

The 2026 Shopping Shift: Why people are quietly walking away from malls

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By 2026, retail shifts beyond malls into experiential ecosystems, says Jimmy Mistry of Della Townships, as cities like Milan, London, Dubai, and New York inspire India's move toward integrated, culture-led shopping destinations blending community, design, leisure, and wellbeing for all.

By 2026, shopping habits have changed in ways that are subtle but decisive. Traditional malls are no longer the default choice they once were. Footfalls are steady at best, dwell time is shrinking, and consumers are increasingly indifferent to spaces that feel repetitive and disconnected from everyday life. This is not the end of physical retail, but it is the end of retail as a purely transactional experience.



At the heart of this shift is a growing desire for meaning, wellbeing, and engagement. Online platforms have already taken care of convenience and price comparison. What physical spaces now need to offer is emotion, discovery, and a sense of belonging. As Jimmy Mistry, Founder and Chairman of Della Townships, explains, "Redefining shopping has never been about retail alone. It has always been about experience."

The mall model, built around enclosed, inward-looking structures, is increasingly out of step with these expectations. Luxury malls, in particular, have become standardised and globally interchangeable. According to Mistry, "Luxury malls tend to be inward-looking and standardised," while high streets, despite their energy, often struggle with congestion, weak infrastructure, and lack of planning. Consumers are quietly choosing to spend less time in both.

In response, a new format is emerging — one that sits between malls and high streets. Mistry describes this as "not a vertical box, but a horizontal ecosystem."

Della Design District and Luxury retail Boulevards spaces are open, walkable, and centred on the public realm, with landscaped boulevards, shaded courtyards, water features, cafés, art, and cultural spaces. Retail becomes experiential and educational rather than purely transactional, allowing people to engage deeply with design, craftsmanship, and ideas. "Design has to be felt, understood, and lived," he notes. Unlike conventional malls or fragmented high streets, this is a purpose-built, culture-led ecosystem where design, leisure, hospitality, and lifestyle converge with intent — curated for immersive experiences and enduring relevance rather than transactional retail.

Global cities such as Milan, London, Dubai, and New York have long embraced this approach, but India lacked a single, coherent destination where design, culture, and commerce could truly converge. Mistry recalls repeatedly asking, "Why doesn't India have a place like this?" By 2026, as Indian consumers become more globally exposed, that absence has become more apparent.

This shift is closely tied to the rise of integrated luxury townships. India, Mistry believes, is "moving decisively towards self-sustained, integrated luxury townships where quality of life is embedded into the master plan from the outset." In these developments, shopping districts serve as cultural and social centres, seamlessly integrated with homes, workplaces, hospitality, and leisure, ensuring daily relevance rather than weekend-only activity.

Wellbeing and inclusivity are central to this new thinking. Open-air promenades, blue and green zones, quiet gardens, and pet- and senior-friendly design reflect changing priorities around health, balance, and community. As Mistry puts it, "The public realm must take precedence," transforming shopping environments into civic and cultural anchors.

The mall is not disappearing — it is simply being replaced by spaces that feel more human, open, and connected to how people actually want to live in 2026.