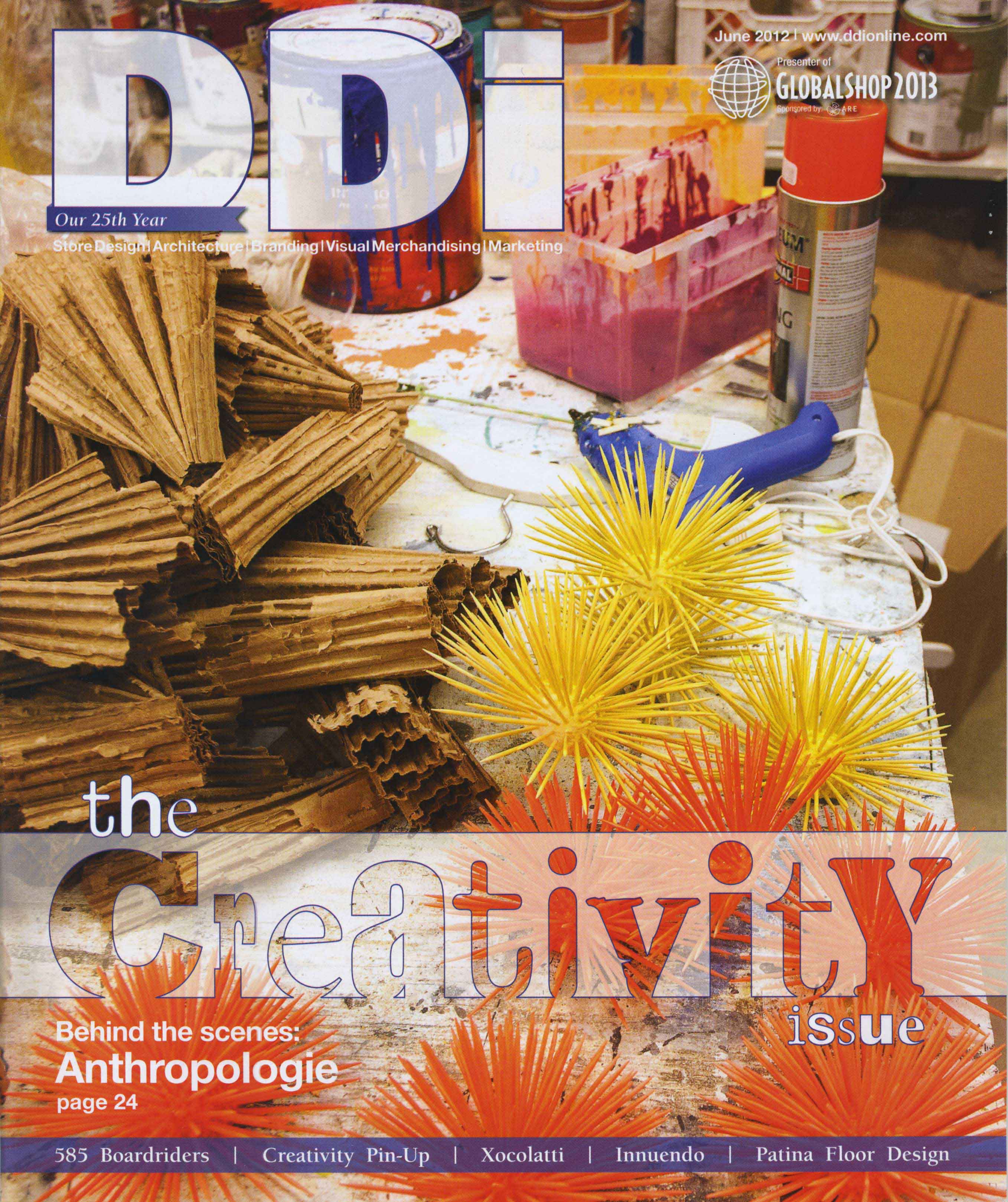




# DDi

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issue

Behind the scenes:  
**Anthropologie**  
page 24



Photos: Frank Ouderman

## Box of chocolates

Xocolatti's first boutique delivers an indulgent experience

By Lauren Mitchell, Associate Editor

This past fall, premium chocolate brand Xocolatti debuted in New York's SoHo neighborhood, wrapping up its gem-like delicacies and presenting them in a 150-sq.-ft., street-side package. The chocolatier's first-ever store, the modest space is seamlessly integrated into the urban streetscape, welcoming passersby to enter for a luxury-chocolate fix.

New York-based design firm de-spec built and designed the flagship store, with a vision to treat the boutique like a display case. "Xocolatti

views their chocolates like jewelry, and this was a very important starting point for us," says Farnaz Mansuri, principal of de-spec.

Free of the traditional storefront and window merchandising barriers, the store serves as a vitrine-like space. With a full-glass, street-side wall and three interior walls featuring floor-to-ceiling custom shelving, the entirety of the space functions as display.

The shelves, like the partitions of a box of chocolates, both store and present Xocolatti's confections. Throughout the day, customers remove the iconic green-and-brown boxes from the wall—the resulting patterns indicating the most-desired flavors. "We view this as part of the excitement of the retail space, as the environment evolves through the interaction of the customer," says Tom Shea, lead designer for de-spec.

The space features a color palette inspired by the richness of the chocolate, with bronzed-toned shelves and dark, oiled walnut cabinetry. The flooring consists of wide-plank oak with an antique driftwood finish, and the island in the center of the space—which houses six flavors of gelato and the POS—is custom bronze with a Belgian Bluestone countertop. Unique lightbox signage, created in collaboration with New York-based Exit Creative Co., serves as contrast against the dark neutral tones of the space, and provides the customer with clear presentation of their options and flavors.

"Our goal was for the shop to be read with one singular idea," Shea says. "We resolved a design where the space itself is virtually constructed from the product being sold." A prototype store, the SoHo boutique is the first of multiple locations Xocolatti plans to open in the United States and internationally. **DDi**

