

"THEY ARE FAIRLY BORING CORPORATE BUILDINGS,

and it's our job to make them look pretty," says Universal Design Studio's

Hannah Carter Owers, describing the practice's ongoing project with fashion chain H&M.

The latest store, in Seoul, includes a faceted sculptural facade and a three-storey staircase for shoppers.

"When H&M first came to us, it was a really open brief," says Carter Owers. "They just wanted a series of iconic components with which they could brand their buildings. We weren't to worry too much about what was going on inside other than the common parts, as we tend to do concept staircases for them."

The 18m high stairwell has white powder-coated aluminium slats on the walls, with a graphic

pattern of tonal greys behind them, and a balustrade of white glass. "It's all about layering and trying to create a softened, undulating surface texture," says Carter Owers.

The facade is based on a design originally used for the Los Angeles store, Universal's first project for H&M and now an ongoing motif. "We started looking at icy Northern European landscapes and also soft structures, because we're usually given such hard architectural typologies," she says. "On the one hand it looks like an iceberg, but it also has that pleated fabric feel to it."

The aluminium is perforated with three different densities to give it a more three-dimensional effect, and at night this is further accentuated through tube lighting behind the panels.

ROSIE SPENCER



This picture The perforated aluminium facade is backlit at night Above left Aluminium slats in the three-storey stairwell mimic the facade with tonal greys and whites

➔ **MARGIN** When Ed Barber and Jay Oegerby, founders of Universal, met the H&M team in Sweden they were mystified as to who was "the boss". There was no hierarchy at the conference table and there were no titles on the business cards.

IMAGES: YUM SEUNG HOON