

STORES

The retail offer in Birmingham holds its own against other cities.

John Ryan reports

Birmingham's s

Birmingham had something of a renaissance when the completely remodelled Bullring was unveiled and Selfridges began trading from a hubcap-studded blob at the far end of the new shopping centre.

That was just over a decade ago however, and in the intervening years things have been pretty quiet as far as the centre of Britain's second city is concerned.

Indeed, there was a point when the Selfridges store began to look a little sorry for itself and it seemed almost as if it had been neglected in favour of the revamp that was taking place in the retailer's Oxford Street flagship.

Yet visit today and this is a store that has been given a new lease of life. And it is entirely in tune with its location.

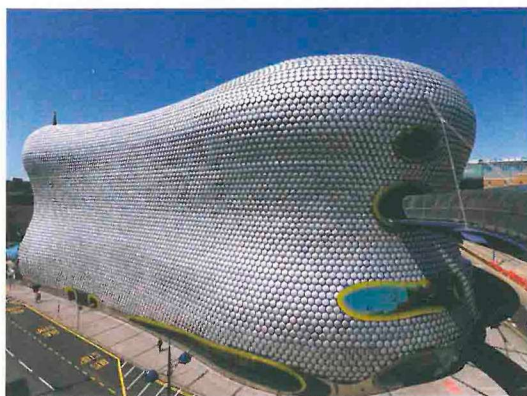
The same is true of many of the retailers that have made their Birmingham debuts over recent years. American value fashion retailer Forever 21 has gone from being a Bullring behemoth operating over two floors and a mezzanine to trading from a single floor, and now Victoria's Secret is on the way in the space formerly occupied by Mamas & Papas.

Change has in fact been taking place across central Brum and a brisk walk around the shops suffices to show just how much has happened and continues to take place.

At some point in 2015 yet to be confirmed, the face of central Birmingham will change once more as the redeveloped Pallasades, the shopping centre that sits above Birmingham's New Street station, is reborn.

The centre will comprise 200,000 sq ft of retail space, providing space for 40 retailers. It will be anchored by a futuristic-looking 250,000 sq ft John Lewis, which will be the retailer's biggest branch outside the Capital.

This is a city that has morphed over the past decade from a place that people visited either because they had to or because they needed to change at New Street, into a place where people sit out sipping lattes. For so long the butt of many average jokes, Birmingham is worth a retail visit.



SELFRIDGES



BULLRING

Work completed in 2003, 161 tenants

Size 1,363,787 sq ft

Ambience Modern and airy

PAVILIONS

Sold in 2014 to Primark, with M&S and H&M as the current anchors

Size 250,000 sq ft

Ambience Tired and needing a facelift

The future for

Birmingham A full-line John Lewis will open in New Street in 2015

Selfridges in the Bullring has one of the most arresting exteriors in the UK and its interior now matches it after a recent revamp

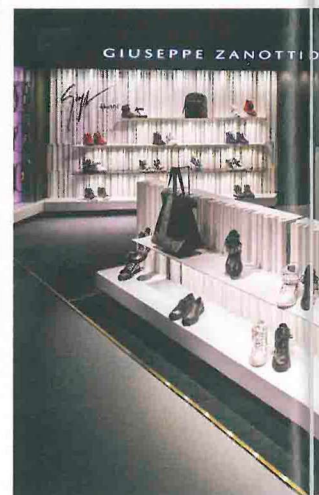
Selfridges, Bullring

The department store used to have tired resin floors with holes in them where it had decided to try a new fixtures layout, leaving the evidence of past mistakes for all to see.

That was the reality of Selfridges in Birmingham. It was a store that had the most eye-catching exterior of any shop in the UK, but which had failed to keep faith with this promise when shoppers stepped across its threshold. Following the recent completion of the menswear revamp on the store's second floor, such things are mere memories however and this is once more an anchor

department store for the Bullring worthy of the name. Enter the shop at the lowest level and the food offer occupies the whole of the front as far as the eye can see with Ed's Easy Diner, Pret, Rossopomodoro and a mid-floor island that is home to a sushi offer.

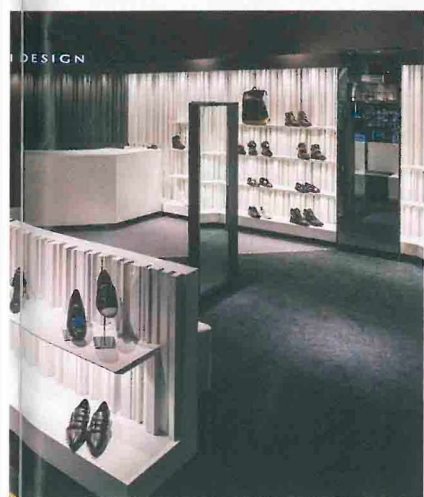
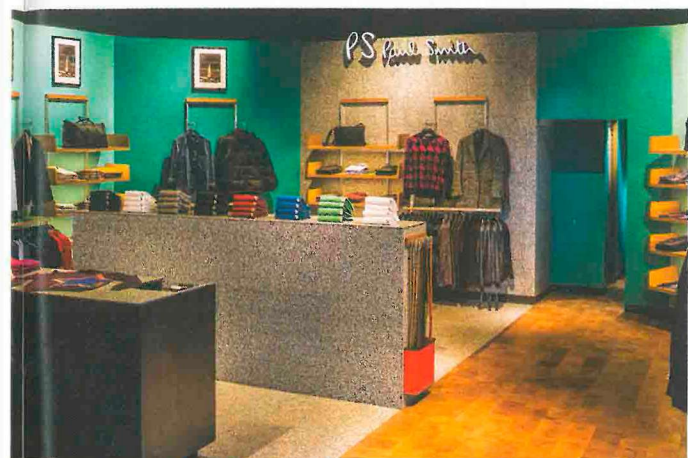
There is also a wineshop and a confectionery department tagged on. In total, this is a casual dining floor with elements of a food hall bolted on. It is almost completely different from what is done in the London store and to judge from the number of early morning shoppers taking a break, it is making money.



