



The très chic shops of Paris

The City of Light is home to a renaissance in visual merchandising at the moment. John Ryan visits the shining examples

All cities have their moments as far as retail good looks are concerned and at present it appears to be Paris's turn.

A couple of new stores have opened, the Uniqlo outpost in the fashionable Le Marais district is probably the most notable (see Store of the Week, *Retail Week*, May 16), and a handful of shops are showing off refurbishments, but it is the visual merchandising that stands out in many places.

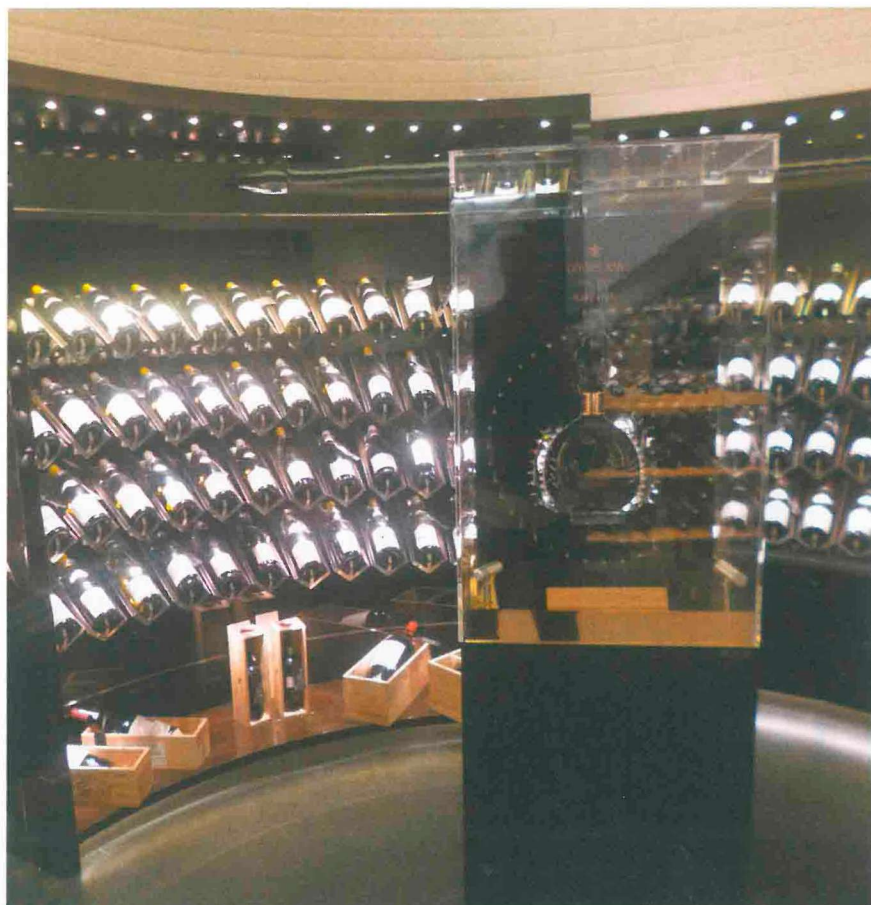
Whether it's the luxury chic of the

Rive Gauche's grande department store dame, Le Bon Marché, or the simplicity of the linen promotion at Merci, there is a lot to look at and, for retail novelty seekers, a lot to talk about.

Paris is often vaunted as the home of fashion, but there is more to the city than a series of stores offering glad rags. The visual merchandising fraternity (and sorority) appear to have pulled out all the stops across all sectors in a way that has not been apparent for several years.



For more pictures of the stores in Paris and more store galleries go to retail-week.com/stores



La Grande Epicerie

Across the road from the main Le Bon Marché department store is La Grande Epicerie (part of Le Bon Marché, but discrete from it), a Parisian deli selling everything that the well-heeled Left Bank resident might feel inclined to buy when having a gathering of friends.

The three-floor space was completed at the beginning of this year and has been a long time in the making. Now it features a 'Cave' (wine cellar) in the basement, complete with a temperature-controlled, glass-fronted displays, the main ground floor room and a salon de thé upstairs.

