architectural studies. This combination allows us to deepen our understanding of the mechanisms by which the Desigual brand identity is constructed, while taking into account the social and cultural dimensions of fashion, as well as the memorial practices associated with fashion production (Baudrillard, 1994). The main aims of this research are threefold: to analyze the impact of heritage design on the Desigual brand, examining the use of recurring elements (such as motifs, colors, textures, retail spaces) inspired by Iberian heritage; to explore how these elements contribute to thematic coherence and reinforce cultural memory; and to investigate the intersection between high and low culture in the production of archives and memory in the context of fashion. By following this path, the study aims to shed light on the creative processes that link heritage, design, and memory in contemporary fashion, and more specifically in the case of the Desigual brand.

Analysis Methodology

Semiotic Approach and Analysis of Signs in Desigual's Collections and Commercial Space

Semiotic analysis focuses on the study of signs, symbols, and meanings, based on the premise that every sign carries a message that can be decoded to reveal its deeper meanings. In the context of analyzing Desigual's collections and spaces, semiotics makes it possible to dissect the visual elements used by the brand (motifs, colors, textures, etc.) in order to understand how these elements communicate a message and contribute to the construction of the brand's identity. The aim here is to grasp the different systems of signs that run through the collections and to understand how these signs, beyond their aesthetic dimension, convey cultural and social meanings linked to the Iberian heritage and collective memory.

The application of semiotic theories to fashion is based in particular on the work of Roland Barthes (1967), who analysed signs in fashion as a system of communication. Following this approach, for example, motifs inspired by traditional Iberian art (such as ceramics or mosaics) are signs that carry with them a cultural and historical richness. Bright colors, geometric shapes, and layered textures are visual elements that, when analyzed semiotically, reveal not only aesthetic trends but also messages about Spanish culture and how it is perceived and reinterpreted in the global fashion context. Analysis of Desigual's collections involves identifying recurring visual elements (motifs, symbols, colors) and interpreting them in the brand's specific cultural and historical context.

Sociological, Anthropological and Cultural Approach

The sociological and anthropological study of fashion and collective memory allows us to explore how objects, practices, and visual signs are charged with social and cultural meanings. In the case of Desigual, this involves analyzing how the brand's creations fit into wider cultural practices and how they interact with consumers' social and identity values. Fashion, as a cultural and social practice, is not just an aesthetic phenomenon, but also plays an essential role in the construction and transmission of collective memory (Friedman, 1994). Thus, the study of Desigual's fashion consumption practices will make it possible to examine how the brand, through its collections and spaces, contributes to the formation of new cultural identities while drawing on a traditional heritage.

The anthropology of fashion, in particular, offers a useful framework for understanding the links between fashion and collective memory. For example, the way in which traditional Iberian symbols are reused in Desigual's collections allows us to reflect on the way in which these signs are perceived and reinterpreted by consumers, according to their cultural and social affiliations. In addition, this approach allows us to explore the way in which fashion functions as a means of expressing personal and collective identity, highlighting the way in which Desigual is part of specific cultural practices and how it shapes the image of Spain through its collections and spaces.

The collection and analysis of Iberian archives are an essential tool for understanding the impact of heritage on fashion. Cultural archives, whether visual, textual, or material, allow us to explore the history of a culture and its objects, and in this case, to examine how these elements are taken up and reinvented in the brand's collections and spaces. Collection methods include the exploration of archive holdings, traditional works of art, and historical documents that help to contextualise recurring elements in Desigual's design. Analysis of these archives not only allows us to identify key motifs and symbols of Iberian heritage, but also to understand how these elements have been adapted and integrated into a modern fashion context, while remaining faithful to a shared cultural memory.

Desigual Desigual: A Brand Rooted in Iberian Culture

Desigual is an iconic contemporary fashion brand, founded in Spain in 1984, which has quickly established itself as a major player in the sector thanks to its bold designs and unique graphic signature. This section explores the history of Desigual, its distinct visual identity, and the integration of Iberian cultural memory into its collections.

Desigual's History and Visual Identity

The creation of the brand, its growth, and its graphic signature: a fusion of contemporary creativity and traditional influences.

Desigual was founded in Barcelona by Thomas Meyer, a Swiss entrepreneur, with the aim of creating a fashion brand that combined a unique innovative style with a strong visual identity. From the outset, the brand has stood out for its resolutely different approach, emphasizing colorful designs, bold prints, and an original use of textiles. Over the years, Desigual has become a symbol of hybridity between modern elements and traditional influences. The brand's graphic signature is based on a fusion of contemporary creativity and ancient cultural references, particularly those of the Iberian heritage (Liu & Jiang, 2024).



