

STORES

Steamer docks a

There are 32 Steamer Trading Cookshops altogether, including the one that has just opened in Bluewater. For the retailer, it is its first mall branch. Steamer Trading has been around since 1985 when the first shop opened, but things didn't really begin to simmer until the turn of the millennium and since then two or three stores a year have opened.

Steamer Trading Cookshop has always operated from cathedral cities, meaning that it has benefitted from generally well-heeled local populations for whom the latest fads in cookware and food-based entertaining are, well, meat and two veg.

New mezzanine

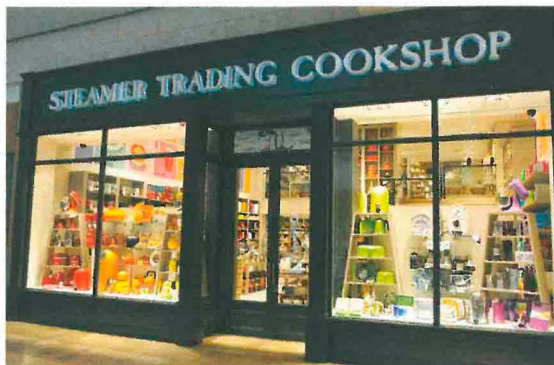
Ben Phillips, the retailer's managing director and son of husband and wife founders Liz and David, says that the launch in Bluewater is a natural progression: "Bluewater is a bit like one of the towns that we trade in. People come here from the surrounding area, in the same way as they come in from the villages that are found around the towns that we trade in."

The store is on the mall's upper level and occupies around 2,800 sq ft with a 2,000 sq ft ground floor and an 800 sq ft mezzanine level.

Phillips says that the fit-out has been rather more complex than might at first appear to be the case: "We actually lowered the floor on the mezzanine level to give greater height on that level."

That means the 8.2 ft floor-to-ceiling height is the same on the mezzanine level as on the floor immediately beneath it. This gives a pleasing symmetry, which may not be consciously noticed by shoppers, but which might be obvious had it not been done and as Phillips notes: "That was the major cost."

The standout feature for the first-time visitor is the staircase and the column immediately behind it. The staircase occupies centre stage in this store and the column that backs it is a structure composed of pigeonholes from top to bottom. Each has been



STEAMER TRADING COOKSHOP, BLUEWATER

Opened October 10

Size 2,800 sq ft

Floors Ground and mezzanine

Store design Raylian

Ambience Modern rustic

filled with a brightly coloured piece of kitchen equipment or something for the dining table.

Phillips says that it was tricky to merchandise this and a quick glance says that keeping it looking this way will also be a challenge, but to judge from the rest of the shop, the staff are up to the task.

