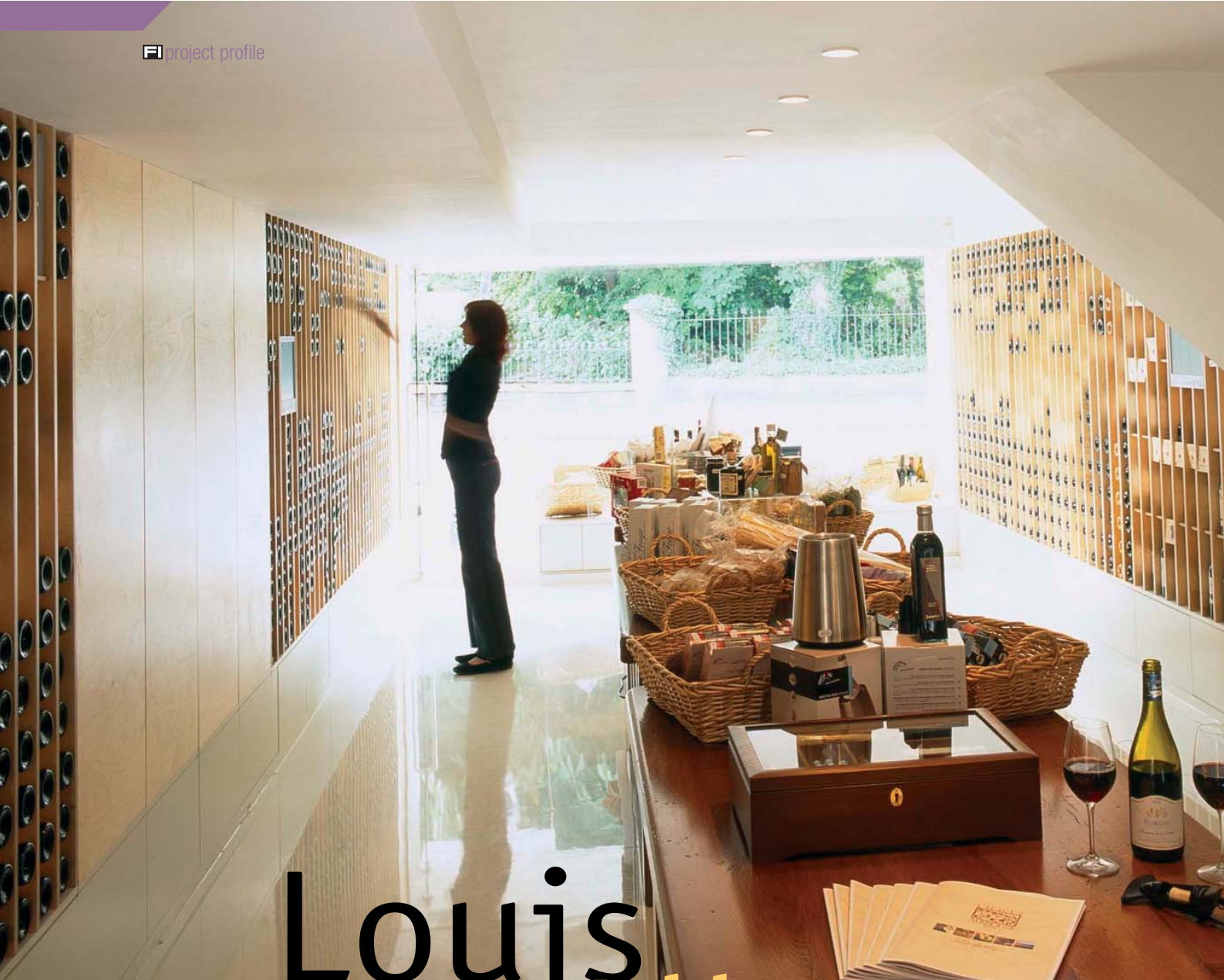


Louis Albrouze

Written by **Frank Coles**



Louis Albrouze

Striding confidently into the open
middle ground between the high brow
and the en-masse consumer,

Louis Albrouze enters Ireland's
rapidly expanding off-licence market
with a welcome redefinition of
expectations for the wine buyer.