Figure 1. Desigual's visual identity.

This distinctive visual identity is based on a palette of bright colors, geometric patterns, embroidery and textured fabrics that evoke popular symbols of Spain, including Andalusian art, folkloric motifs, and the heritage of traditional craftsmanship (Liu & Jiang, 2024). Desigual is much more than clothes, it is an explosion of colors and patterns that tell a story, a dialogue between past and present. One of the essential components of this identity is its major inspiration from Iberian arts and crafts.

Desigual and the Appropriation of Iberian Motifs: An Example of Iconography

One of the most striking manifestations of Desigual's cultural roots is the recurrent use of geometric and floral motifs, inspired in particular by Iberian artistic traditions. Among the most representative elements are Gaudí's mosaics and Andalusian ceramic motifs, which, as well as being direct references to Spanish art, are reinterpreted by Desigual through a modern and dynamic aesthetic. In some collections, for example, Desigual has used motifs reminiscent of architect Antoni Gaudí's famous-colored tiles, but has reinvented them in a more fluid and abstract form, incorporating bright shades of color such as red, orange, and blue, creating visual compositions that evoke the organic structures of Catalan modernism.



Figure 2. Gaudí's mosaics.



Figure 3. Gaudí's mosaics.



Figure 4. Desigual's logo design.

The use of these recurring elements in Desigual's collections generates what can be described as visual isotopia. According to Greimas (1983), isotopy is defined by the repetition of visual or thematic elements within a set of signs, forming a significant unit and allowing a coherent reading of the work as a whole. At Desigual, this isotopy is materialised by motifs which, although constantly changing over the course of the collections, maintain a thematic coherence that evokes Iberian heritage while being reinterpreted in a resolutely contemporary form.

The Use of Floral and Geometric Motifs: A Reinterpretation of Cultural Roots

Another example of the appropriation of Iberian heritage is the use of floral and geometric motifs often found in Desigual designs. These motifs are inspired by various forms of Spanish craftsmanship, including traditional fabrics and ceramics, but also by architectural influences such as Barcelona's Casa Batlló, one of architect Antoni Gaudí's marvels, where complex, repetitive geometric shapes create a kind of unique visual language. Desigual takes these elements and reinterprets them to produce modern visual compositions, incorporating bright colours and freer forms.

In this way, floral motifs inspired by Andalusian craftsmanship are not simply replicated, but become a visual storytelling tool. By transforming these traditional motifs into a contemporary palette, Desigual bridges the gap between the cultural past and the fashion present. These motifs are often arranged asymmetrically or combined with modern geometric shapes, altering the traditional structure of the patterns to give them a more dynamic and contemporary appearance.

Isotopy Theory Applied to Desigual's Visual Identity

In the case of Desigual, isotopia not only makes it possible to maintain visual coherence, but also to anchor the brand's identity in a shared collective memory and cultural heritage. The idea of isotopy developed by Greimas (1983) emphasises that through the repetition of certain elements, a brand can create a kind of "visual language" of its own, making it easier for consumers to immediately recognise the brand in collections and spaces.

In the case of Desigual, the repetition of geometric patterns inspired by Iberian art and vibrant colours becomes a kind of visual signature that links each collection to a specific cultural tradition while allowing the brand to remain current and dynamic. Isotopia at Desigual does not just pay homage to a past culture; it constantly updates it. For example, the use of organic shapes inspired by Gaudí for Iberian floral motifs may appear in a completely new form from one season to the next, but the recurring elements help to maintain a link between these historical elements and modern trends.



Figure 5. Casa Batlló in Barcelona, one of architect Antoni Gaudí's masterpieces.

Visual isotopia thus becomes a brand strategy through which Desigual succeeds in fusing elements of Iberian heritage with contemporary influences, producing a strong and recognisable identity. This allows the brand to differentiate itself in the fashion industry, while cultivating a shared cultural memory with its consumers, who can identify with these visual references.



Figure 6. Islamic mosaic, Kasbah Telouet, Morocco: Moroccan zellige pattern.

