

Shop windows in the frame

If you want to grab the shopper's gaze, putting a frame around the merchandise is a striking way of doing so.
John Ryan reports

It's probably a truism of visual merchandising that if you want to create impact you need to focus the viewer's gaze.

Stores that try to put a lot of things in the window are fine, but there needs to be a reason for the shopper to look at individual pieces of merchandise.

There are quite a few ways of doing this. At present, retailers seem to be fixated on framing.

By its very nature, a shop window acts as a frame. However, many are so large that shoppers cease to look at them as a frame, staring instead straight at the scene within.

This is fine in principle, but really

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does not lend the required degree of focus that will result in a decision being made to head into the store.

Physical frames act almost as windows within windows and for fashion retailers in particular they are an extremely effective way of ensuring that what is on view gets the requisite attention.

They are also a good way of taking the very small, putting it in the relatively large context of a shop window and ensuring that it doesn't get lost.

And in-store the same applies – frame the stock and it will get looked over, rather than overlooked – surely the purpose of any display, anywhere.



River Island, Oxford Street

Frames that are actually opening and closing doors are used by River Island at its branch at the west end of Oxford Street.

Two of the windows use the device. The left-hand one features a female mannequin disappearing and then reappearing from behind a panelled fuchsia door, on the handle of which is a hotel-style label that reads "Too fabulous to be disturbed".

The window to the right of the main entrance also features a door – this time it's white and reveals a male figure. It too has a label that states, somewhat more prosaically, "In the pub".

There are other items in the windows, but such is the power of this simple idea that, for most shoppers, it is the doors that will be looked at. They also demonstrate the fact that movement, as well as a frame, rarely fails to attract intrigued glances when it is part of a window display.

The other point is that this kind of thing is also replicable in other locations – surely essential for any high-street chain.





H&M Oxford Circus

It is frequently remarked that an open shop entrance acts as an additional window and there can be little doubt that this is the case at the H&M flagship on Oxford Street.

H&M, much like Zara, has used mid-shop mannequin groupings as a way of attracting attention for some time.

The display that stands watch at the entrance to this shop is no exception to the tendency, except that frames have been added to the mix. And rather than using the white frames, which have merchandise messages and prices on them, to physically frame the individual mannequins, they have been placed around the group – in front of them, above them, between them and beneath them.

There are even a number that frame nothing at all and which have been used, in effect, as props rather than any kind of real framing device. Frames, it would appear, can act as eye-grabbers in their own right.



Loft, Marylebone High Street

Upscale French casual clothing retailer Loft has taken a very simple approach to frames in its Marylebone High Street branch.

There are just two windows in this store and both feature hexagonal frames to highlight particular pieces of merchandise. In the large left-hand window three frames are suspended, one of which contains a white T-shirt. In the normal run of things, a single T-shirt wouldn't be that special, but the frame makes the garment.

The same is true of the right-hand window, which has just one hexagonal frame, this time lit by plain fluorescent tubes and with a black jacket in its centre. As an exercise in monochrome glamour this takes some beating and is one of the more arresting visual merchandising images in the area.

It also works, as so many designer brands tend to, by taking a simple thing and leaving it that way.



John Lewis, Oxford Street

In the windows that run along the side of the John Lewis flagship there is a display of cases that can be taken on board a plane as hand luggage.

Potentially, this could actually make the business of watching and waiting for a kettle to boil seem really rather interesting. That has been averted by the simple device of applying decals of airline seats to the glass and then putting a plinth behind each one, on which the cases can sit. Information about which airline will accept the particular piece of luggage that is resting on the faux seat makes this into a display that demands to be inspected.

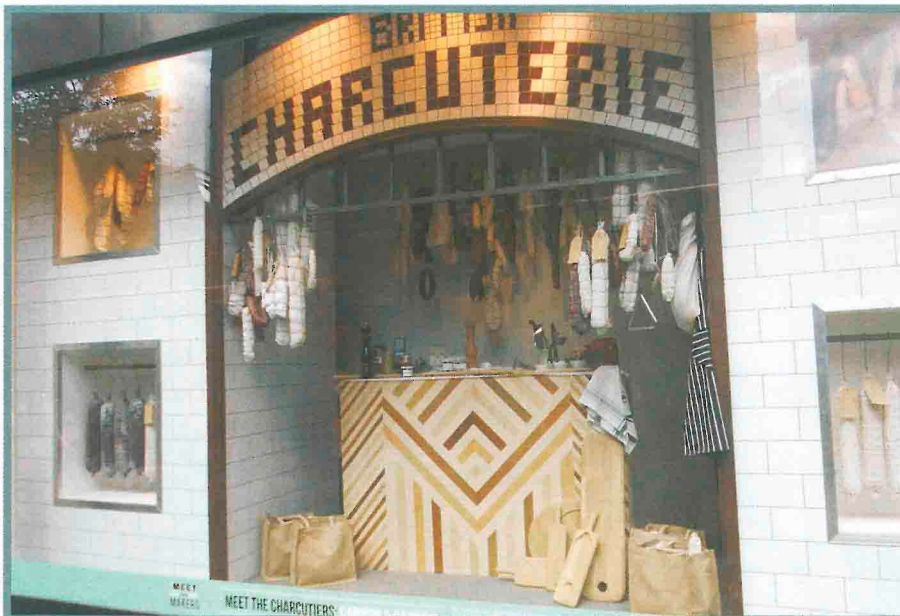
Using the seats as frames for the cases is an obvious link, but it is well done. To complete the picture, the back wall of the window has been turned into a series of aircraft windows. There is nothing fancy about what has been done here, but this scheme will be inspected by shoppers.

John Lewis, Oxford Street

Perhaps it is not fair to put two windows from one store in a single article, but John Lewis merits this. Part of the front-of-store display features a window with a Mondrian-like frame where instead of slabs of colour there are products and pictures of products.

A freestanding retro light-box that looks not unlike an elongated mid-1970s TV carries the legend "The Edit". This has the attraction for onlookers of making them realise that the objects that are on display have been selected, even though this is implicit in every window scheme – stating the fact just makes it more compelling.

Once more, through the use of frames, this time strung together to create a network as a backdrop for the window, a scheme has been created that turns heads. It is also a measure of how far John Lewis's visual merchandising has changed over the last few years that it can merit two mentions for two almost entirely different windows in the same branch.



Selfridges, Oxford Street

The *grande dame* of Oxford Street department stores can generally be relied upon to come up with something interesting. One of the better windows along its vast frontage at present is one that takes the idea of British charcuterie as a showstopper. Quibbling about the idea of 'charcuterie' to which the word 'British' has been applied (surely 'British Cured Meats', non?) aside, this window uses a shop front within a shop front as its starting point.

It's a somewhat self-referential way of creating a visual stir, but it works and is certainly diverting. As well as the tiled faux shop window itself, it is worth noting the four additional frames (each filled with cured meats) that have been created.

Creating windows that recall stores of yesteryear is a fairly well trodden path but this example shows the enduring power of the motif, as well as illustrating how frames can be something other than rectangles for visual merchandising purposes.