To see pictures and videos of store interiors go to Retail-week.com/stores



stand-out shops



OASIS



But it is the upper levels, menswear and womenswear, that really look new. It is clear that there has been a brand realignment on the second floor, Destination Men, and the offer is predominantly at the better end of the mid-market, rather than designer (which is where the London store is positioned), although the design-led PS Paul Smith area does look good.

The visual merchandising is arresting as well, with the denim area in particular demanding that shoppers take a look thanks to jean-clad pairs of legs that have been suspended around mid-floor pillars or arranged on metal grids

“Windows feature mannequins posed amid dodgem cars and waltzers”

with pink neon lights to add drama.

The display jeans overhead and silver cans of paint with blue labels bearing brand names ensure that the message hits home.

On one of the womenswear floors items such as a freestanding spiral staircase, used to show off LK Bennett shoes, and mid-floor light boxes with monochrome images add to the impression of luxury, but at a within-reach price.

The window display that divides the two entrances on the upper level is worth a mention as well. Employing the strapline ‘Paul Smith Master

of Inspiration’, it uses wedges of black and white card to mimic the light and shade created by a spotlight.

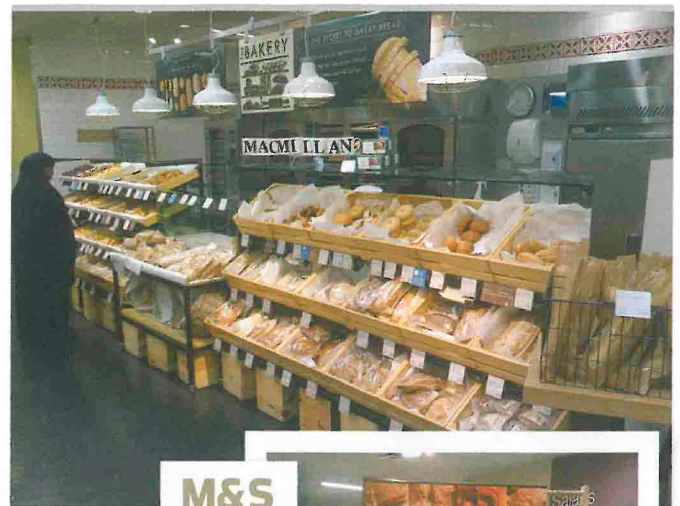
It is simple but very effective and symptomatic of the manner in which the store has been given an overhaul that will pull shoppers through the doors.

Oasis, Bullring

Mid-market fashion retailer Oasis has long been known for its visual merchandising and its latest scheme, which takes its cue from fairground rides and carousels, is no exception.

The windows feature mannequins posed amid dodgem cars and waltzers

STORES



DR MARTENS



M&S



▶ and striped curtains create the appropriate stage-cum-circus reveal.

Inside the store the theme is picked up, with a mannequin sporting a skirt that is a carousel and graphics around the wall that continue the idea.

This is a simple and easily replicable series of displays, essential for a chain the size of Oasis, but one that makes the shopper stop and take a second glance.

Dr Martens, Bullring

Dr Martens boots are must-have fashion items for the indie youth crowd and 'keeping it real' is part of the brand's appeal.

Perhaps with that in mind, the window of this store features pictures of bands many people may not have heard of and a pair of mannequins wearing nothing other than beanies and Doc Martens boots.

The mannequins are set against a faux brick wall, to strike the appropriate 'street' note, but what really commands attention is the manner

"The display by H&M is among the most show-stopping in the city"

in which their modesty has been preserved by every inch of their surface being covered with photographs and band logos. This is low-cost and perfectly in tune with the brand's back-to-basics ethos.

H&M, The Pavilions

The Pavilions is the shopping centre that plays second fiddle to the Bullring and since its purchase by Primark this year – a Primark flagship is to open in 2015 – it has become something of wasteland with many empty units and just H&M and M&S keeping things ticking over.

That said, the display by H&M on the centre's ground floor level is

among the most show-stopping in the whole of the city and it is very rudimentary.

Creating a stir from a bunch of mannequins with outsize knitted heads and hands and with eyes that look like something from a 1950s B movie is original. It also captures the seasonal change well, reminding onlookers of the need for new, warmer fabrics as the nights draw in.

M&S, The Pavilions

If there is one thing that has been consistent at Marks & Spencer over the past few years it has been the almost relentless advance of its food offer, whether as standalone Simply

Food stores or as part of an overall offer in large branches.

In central Birmingham, the food hall is subterranean but still manages to engage, thanks to point of sale material that other grocery retailers could learn a thing or two from.

Two examples in this store stand as evidence of what can be done, both with 'Adventures in...' straplines. The first is 'Adventures in Fairness', which is coupled with 'Adventures in Discovery'. This is a mid-shop display in which Fair Trade products are merchandised alongside products from less familiar cuisines.

And just a few metres away is the 'Adventures in Variety' display, which takes the familiar and makes it unfamiliar by offering large numbers of variants on a single item.

The displays are part of an online campaign and are also referenced by the current TV advertisement. As a way of tying together a promotion that appears in a variety of media, this is a strong performance. ■