Desigual's visual identity is based on a mix of cultural heritage and innovation. By reinterpreting motifs and symbols from Iberian arts and crafts, the brand creates a visual isotopia that weaves a coherent link between both its collections and its retail spaces, while reinforcing its identity. This isotopia does not simply reproduce traditional elements, but transforms and updates them in a constant dialogue between past and present. In this way, Desigual succeeds in offering its consumers not only aesthetic creations, but also a genuine living cultural memory, allowing the brand to stand out while cultivating emotional links with its public.

Cultural Memory and Its Role in Desigual's Image

The Impact of Cultural Memory on Consumers

Cultural memory refers to all the memories, practices, and meanings shared by a group or community. In the field of fashion, this cultural memory strongly influences the way consumers perceive a brand, and the emotional bond they establish with it (Halbwachs, 1992). For a brand like Desigual, the use of heritage and cultural elements in its designs and spaces helps to anchor the brand in a collective memory that refers to shared values and meanings, thereby reinforcing the brand's identity with consumers.

The patterns and colors associated with Iberian heritage, such as traditional ceramics or flamenco decorations, awaken memories and emotions linked to a history and culture that consumers associate with specific values such as authenticity, craftsmanship, and passion. This emotional link with the collective memory allows Desigual to connect in a profound way with its customers, who recognize themselves in this cultural memory and interpret it through their own experiences and their own perception of Spanish culture (Miller, 2005). In this way, Desigual positions itself not only as a fashion brand,

Heritage Design as a Tool for Reinforcing Cultural Memory

Heritage design at Desigual is not limited to the simple appropriation of old motifs. Rather, it is a strategic tool for reinforcing cultural memory by reinterpreting traditional elements. Incorporating these elements into the brand's collections weaves a link between past and present, celebrating a heritage while adapting it to contemporary fashion issues.

Concrete examples include the use of Andalusian craft motifs, which, while deeply rooted in Spain's architectural and decorative history, are modernised in Desigual's designs. One of the flagship collections, inspired by the colours and shapes of the Iberian region, combines local history with a contemporary aesthetic, allowing people to identify with a shared heritage while embracing a contemporary lifestyle. These heritage design elements are not just decorative, but become symbols that carry meaning, helping to reinforce the collective memory and create cultural continuity in the world of fashion (Baudrillard, 1994), also, as a vehicle for cultural transmission and collective memory (Liu & Jiang, 2024).

Formal Analysis of Desigual's Commercial Architecture: Conceptualization and Expression of Design

In analyzing the retail space of the Desigual brand, it is crucial to highlight the significant intervention of graphics and colors, which draw their inspiration from Iberian heritage traditions. These elements play a decisive role in the stenographic quality of the shops. Like Gaudí's architecture, which uses shapes and colors to create a dialogue between the building and its surroundings, Desigual incorporates traditional Iberian motifs, such as mosaics, arabesques, or bright colors from the Mediterranean and Andalusian landscapes, to envelop the consumer in a distinctive and culturally charged visual universe.



Figure 7. Heritage motifs in Desigual's fashion collections.

The graphics used in Desigual shops not only decorate the space, but also become narrative elements, reinforcing the idea of immersion in a revisited Iberian heritage. For example, geometric patterns inspired by traditional ceramic tiles or floral illustrations inspired by Spanish folk art punctuate the space, creating a stimulating and visually coherent environment.

The colour palette echoes the warm, vibrant hues of the Mediterranean markets, traditional fabrics and landscapes of Spain and Portugal: reds, oranges, yellows, blues, and greens blend together in a bold, dynamic way. This choice of colors, in constant interaction with the shop's lighting and materials, contributes to the creation of an immersive atmosphere, where the visitor is not just a consumer but becomes part of a sensory experience enriched by a shared cultural memory.

In this way, through the use of these graphics and colors, Desigual manages to transform its retail spaces into veritable stages, where the Iberian heritage is reinterpreted in a contemporary way, while at the same time enhancing a living heritage design, creating an atmosphere that is both festive and charged with cultural significance.

From an analysis of several examples of photos of Desigual brand retail spaces, it is clear that the brand's specific intervention in the design of these spaces plays a decisive role in their architectural enhancement. This intervention, marked by the use of graphics inspired by Iberian heritage and a palette of bright, dynamic colors, dresses up the architectural space, giving it a character that is both contemporary and deeply rooted in cultural heritage values.

