

# Sensational, By Design

Sophisticated textures on solid colors are a perfect complement for engaging retail environments

By Kenn Busch



Wilsonart's Ocean solid-color, with a Glaze - Ultra Premium finish.



Island solid-color, with the Casual Rustic - Premium finish.



Designer White solid-color HPL, with a Gloss Line - Premium finish.

**W**hen it comes to shopping, our fingers are fed up with being hungry. The rest of our senses are crying out for a little satisfaction as well.

There are plenty of practical reasons to think twice about shopping online – the guilt over the extra packaging and fuel required to ship you a single item, the tendency to start tossing unnecessary things to a bottomless shopping cart, the inability to “get a feel” for an item’s quality by handling it or trying it on, and so forth.

But the biggest drawback might be more emotional than practical: Shopping online deprives us of sensational experiences.

Think about it. When you’re hunched over a tablet your vision is focused on 80 square inches of glowing pixels, what you smell and hear has nothing to do with what you’re buying, and what you touch is always the same: glass.

When you walk into a well-branded brick-and-mortar store, on the other hand, you’re immersing yourself in a sensorial experience, the lighting, the color, the sounds, the smells and yes, the feel of the products and the fixtures on which they’re displayed.

“In retail, there’s a trend toward tactility and temptation of touch,” says Lisa White, Head of WGSN Lifestyle & Interiors. WGSN is a global trend forecasting agency, and White is intimately involved in studying the lifestyle, hospitality and retail interior industries.

“Materials play a big role in getting us away from the screen,” says White. “We’re really getting tired of slick surfaces; our fingers are hungry for tactility. Spaces designed with so much to touch are more exciting, engaging and refreshing, and inspire people to spend more time in them.”

Research published by the National Institutes of Health says that not only do “shoppers more readily understand and form confident impressions about products with which they physically interact,” the materials used in the environment and packaging of a product influence perceptions: “[W]ater seems to taste better from a firm bottle than from a flimsy bottle.”

## TOUCH AND THE BRAIN

Texture and touch have a huge impact on how we understand our world and catalog our experiences. Compared to the other senses, unfortunately, there’s relatively little research on how we process this important channel of information.

We do know that in the brain touch and pressure are interpreted by the forward part of the parietal lobe, situated between the frontal lobe and the occipital lobe. The parietal lobe also manages taste and body awareness.

What’s surprising is that the touch-and-pressure region is larger than the vision area of the occipital lobe, as well as the speech, concentration, planning and problem-solving area of the frontal lobe. In fact, the only areas larger than touch-and-pressure are those that control motor control, body awareness, coordination, and reading and language.

Touch is also the first sense we acquire ontogenetically – as we’re first developing as organisms – and plays a huge role in putting our world into context for the rest of our lives.

Is it any surprise that our fingers get hungry when restricted to a diet of keyboards and glass?

## ADD INTEREST, NOT DISTRACTION

Materials used in a retail setting have a fine line to walk. The goal is to create displays and spaces that

are enticing and reinforce the store’s brand, but don’t overshadow or interfere with the merchandise.

Wilsonart’s Textured Solids program – durable laminates in solid colors with stone, wood or leather textures – is an elegant solution to this challenge.

“This combination allows designers to add interest without getting too busy,” says Sally Chavez, LEED AP ID+C, and senior designer with Wilsonart. “These materials won’t fight with what’s on display the way adding a woodgrain or stone pattern might.”

A monochromatic palette of surfaces with sophisticated woodgrain textures adds layers to a sophisticated interior without being distracting. Creative use of lighting selectively emphasizes the intensity of the textures.

“With Textured Solids you get the warmth and movement of wood without the busy visuals of woodgrain patterns,” says Chavez. “They offer designers another way to create layers of detail supporting the aesthetic they’re trying to establish. It’s reminiscent of the painted woods we’ve been seeing at upscale furniture exhibitions, but durable enough for retail applications.”

Textured Solids are available in a dozen different textures including several gloss levels, woodgrains, stones and fantasy designs and, depending on finish, may also include enhanced AEON™ scratch and scuff-resistance and even antimicrobial protection.

*For more information, visit [www.wilsonart.com/solids-with-texture](http://www.wilsonart.com/solids-with-texture).*

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