Lifestyle offer

Also worth noting is the fact that in

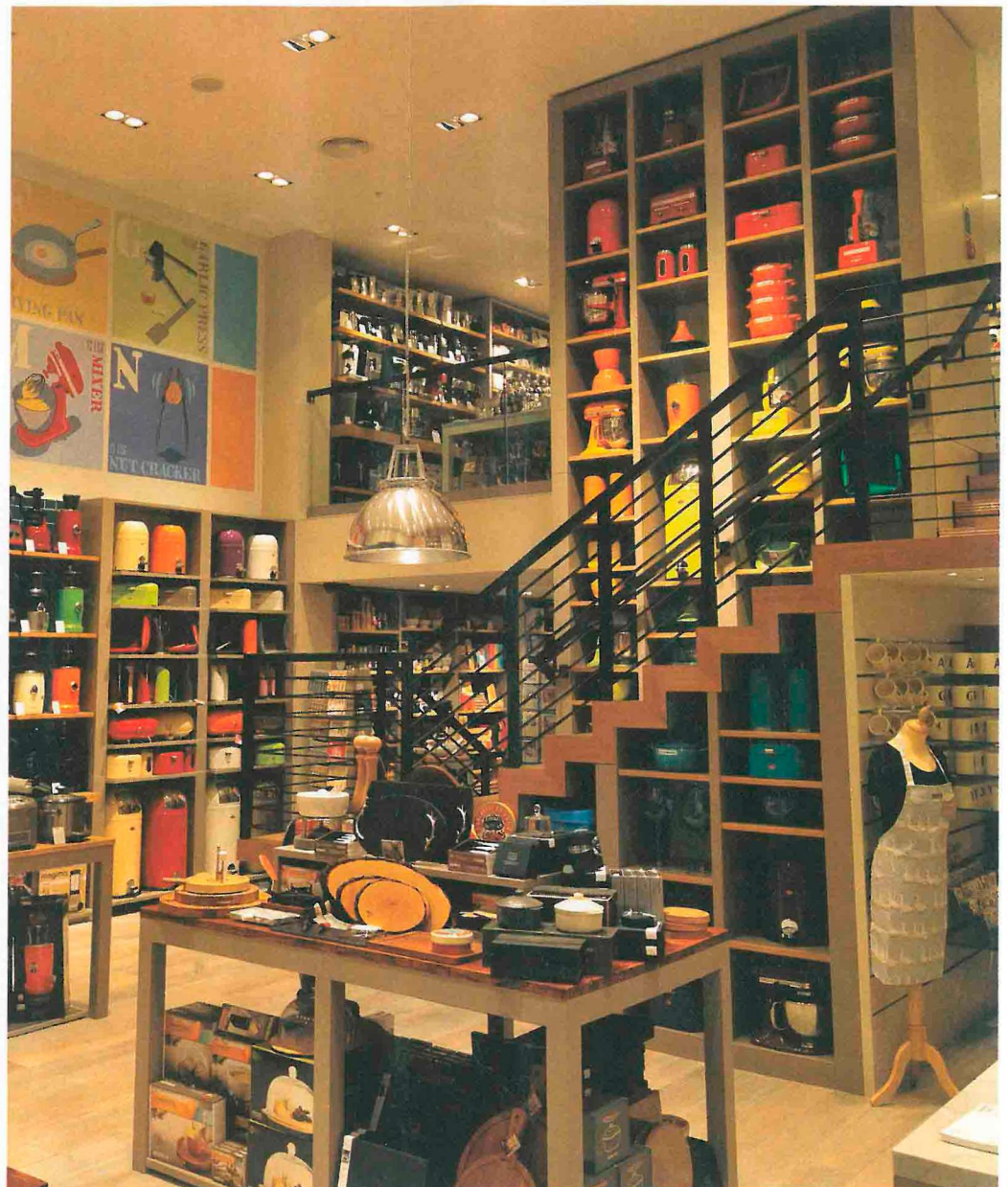
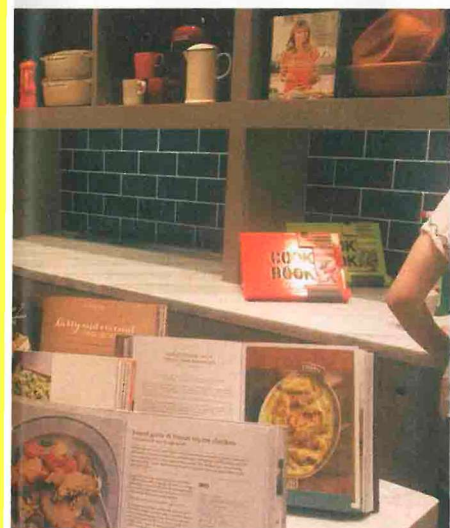
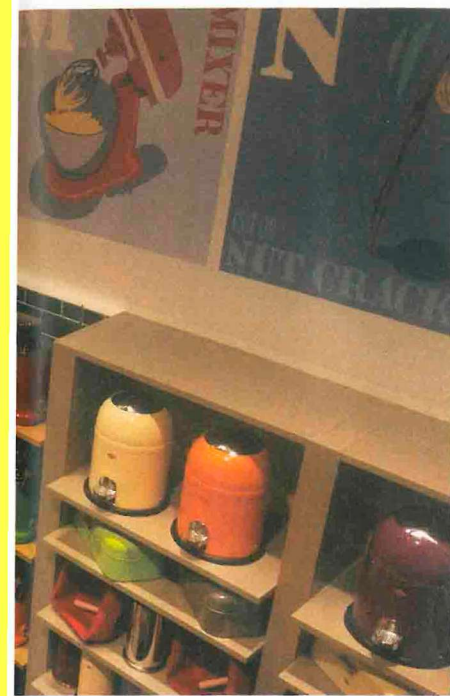
its previous life, this store was a Dwell and the staircase was set along the right-hand perimeter wall. It was "totally uninviting", according to Phillips, who says that the idea for the central staircase and column was "taken from Uniqlo", which has a store in Bluewater and that "nothing else in the centre looks like this".