The decorative elements, whether geometric motifs reminiscent of traditional Iberian art, or the vibrant colors Mediterranean tradition, create a harmonious interaction with the modern with the modern architecture of the shops. The space becomes an arena for expression, where the Iberian cultural heritage is sublimated by a contemporary approach to design, and where every detail is creating a unique atmosphere. This successful fusion of between contemporary architecture and heritage identity transforms the commercial space into a veritable work of scenography, where past and present meet in a fluid and creative way.

As part of the architectural of the Desigual brand's retail spaces, it is relevant to examine the different to examine the different configurations of their façades according to the types of outlets. Firstly, in the shopping complexes, Desigual's facades are characterised by an approach that avoids superimposing superimposed supports, favoring simple lines and innovative materials that give a clear, unified impression of the space. This formal choice highlights a desire to break away from traditional architectural codes architectural codes, while

incorporating graphic and colorful elements that the brand's visual identity. On the other hand, in located in urban landscapes with an established architectural identity, Desigual established architectural identity. Desigual often opts for a:

- In the sales areas of shopping complexes where the façade does not involve a superimposition of supports:

In this case, the shop façade is distinguished by a formal composition in which Desigual's graphic motifs are used in a total and expressive way. The architecture of the façade is not constrained by a pre-existing relationship with the surrounding building. This intervention allows the brand to impose a strong and coherent visual identity, transforming the façade into a graphic canvas based on Desigual's characteristic elements: bright colors, abstract shapes, and floral or geometric motifs. Using graphic elements that match the brand's visual codes, the architecture of the retail space becomes a vehicle for expressing Desigual's identity, a kind of instant visual manifestation of its creative philosophy. In this type of space, the involvement of Iberian heritage manifests itself less in terms of integration into the historic fabric than in terms of a break with and reinvention of formal conventions, a kind of disconnection from the heritage and urban structure.



Figure 8. Desigual store facades: colorful visual identity.

- In retail outlets where the façade is part of an urban landscape with an established architectural identity:

In this context, the architecture of the façade must take into account the existence of a pre-existing urban structure. Desigual's approach is more subtle and respectful of the urban environment. The addition of Desigual's graphic motifs is carefully designed to blend harmoniously and non-intrusively into the building's existing façade. Here, the Iberian heritage element plays a fundamental role, as it is crucial to maintain continuity with the architectural identity of the site while introducing the brand's graphic universe. The intervention is deliberate and subtle: The motifs are not superimposed or imposed in a crude manner, but rather enrich the existing lines and materials. The use of motifs can be achieved through techniques such as the inlaying of ceramic tiles typical of Iberian facades, or the use of colors and textures that respect local proportions and materials. The aim here is to fuse local heritage with the brand's universe, creating a symbiosis between modernity and history, where Desigual enters into a respectful dialogue with the architectural past of the public space while asserting its own visual language.

In short, these two approaches differ in the way they integrate Desigual's graphic identity: The first, in a context of formal rupture, allows the brand to assert its unique and daring character without heritage constraints; the second, in an already established urban environment, involves a reflection on harmony and complementarity, where the integration of Desigual's motifs into the historic architecture is done with mutual respect between the old and the contemporary.



Figure 9. Facade of the desigual store in Barcelona.

Architectural intervention in Desigual's retail spaces plays a crucial role in the impact of heritage design on cultural memory. Through design choices that blend modernity with references to local historical or cultural contexts, the brand succeeds in creating retail environments that are not just functional, but also carry profound meanings. In spaces where the architecture is integrated into an urban landscape already marked by a specific identity, Desigual's design echoes the history of the place while injecting a contemporary vision, establishing a direct link between past and present. In this way, the façade, interior layout, and design elements become vehicles of collective memory, recalling traditions while celebrating diversity and creativity. This approach helps to reinforce a sense of cultural belonging, transforming each point of sale into a space for experience and reflection on local and global identities. By reusing and reinterpreting heritage elements, Desigual contributes to the preservation and transmission of cultural memory, while at the same time engaging in an innovative dialogue with the contemporary challenges of design and architecture.

High and Low Culture: The Intersection of Memory Production in Fashion

The Convergence of High and Low Culture in Contemporary Fashion

In fashion, the distinction between high culture and low culture is often blurred, as many brands, including Desigual, navigate between these two spheres to create products that are both accessible and carry profound meanings (McRobbie, 1994). High culture is generally associated with sophisticated and elitist art forms, while low culture includes popular practices that are often perceived as less refined. In the case of Desigual, this boundary is deliberately blurred, with the use of popular and artisanal cultural references within a mass fashion framework.

