

CHAPTER SIX

TOP 20 GLOBAL DESIGNS OF THE PAST YEAR



Spar, Budapest

- Digital emerges as a major force in store design
- Department stores take the lion's share of design effort
- Food retailing has more design resource devoted to it
- Apple continues to ride high in the store design arena

In any given year there are always highlights as far as store design is concerned and the past 12 months have been no exception to this generalisation. From the massive Galeries Lafayette in Beijing, to the diminutive digital show-pony that is the Burberry Beauty Box in London's Covent Garden, there have been many worthy of a mention.

And in the top 20 that we have selected, two trends are in evidence. Some of the best designs are to be found in the department store arena, and the influence of digital is making itself felt in the way in which stores are designed and how they are presented to shoppers.

To an extent, the department store trend is not surprising. Increasingly, the biggest cities have department stores as their retail showpieces and have correspondingly greater store design budgets at their disposal than is the case in other forms

of retail. The reason for this is clear – they have to provide a reason for shoppers to visit them as, most of the time and in most locations, almost everything on show in the store can be found somewhere else. Design and visual merchandising are therefore to the fore.

As far as digital is concerned, the days of a flat screen and a number of freestanding kiosks appear to have ended. Now there are stores that are posited upon making digital the central element of their sales proposition. This may be to do with design consultants and retailers seeking to keep ahead of the game, rather than keeping pace with shopper expectations.

The head of design for one of the UK's biggest fashion retail groups comments: "As was once said in the days before cars, if you ask shoppers what would improve their lives, they'd say 'a faster horse'. We need to surprise and delight –

but you don't get a second chance. They're gone if it's no good." Argos and Burberry have shown that if retailers do get this part of the design process right, it is still relatively early days and there are rewards to be reaped.

It will also be noted that Apple makes two appearances in this list for one simple reason: this is the only retailer/brand that delivers a show-stopper wherever it opens a shop, and the new stores that it has unveiled in Tokyo and Istanbul stand as testimony to this.

Finally, food retailing should not be overlooked and as the sector that garners the highest turnover, if not margins, this is an area that has a very substantial amount of design effort being devoted to it currently, from the highly organic form of a Spar supermarket in Budapest to the customer-centric offer at Waitrose in Swindon.

FASHION



UNIQLO, LE MARAIS, PARIS

Located in a former iron foundry dating from the 19th century, the latest Parisian offering from Japanese value fashion retailer Uniqlo plays the heritage card highly effectively. This is a listed building and, as such, remarkably little has been done with the frontage. Within, many of the original features have been retained, including the iron foundry's imposing chimney, but it is the manner in which the standard Uniqlo fit-out has been adapted to this interior that is impressive. Although it isn't, this feels almost like a digital environment – thanks to light boxes and scrolling dot matrix displays. There is also an in-store museum showing elements of the building's former life.



HACKETT, REGENT STREET, LONDON

As a brand that is almost entirely based on the idea of Britishness, it is perhaps no surprise that Hackett has chosen Regent Street for its flagship. This is a shop of very distinct zones, however, and on both floors, while there are features that link the several rooms that make up this interior, there is a different feel to each area. This means a men's suiting department on the first floor has a distinctly formal feel, which contrasts with the casual area on the ground floor, just inside the entrance. Digital makes an appearance in the form of large screens and there is a very traditional bar on the first floor.



URBAN OUTFITTERS, HERALD SQUARE, NEW YORK

This is the biggest Urban Outfitters to date and at 57,000 sq ft is roughly three times the size of the retailer's average outlet. Alongside the usual idiosyncratic product offering there is a coffee bar, a record shop and a hairdresser. In fairness, the majority of Urban Outfitters stores could reasonably be cited as examples of store design where a basic shell is deliberately distressed, in keeping with a reach-me-down chic design mentality that has been around at least since the beginning of the decade. It is the scale of what has been done here and the way in which pace is maintained that makes this impressive.



PRIMARK, ALEXANDERPLATZ, BERLIN

The discount fashion retailer has had a presence in the west of the German capital for a couple of years, but the Alexanderplatz store, in the east, has taken much longer to complete, largely owing to planning delays. Now it is open and comes complete with digital screens, large-format graphics and a ground plan that builds upon what was done in Düsseldorf early in 2014. Like many recent Primark stores this one makes play of its location and seeks to root itself as part of the community. It is also the only discount player in the top 20, principally because it has achieved that tricky balancing act of creating a good-looking interior that is also cost-effective and can be rolled out.