The main action is on the ground floor and here it feels as if a Jamie Oliver shop has collided with the John Lewis food hall on Oxford Street and become something better (albeit much pricier) than either.

All of this and the opportunity to use hand-held implements for 'le self-scanning' make this one of the highest profile store refurbishments in the city.

Le BHV/Marais

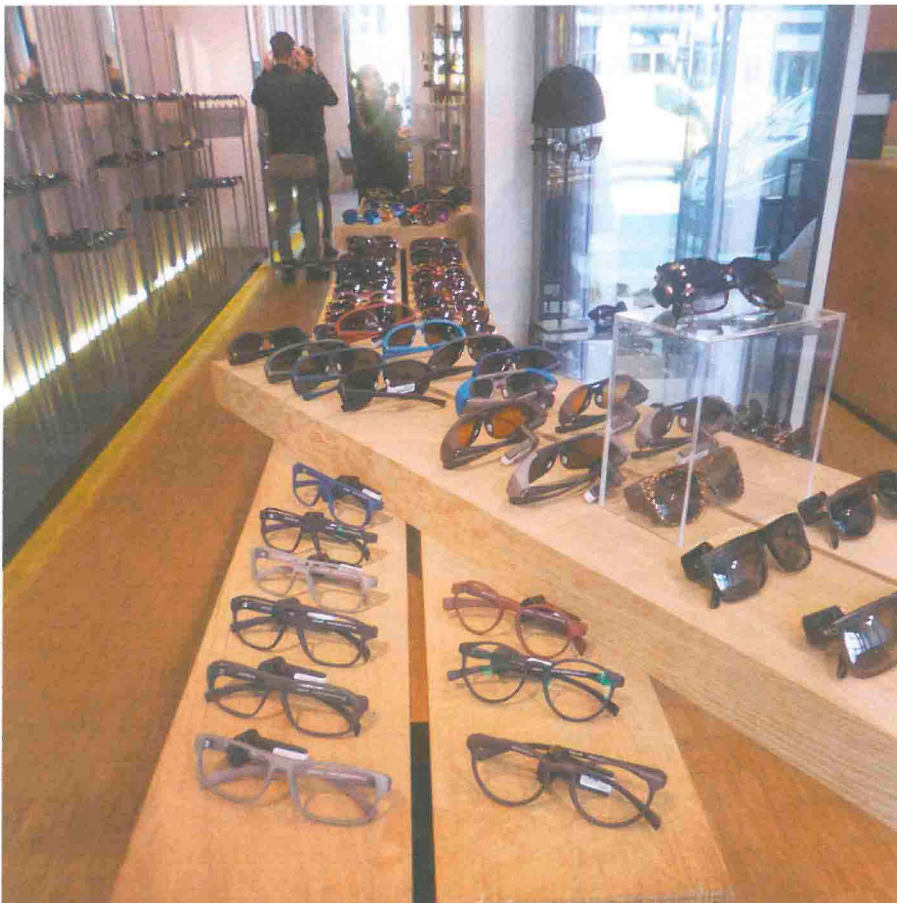
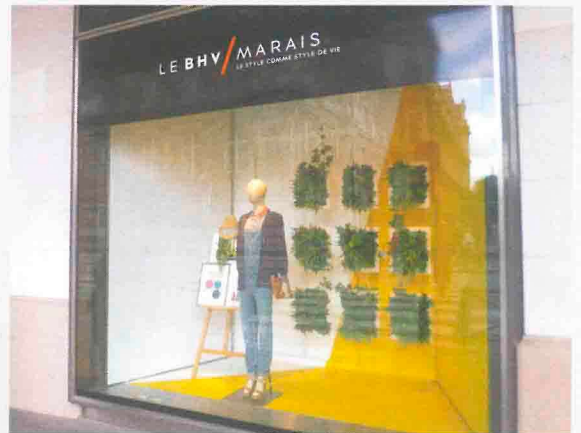
The eight-floor department store has recently undergone a top-to-toe refurbishment that has taken this Parisian retail landmark, owned by Groupe Galeries Lafayette, and turned it from being something of an also-ran into a must-visit on the edge of the modish Marais district.