Desigual manages to merge these two dimensions by reintegrating popular and traditional elements of Iberian culture (such as folk motifs and regional symbols) into fashion that is intended to be contemporary and accessible. This blend enables the brand to create a memory archive in which popular culture and elitist culture coexist and feed off each other (Bourdieu, 1984).

Archiving and the Production of Memory in Fashion

Cultural archives play a key role in the construction of collective memory, making it possible to preserve and reinterpret elements of culture that might otherwise be forgotten. At Desigual, archiving takes the form of highlighting Iberian heritage through its collections, which become media of visual and symbolic memory. By reusing traditional motifs and techniques, the brand contributes to the archiving of this cultural memory, while at the same time giving it a modern, international dimension. This process of archiving is essential in the production of memory in the fashion world, as it creates continuity between different eras and reinforces the brand's cultural identity. By combining popular and elite culture, Desigual has positioned itself as a key player in this dynamic of memory and heritage in the fashion world (Friedman, 1994).

Discussion

This article has highlighted the importance of heritage design and cultural memory in the construction of the Desigual brand's visual identity. The analysis revealed that the brand has been able to coherently integrate elements of Iberian heritage into its collections, creating a visual isotopic that links Spanish cultural history with a contemporary and dynamic aesthetic. The recurring use of motifs, colors, and textures inspired by Iberian heritage, such as geometric patterns, traditional ceramics and bright colors, has enabled Desigual to develop a distinctive and easily recognizable visual identity, while conveying a profound message linked to the history and culture of the Iberian Peninsula.

Cultural memory, as a vehicle for transmitting a shared history, plays a fundamental role in the way consumers perceive and identify with the brand. By anchoring its designs in a collective memory, Desigual establishes a strong emotional bond with its consumers, strengthening the relationship between the brand and its public. This process of creating a visual and symbolic memory helps to reinforce the brand's image as a bearer of cultural values and identity, while cultivating a sense of belonging and recognition among its customers.

The construction of Desigual's identity is not limited simply to the creation of clothing or accessories; it is intrinsically linked to the reinterpretation and enhancement of Iberian heritage. By incorporating traditional elements, such as ceramic motifs or the characteristic colours of flamenco costumes, Desigual reaffirms the importance of Spanish culture while adapting it to a globalized world. This blend of heritage and modernity is a powerful strategy that allows the brand to position itself at the crossroads between heritage and innovation.

The use of Iberian heritage is not limited to simple aesthetic appeal: It is also a tool for building a collective memory. By offering its consumers a contemporary vision of Spanish cultural history, Desigual is helping to enhance this collective memory, while at the same time making it part of a creative, global universe. This process is reinforced by the use of a visual isotope that guarantees the coherence of the brand's identity, while making it accessible and understandable to an international audience. Through this strategic choice, Desigual is becoming not only a major player in contemporary fashion, but also an ambassador for Iberian cultural memory.

The results of this study open up a number of avenues for future research into heritage design and fashion. Firstly, it would be interesting to examine how other fashion brands, beyond Desigual, incorporate elements of cultural heritage into their visual strategy, and how this approach affects their relationship with consumers. Comparing the strategies of brands that incorporate different types of cultural heritage could lead to a better understanding of the mechanisms by which fashion participates in the construction of collective memory and the dissemination of cultural values.

In addition, future research could focus on analysing the processes by which heritage is reinterpreted in a context of globalisation. While brands such as Desigual use local heritage to differentiate themselves on the global stage, it would be relevant to study how this heritage is perceived by international consumers and how it is appropriated and reinterpreted across different cultures. This would explore the interplay between local heritage and globalisation in the world of fashion.

Conclusion

Finally, further exploration of the role of cultural archives in the process of memory creation in fashion could be a fruitful area of research. The study of how heritage archives are used by fashion designers, not only to preserve heritage but also to reinvent it, would be a fascinating topic. Iberian archives, in particular, offer a

rich terrain for understanding how traditional visual elements can be modernised and reused in a creative context while respecting their historical and cultural value. This study of Desigual demonstrates that fashion is not just a space for aesthetic consumption, but also a field where identity, culture, and collective memory intersect and redefine each other. The future of research into heritage design in fashion looks promising, as it allows us to explore questions that are at once aesthetic, sociological, and historical, while highlighting the fundamental role of fashion in the transmission of culture through time.

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