Once the shopper has moved away from the central feature, the rest of the front of the shop is worth a look.

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t Bluewater



The bulk of the mid-shop presentation is on tables and the front left-hand perimeter wall is taken up by food mixers, food processors and liquidisers of the kind that involve parting with substantial amounts of money.

Phillips says that while the price for one of the mixers may be just shy of £400, the expectation is that the machines will last longer than the owner. "You'd be quite happy to spend £500 on a phone and then if it works for

Steamer Trading Cookshop has always operated from cathedral cities

five years and a new model is on the market, you'll be happy to do the same again. With mixers it's a one-off purchase, so you have to be quite careful about the mix of stock that you have if you are a cookshop."

The mid-shop is taken up by a lifestyle offer with everything from chopping boards to salt and pepper dispensers, but all carefully colour-themed and visually merchandised.

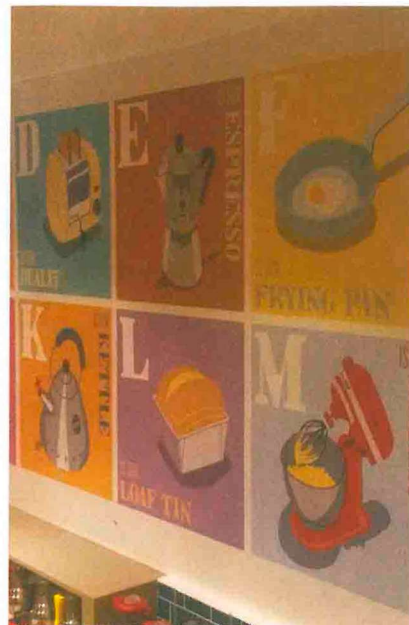
The right-hand perimeter is a work-

station for cooking demonstrations with a vertical hob that rises out of the Carrara marble worktop – little expense has been spared on the look and feel of this interior. And beyond this is a "food gifting" area that Phillips says is a new departure for Steamer.

Head towards the rear of the ground floor and pride of place is given to a knife cabinet. Phillips says that a "knife expert" will come in to the store at dedicated times to demonstrate

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► blade use and care, which might sound a little unnecessary until it is explained that some of the knives on display sell for north of £200 a piece.

After this, it's the nuts and bolts of a cookshop with pots, pans and gadgets of the kind that perhaps shoppers never knew they wanted (a silicon rubber vacuum lid for cooking pans is a good example) until they see them.

And so to the upper level, which is principally about glassware and crockery, tea and coffee pots. The latter are given prominence thanks to the decision to offer entry price and top-end coffee-making

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machines. There is even a coffee machine mounted on a swivelling base, enabling live demonstrations of how it works.

Phillips says that coffee in bean and ground form is now available in the store and he has picked up on one of the current hot buttons in kitchen-based home entertaining and kind of showing off that Haynes manual enthusiasts would probably enjoy.

A to Z of cookware

Back to the staircase that overlooks the ground floor and Phillips' belief that it offers a "Titanic-style view" (think Winslet and DiCaprio) is apparent. Here is also the best place in the store to take a look at the "A to Z of cookware", as Phillips calls it.

This is a high level perimeter graphic on the left and right walls that starts with "A is for Apron" and

runs through to "X is for" ahem, "X Scrabble Mug", which does rather smack of poetic licence. Each letter is accompanied by an associated picture and the total effect is akin to child's reading primer meets Mrs Beeton.

This is a store that is in a shopping centre but which doesn't really feel as if it is. The second mall-based Steamer Trading Cookshop opens next month in Southampton's WestQuay shopping mall.

That will bring the store tally to 33, but this is a retailer with some way yet to run before it reaches capacity. ■