Formerly, the store was perhaps best known for its hardware department, and the basement continues to be a destination for those in search of anything from heavy-duty casters to superglue, but now displayed in a manner that makes DIY exciting. This is probably because the stated aim of the store makeover is to appeal to the 'bobos' – the bohemian bourgeois – and making a very large DIY department, in the middle of a city, attractive is part and parcel of this.

A broader clue to what lies within however is provided by the large shop windows and the strapline above the main entrance. This reads "Le style comme style de vie" (style as lifestyle) and although each window carries a different category, each also has well-dressed mannequins aiming to reinforce the link between style and lifestyle, whether it's paint or pot-plants.

This promise is made good in-store with everything from a temporary Samsung shop-in-shop that places an emphasis as much on fashion as technology, to displays of brushes and cleaning utensils on a pillar, arranged to give them appeal. Each floor has a series of 3D graphics that take the stock that is on display and turn it into something that is more than the sum of the parts.

Work is still being done on the store, but it is definitely worth a visit.



Marc Le Bihan

When it comes to selling glasses, optical or for protection from the sun, there are generally two methods.

The first involves a semi-clinical approach where white-clad assistants conspire with a white environment to foster the sense that you have wandered into some kind of medical facility.

The other involves fashion – generally sunglasses – and is part of a larger accessories offer. The reason for this is straightforward. Displaying small objects in a large space is one of the stiffer tests facing a visual merchandiser and in the case of glasses, offering the security of a medical environment acts as an anchor for the offer.

Not so at Marc Le Bihan, a shop selling eyewear. Here, there is no sense of the medical and the environment may be about fashion, but it is solely focused on glasses.

In-store this translates as railway sleeper-style display planks in the mid-shop and glasses displayed on narrow metal tables that nestle against the wall around the perimeter. More is more in this store and the whole concentration is less on brand – no brand point-of-sale is deployed – and more on a broad choice. A small concession is paid to traditional display with hats on poles, each of which has a pair of glasses beneath it in an eyewear for the invisible man form.

This is a long, narrow shop and the display equipment has been kept low, allowing views through the windows right to the back...providing the eyes are up to it.



Le Bon Marché

Head down into the basement of this Rive Gauche department store institution and the gallery-like men's department may be about being Parisian slick, but it is also about persuading men to be active.

For a while now, if you want to appeal to the active but design-aware male consumer then the answer seems to be put a bike, or bikes, in your store. In this respect, Le Bon Marché is no exception, although it is difficult not to suspect that the bikes on display are considerably more about form than function. The same is probably true of the surfboards, skateboards and leather bike saddles that fill the space close to one of the escalators.

The objects in question have either been mounted on the white walls or given pride of place on chest-high white plinths in a manner that wouldn't be out of place in the Classical Civilisations section of the British Museum.

And much of this has little to do with the business of selling, for example, Paul Smith or Saint Laurent clothing. It is about mood creation and on this reckoning, the refurbishment that has given visitors to the menswear department something new to look at must be reckoned a win-some success.



Merci

The homewares and fashion store beloved of the arty set found around the northern part of the Marais has a linen promotion at present that seems to have sufficient pull to make shoppers stand patiently in line for a considerable period on a mid-week day. The standout feature here is the linen sleeping bags, three of which have been attached to the high wall on the right-hand side at the front of the shop.

And in each sleeping bag a monochrome cut-out of a sleeping woman helps the viewer to work out what is being looked at. This 2D/3D approach is given full expression on the floor in front of the wall display. Here, beds with mosquito nets around them each have a linen sleeping bag, to show how things might be in a steamy tropical reality. And the headboard of each bed is a picture of a foreign country, far from Paris and again creating the sense of going somewhere exotic (and expensive).

This is a very simple series of displays, but on the day of visiting, it was hard not to stop and stare.