

**In the historic Scribner building which used to house the publishers of Hemingway and Scott Fitzgerald  
THE FIRST BENETTON FLAGSHIP STORE IN THE USA OPENS ON  
NEW YORK'S FIFTH AVENUE**

New York, 29 October 1996. Benetton opens a 13,000 square foot flagship store in the landmark Scribner Building on Fifth Avenue near 48th Street. Originally designed as the head office of the publishers of literary giants such as Hemingway, James, Stevenson and Scott Fitzgerald, the building has been renovated at a cost of \$4 million. The facade and interior have been restored to their original Beaux Arts style as designed by Ernest Flagg in 1912, who himself regarded the project as "*the best thing I ever did*".

UNITED COLORS  
OF BENETTON.

The unique and dramatic store space comprises three levels. The 4,850 square foot ground floor will display the complete United Colors of Benetton collection for men and women, the 012 children's range and Zerotondo for infants, as well as accessories and footwear. The Benetton Sportsystem range of sports wear and equipment will be available for the first time on the 4,300 square foot mezzanine. This includes Nordica ski boots, Prince and Ektelon rackets, Kästle skis and bikes, Rollerblade in-line skates, Killer Loop eyewear and Asolo mountain footwear. There will be a 1,200 square foot espresso bar located in the basement. The rest of the building will be used for offices.

This new flagship store in New York represents the latest stage of development for the Group's world-wide network. Alongside traditional points of sale, the focus is now on large megastores - the largest Benetton shop in the world recently celebrated its successful opening in London. The megastore is more than just a retail outlet, it is also a place for people to meet and get together. Benetton has always aimed to be more than a global group manufacturing and selling clothes; it has also promoted an open and international lifestyle, and the new megastores are an essential part of this concept.

The Scribner building, designed for the publishing house of Charles Scribner's & Sons, was listed by the Landmarks and Preservation Commission in 1982 as being of historic significance. Previously occupied by Rizzoli International from 1984 to 1988 and then by the Brentano bookshop, the ten-storey building combines the French neo-classical details characteristic of Ernest Flagg's style with a wide use of iron and limestone. The three floors of retail space have a vaulted ceiling with soft tan-coloured stuccoes and balconies along each side. The restoration work, carried out by the Phillips Janson Group, aimed to recreate the original design in its entirety, complete with all the materials, fixtures and colours: the cast-iron facade, the white oak flooring with its herring-bone design, the Caen stone, the ornate steel spiral staircases, the Carrara marble and the original glass floor.

## **Information Note 1: THE SCRIBNER BUILDING**

This ten-storey masterpiece, located at 597 Fifth Avenue, was designed in 1912 by the celebrated American architect Ernest Flag, brother-in-law to Charles Scribner, who owned the publishing house Charles Scribner's & Sons. Flag's aim was to make the building stand out architecturally by emphasising its monumental quality. "*If given a free hand*" he wrote in his diary on the 10th of March 1912, "*I am sure I can make this the building of my life*". The metal and glass frontage is one of the most original Flag designs in the world, with sections in perfect proportion orchestrated to form a geometrically harmonious whole. A metal grid dominates the first two floors and mezzanine, while a central arch brings the composition into perfect focus.

Flag decorated this monumental space, where the ceiling sometimes reaches a height of 30 feet, with a series of bays linking the store front to a mirrored wall so that the light reflected by the Fifth Avenue display windows creates a wonderful view of the interior. The glass and iron work on the two lower floors provide a focal point for the facade, and above these is the main part of the building consisting of seven floors faced with limestone. The third and ninth floors act as a "visual transition", distinguishing the central section from the base and from the two-storey mansard roof. An agreeable balance between solid and void is created through the juxtaposition of areas of dark iron work alongside others of light-coloured stone.

## **Information Note 2: RESTORATION WORK**

The restoration of the building, carried out by the Phillips Janson Group, required an investment of four million dollars. The main priority was to restore the interior of the Scribner Building to its original state after painstaking research to trace architectural descriptions of the building in its original condition. Writing in 1974, the celebrated art critic Henry Russell Hitchcock compared the interior of Scribner Building with that of Grand Central Station as: "*the grandest interior space that had been created in New York*".