Frank Coles

The premise presented to Odos Architects Darrel O'Donoghue and David O'Shea by their client introduced two key elements, the visual display and the knowledge of wine. The idea was to educate people through a method of displaying wine and encourage them to pay and take their studies home with them.

Presented with a leased unit, a protected structure with low and restrictive space between floor and ceiling, including two visual intrusions on either side of the shop floor, Odos had to return to their first principles of never overstating the obvious and aiming to leave the user asking, "How have they achieved it so simply?"

With a purist initial concept of two walls of wine, off-white floors, ceilings and walls that glow of red and white wine, they have created a calm stage, a symbiosis of artful display and wilful knowledge onto which the owner can place his product.



To take a cave-like space and transform it into a new wine-buying experience and the brand template for both its local one-off and future incarnations, was a welcome challenge achieved through the combined energies and sheer passion of Odos, their client and the contractors [CKC Ltd].

Darrell O'Donoghue explains, "Everything in this shop from the floor to the storage system we had to design from scratch. There were no available systems that we could employ." They ultimately created a display system that also acts as the light source, video wall and information unit, where because of the sheer variety of wine on offer the bottles also need to be able to stand alone and be noticed.

Taking their inspiration from Marlon Blackwell's 'Honighaus' in Cashiers, which stores pots of honey in the walls of a glass and steel storage unit, it was Odos' desire to recreate the calming atmosphere of a wall of honeyed hues by transmitting light through the wine bottles and using the product to display itself. When these units are lit from the back "they gather light and hold light into them in some remarkable way", creating prominent grooves of illumination where the white wine actually radiates a golden glow and the red wine creates striking bands of dark light to temper the environment.

As the light sources are hidden from view "the floor itself needed to be a light reflecting floor," clarifies David O'Shea, "to get as much light bouncing through the front elevation down to the inner depths. The floor has an almost mirror-like quality and then the walls themselves reflect artificial light."

The almost floor-to-ceiling and variable display can hold nearly 2000 bottles of wine either vertically or horizontally in purpose built



compartments made of acrylic that enhance the subtle glow of the lighting by bleaching the supports out of the equation and giving the bottles a hovering, floating quality.

A sense of space was crucial to the success of the design to counteract the low floor to ceiling. The shelving not only emphasises the vertical, creating the necessary sense of height but also merges with the bulkhead canopy to the right hand side of the shop and is visually connected to the courtyard. This visual play of the interior canopy makes the eye and the person believe that the shop as a unit is higher than it actually is.

The openness is further emphasised by the courtyard. "It is so unusual to go into an off-licence and see a courtyard or an external quality of any kind, because we're so obsessed with retail floor space." The purpose of the courtyard is to allow for wine-tasting at weekends and for people to smoke outside, "there is a whole lifestyle being sold here which is not just to do with wine, it is to do with how you live and how you perceive yourself living."

The concept's exterior broadcasts its desire to seduce the passer-by at night using colour and light. This is provided by a shop front that O'Donoghue wanted to make

disappear. "We wanted to bring the inside of the shop as much as possible to the outside – that's why everything is just glass." The seduction continues during the switch from street to shop, this creation of a pleasant transitional experience for the customer comes from using an uncluttered palette of materials and colours. A modern interpretation of the owner's taste for natural pigments and tones that avoids any danger of creating a brightly lit box.

Thought to be too early for Ireland, the consumer concept has so far had a positive reaction, while remaining true to the original ideas of the designers. **FI**

FI contacts

Architects - ODOS Architects • Main Contractor - Creedon & Kirke Construction Ltd • Shop Sign - The Tanner Sign Company • Clear Plastic Trays - Palmer Precision Mouldings & A Michell Moulding
 • Shop Lighting - ECI Lighting • Shop Canopy / Shopfront - Newry & Mayobridge Glass and Glazing • Card Holders - Liam Collins
 • Perspex backing sheets - AmariSecurity Screens - SecuriscreenUnit
 • Painting Specifications - Becker Acroma Ireland Ltd • Shopfront Ironmongery - Dorma Ireland