

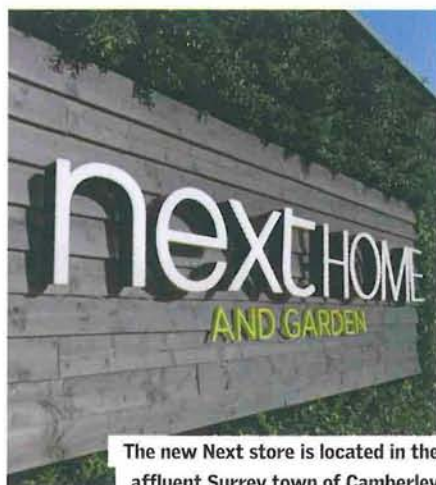


## THE NEXT BIG THING

*Next's Home and Garden format is taking off. John Ryan visits the retailer's Camberley store to find out the secret of its success*

**N**ext's Christmas results revealed the retailer as a high street stalwart. Sales rose 11.9% between November 1 and December 24, and over the Christmas period the retailer stated it expected sales to rise between 3% and 7% during 2014. This was at a time when others were reporting flat or a drop in sales.

Next is one of those retailers that seems to have the uncanny knack of getting it right year after year. And just when it might seem there is nothing else that can be done, it somehow manages to improve margins, grow its top line and add new product ranges. And it keeps improving the look of its stores too.



The new Next store is located in the affluent Surrey town of Camberley

It does so with the help of Dalziel and Pow, the London-based design consultancy Next has worked with for a few years. Concrete evidence of this collaboration could be seen at Shoreham-by-Sea in Sussex more than two years ago when the first Next with a garden centre opened, as well as a DIY department and a home improvement area. At the time, it was hailed as a major step forward for Next. That was then, however, and for those following the progress of this retailer, Next's big thing is probably Camberley.

Camberley, for those unfamiliar with the Surrey town, is the home of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and is part of a generally affluent urban agglomera- ▶

tion that stretches for miles, taking in places such as Farnborough, Fleet and Bagshot. As such, it has a large catchment and this may be one of the reasons why it is now home to a Next Home and Garden store which, at 56,000 sq ft, is not only the third of its kind that the retailer has opened, but the biggest.

The store is at Camberley's Meadows retail park, a development that is some distance from the town centre and close to the M3, which funnels shoppers in its direction.

The first thing potential customers will see is a totem on a roundabout advertising the Next store. This stands close to the entrance to the Meadows and apart from the fact that the nearby Tesco Extra is highly visible, visitors could be forgiven for thinking the Next store is the dominant reason for driving into the complex.

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And to an extent it is. Stand in the car park in front of the store and the view of the building – which in a former life was a Homebase – is imposing. A two-storey plate glass edifice with grey stone cladding surrounded by red brick is coupled with massive signage on its upper reaches that shouts 'Next Home and Garden'. It would be impossible to miss and to judge from the number of

parked cars in front of it on a Thursday afternoon, few do so.

#### SHOP-IN-SHOPS

The interior of the store is very large, but it has been artfully divided up in order to negate this impression and to ensure that each of the interior vistas has its own character and works as a discrete shop-in-shop. Towards the front of the shop there is a double-height atrium, flooded by natural daylight, and this is where much of the cash-taking takes place.

It also serves as a runway along which the various merchandise departments are organised. This means about half of the ground floor is devoted to womenswear, a key category for Next. This is densely merchandised across the whole area, with the exception of the footwear space, which features circular banquettes in the mid-shop and which, being at one end of the building, is also naturally illuminated.



Pastel tones and attention to detail are apparent in the garden centre section ▶



*The Home area would not look out of place as a discrete store selling upscale homewares*

The payment areas have a warm yet sophisticated feel

Walk into any of the various womenswear 'shops', divided by walls that come to an end towards their rear, where there is another cash counter, and the shopper could actually be in a standalone Next fashion store. There are also men's and kids' shop-in-shops on this floor and it is a measure of how effective the store design is that none of this conflicts with the DIY and home improvement area, which is also on the ground floor.

Yet the Home area would not look out of place as a discrete store selling upscale homewares – the sort of place where shoppers can opt for a fridge or kitchen and then choose from a wide range of wallpapers, paints in tasteful plain metal cans, or floor coverings. This in turn leads to the outdoor garden centre part of the store.

**JANUARY PASTEL BLUES**

In January, garden centres can look and feel a little bleak, and the range of plants and suchlike is likely to be pretty limited. While this is the case in the garden part of the Camberley Next



Each section is kept separate but there is a sense of a unified whole



**NEXT, CAMBERLEY**

**Location** The Meadows, London Road, Camberley  
**Size** 56,000 sq ft  
**Outside area** 5,000 sq ft  
**Design** Dalziel and Pow  
**Number of Next Home and Garden stores** Three  
**The next Home and Garden to open** York, April 2014

The store's impressive glass frontage makes an impression on shoppers



*This is a very good-looking store and one that makes shopping a pleasure rather than something to be endured*

Home and Garden, the sheds, outhouses and pergolas in their faded pastel colours make an impression nonetheless. It is a world away from the normal run-of-the-mill garden centre offer that can be seen elsewhere.

Upstairs, the store has bathrooms, bedrooms and children's bedroom room-sets. Once more, it's a matter of not giving the shopper the sense of wide open spaces, while preserving the feel of a unified whole. There is also a Costa coffee shop that provides views over the rest of the retail park and which enables shoppers to take the weight off their feet when they have finished perusing this huge store.



All of which tells the observer all they need to know about why Next is one of retail's winners. This is a very good-looking store and one that makes shopping a pleasure rather than something to be endured. Couple all of this with a sure-footed management style that controls

stock well and which keeps its head when others are losing theirs, and the reason for its success is not too hard to ascertain. The Next store design story is about continuous improvement and refinement, rather than any kind of massive sporadic overhaul. It works. ●