One of the focal points concerned the restoration of the three staircases serving the showroom. Originally, two spiral stairwells faced each other from the two opposite sides of the room, while a third grand staircase was set at the rear. One of the two spiral staircases, which had been removed during the Scribner occupancy, has been completely restored with fine hand-forged detail so as to reflect its counterpart across the room. Another discovery was the beautiful Carrara marble floor hidden under the carpeting on the grand staircase, which has been restored to its original splendour.

At the top of the grand staircase is an area of glass brick flooring over 20 per cent of which had been damaged. It has been restored by the painstaking insertion of fine sheets of laminated glass, and the glass bricks are now once again brightly lit by a magnificent skylight above the rear area of the mezzanine. This source of natural light had been covered up by a coating of tar and black paint during the Second World War.

Phillips Janson also carried out a detailed paint analysis to determine the precise original colour and texture of the finish used on interior walls, columns and vaults. The study showed that more than ten layers of paint had been applied to the Caen stone finish over the past 80 years and that the paint had impregnated the porous stone, completely covering the original Beaux Arts effect. The finish has been restored throughout the building to recreate the effect of light created by alternating tan and white as originally intended.

The Phillips Janson Group, which carried out the restoration of the Scribner Building, was founded in 1979 in New York. It recently ranked 14th out of 100 in Interior Design Magazine's "Giants of Interior Design". Their most prestigious projects include Anne Klein Co., Louis Vuitton, Piaget, the "Today Show" studio, MSNBC and Newsweek magazine.

### **Information Note 3: THE SCRIBNER PUBLISHING HOUSE**

Founded in 1846, when it published Edwin Hall's *The Puritans and Their Principles*, Scribner's & Sons became one of the most important publishing houses in the US. In its first ten years the company distinguished itself as a specialist publisher of philosophical and theological works, which reflected the devout Presbyterian background of its founder Charles Scribner. In 1857 Scribner acquired the British book importer Bangs, Marvin & Co., and successfully published the first US edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, selling four times as many copies as in the UK. A few years later, in 1865, the company began publishing a literary review which went on to become famous under the name "Scribner's Magazine". On his death in 1871, the New York Times described Scribner as a publisher "*noted for his sagacity, accuracy, quickness and soundness of his judgements*", praising the character and high quality of the company's publications which so well reflected their publisher's maturity.

In 1878 Charles Scribner II changed the name of the company to Charles Scribner's & Sons and ceased activity as an importer, concentrating instead on building up a formidable body of authors with a particular emphasis on those from the US. The company moved its head office first to the highest area of Manhattan and later to 597 Fifth Avenue where it occupied the building designed by the celebrated architect Ernest Flagg. Scribner II also distinguished himself as a leading figure in the Movement for Authors' Rights in the US and as the founder of the American Publisher's Association. The company published work by many famous writers including Edith Wharton, Henry James, Robert Louis Stevenson, George Meredith, Rudyard Kipling, Theodore Roosevelt, Thomas Wolfe, Francis Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway was in fact recommended by Scott Fitzgerald, then at the height of his success, and in 1925 Hemingway met editor Maxwell Perkins who offered him a contract on Scribner's behalf for a book of stories. In the event, both editor and publisher were to remain with Hemingway for the rest of his life. Having tricked his way out of a previous option commitment to Horace Liveright, the following year Hemingway sold the story "*The Killers*" to Scribner's Magazine for US\$200: this was the first major work

ever to appear in a US periodical. In 1926 Scribner's also published the novel "*The Sun Also Rises*" (*Fiesta*) which brought the author both fame and successful sales.

Hemingway regarded Scribner as his best friend, and no-one else could make him change his mind about a text - persuading him, for example, to alter words considered unprintable. Scribner's grandson, Charles Scribner III, recalls that "*my grandfather combined the roles of publisher and intimate friend to a degree unprecedented and perhaps unsurpassed in modern publishing*". When Scribner II died in 1952, Hemingway wrote to his widow: "*Now my dear and good friend is gone, and there is no one to confide in nor trust nor make rough jokes with and I feel so terribly about Charlie being gone that I can't write anymore*".