CLUB MONACO, SLOANE SQUARE, LONDON

Any retailer setting up shop in a new market seeks to make an impression, but to do so successfully is dependent on understanding the local demographic and responding accordingly. Ralph Lauren-owned fashion retailer and brand Club Monaco arrived in the UK this year and chose the upscale Sloane Square as the location for its flagship. The store starts with a clear advantage, being a fine red-brick 19th-century edifice that occupies a prominent position on the Square. The interior comprises a series of rooms, each of which has a different ambiance and yet all of which are linked, and this has been coupled with visual merchandising, using antiques (which are for sale) as props.

DEPARTMENT STORES



GALERIES LAFAYETTE, BEIJING

At 506,000 sq ft, this is the largest store to make it into the top 20 and it is brand new. It is not often that stores on this scale are opened these days and the work carried out on the project by design consultancy HMKM stands the department store retailer in good stead. In spite of a very modern interior, the five-floor store echoes the Boulevard Haussmann flagship in Paris with a programmable LED display in the ceiling that replicates the Parisian store's Art Nouveau glass and steel coupole. This is a department store that really is on a grand scale, and is reflective both of the bullish nature of Galeries Lafayette as it expands internationally and of the newfound economic power of this part of the world.



BREUNINGER, DÜSSELDORF

The Stuttgart-based department store operator headed north for this store, which opened at the end of 2013. With its curving exterior lines and multiple floors, with the majority of the work being carried out once more by HMKM, this store demands attention in a city where high-profile retail is the norm. Internally, fluted columns and an upscale materials palette give this store environment a feel that is unique within Düsseldorf. This sets it apart from German retail as a whole, largely owing to the non-linear customer journey that has to be undertaken when shopping in the store.



LOUIS VUITTON TOWNHOUSE, SELFRIDGES, LONDON

The outstanding feature in the Louis Vuitton Townhouse in Selfridges is the lift. In the normal run of things, a lift might pass unnoticed, but this circular, glass-walled affair has something that other lifts do not – it rotates as it rises or descends. It is a relatively simple trick, but to judge by the smiles of those who opt to inspect the almost standalone space's first and second floors using the lift, it works. Couple this with a store that manages to differentiate itself sufficiently from the nearby Louis Vuitton store on Bond Street and this brand has created something that, as well as looking good, should be a moneyspinner.

FOOD



EATALY, MILAN

The Italian 'slow food' movement chain continues to gain traction with this store in the former Smeraldo music theatre in central Milan. The notion of selling Italian food to the Italians may seem a difficult one to grasp, but such is the attention to detail in this multi-level space, where the sense of an auditorium but the reality is a shop, that this is largely overcome. A mix of restaurants and specialist food areas combine with a market area complete with striped awning stalls, to provide shoppers with reasons for visiting and coming back. The store also stages daily concerts, in deference to its former life.



WAITROSE, SWINDON

This is a supermarket, but it is also a store in which shoppers can relax, take the weight off their feet and have something to eat, drink or both. Clearly the aim is to sell food, but the store is also about 'grazing', with a mix of long tables with seats, from which shoppers can order food found on the shelves and behind the counters and then enjoy a meal. As well as being a practical solution to the problem of increasing dwell time, the grazing element sets this store apart from its competitors. There is also a juice bar, a bakery and cafe counter, and an outdoor eating area.



LA GRANDE EPICERIE, PARIS

Effectively the food hall for Parisian department store Le Bon Marché, La Grande Epicerie has just emerged from a major makeover that has turned it into what is probably Europe's most compelling foodie experience. Fresh food counters vie with restaurants and ambient food areas, all of which have been fashioned to provide a different experience for the visitor, and there is an ice-cream van in the atrium that fronts the store. This is also a temple where visual merchandising devotees can come to pay homage to some of the world's most compelling food displays.



SPAR, BUDAPEST

In sharp contrast to the normal white box that is the default position of most supermarket retailers, this branch of Spar, designed by local agency LAB5, is a flowing, organic interior, where the keynote is struck by a semi fan-vaulted ceiling and everything is made of wood. There are few straight lines in this interior and much of the offer is from counters. It represents an almost complete rethink of what the food shopping experience is about. The cash tills are also about curved lines and the dark void behind the overhead wooden vaulting keeps the shopper's attention on the product.

TECHNOLOGY



ARGOS, OLD STREET, LONDON

As a 'legacy' retailer looking to reinvent itself for the digital age, the new format from Argos, seen in its first iteration in London's Old Street, is the best example in the world over the past year. This is a store that may be devoid of products for the passing shopper to look at, but instead it is filled with sleek white tables bearing slim tablet-style terminals and multimedia screens around the perimeter. There is much to be said for what has been done here as the interior, created by London consultancy Dalziel + Pow, could have been cold and intimidating. In reality it is welcoming and the graphic tone of voice is well judged.



VERIZON DESTINATION STORE, MINNEAPOLIS

Making more of a phone store is something that all of the big networks strive to do on an almost daily basis, with Nokia, Three, Sony Ericsson and O2 being just some of the names of those who have tried to create a store of the future. The problem with this is that the pace of change in technology has been such that stores frequently look semi-redundant shortly after they have opened. The Verizon 'destination store' in Minneapolis' Mall of America may have defied this pattern, with a store that really does take the mobile phone customer on a journey courtesy of a series of screens and interactive displays that engage the shopper effectively.



APPLE, ZORLU, ISTANBUL

The approach to this store is through the brand new Zorlu mixed-used shopping centre and residential complex. This is a hyper-modern development and the Apple store is like a periscope that is just rising from amid its surroundings. Get up close and it is possible to stare over a parapet into a two-level store that is as contemporary as Apple visitors have come to expect. The point about this branch of the Californian retailer and brand is the architecture, it is easy to see why Apple felt it necessary to patent its glass cube store design.

APPLE, OMOTESANDO, TOKYO

Apple is the only retailer to feature twice in this global look at the best of store design in 2014 and it is a measure of how assured its store design process is that this should be the case. All of its stores are more or less the same, yet all are different and are a response to local conditions and to taking a design format and making it work in situ. In the case of the Omotesando store, the retailer's third store in Tokyo and its ninth in Japan, it has taken its large and now familiar glass cube and turned it into an oblong shape with a huge rectangular plate glass frontage.

BEAUTY



BURBERRY BEAUTY BOX, LONDON

Located in the heart of Covent Garden, the small Burberry Beauty Box falls between two stools as far as design is concerned, being both a good example of the use of digital in store and also the manner in which beauty retailing is developing. With everything from digital displays in the window to fixtures rising from the floors and reaching up to the ceiling bearing clusters of small screens, this store is principally about using digital technology as a store environment enhancer. A clear choice has been made about the use of digital in this instance and it does show how there is more to pixels than providing visual information.

OTHER



PUMA SELECT, JOHANNESBURG

Sports retailing is a sector into which the creative efforts of many individuals is directed and the outcome is that this is one of the most competitive arenas in retail as far as store design is concerned. The Puma Select store in Johannesburg, designed by London consultancy Brinkworth, shows that sometimes simplicity provides a better solution for shoppers than the many complex interiors that tend to characterise this part of retail. The interior of this store is beautifully constructed from wood that takes its cue from the pegboards that used to be found in offices everywhere. It is the melding of this new heritage element with long views in a relatively small space that gives this store its appeal and which sets it apart.



IKEA, ALTONA, HAMBURG

This store brings the edge-of-town retailer into the city. Ikea has opted to build a store that is around two thirds the size of a standard store and to build it over several levels, rather than spreading it over one or two floors, meaning that no floor is overlarge. It has also, as this is an urban store, included windows as part of the blueprint, meaning that street-facing visual merchandising and high levels of natural daylight are the norm when inside the store. As an example of how even the biggest-footprint retailers are reconsidering the manner in which they present themselves to shoppers, this demonstrates the growing trend for the big to become smaller, and better.



PRO-DIRECT, LONDON

Online retailers that leap the digital divide and become terrestrial merchants are an increasing trend, but few are as committed to taking the best of digital and making it work in a physical context as Pro-Direct. This is an online football boot (predominantly) retailer and its lone store, off London's Carnaby Street, is filled with wall-size screens, standalone kiosks and 'digital mannequins'. The latter are filmed content of models wearing the product that stare out at onlookers from the perimeter wall and then move, occasionally. The shop itself is dark, lit for the most part by the multiple interactive screens – there is even a wall where shoppers can challenge each other to a game of virtual football.