

STORES

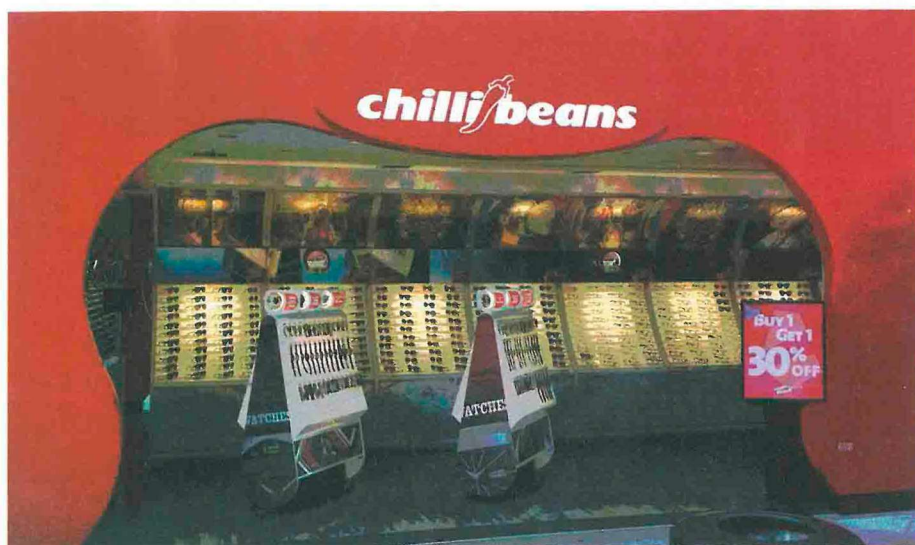
It's famous for film studios but Los Angeles has some blockbuster stores.
John Ryan takes a look

Tinseltown, entertainment capital of the world, smog-bound, the city where nobody walks – all are descriptions of Los Angeles and all to an extent are, or have been, merited.

On the retail front, the second most populated city in the United States is less frequently commented on, but it has plenty of elements of interest and some unique visual merchandising.

And as a city that contains many 'cities', Los Angeles' retail provision is widely spread. From the bright lights of Hollywood to the great metropolis-on-sea that is Santa Monica (more than 15 miles distant), there is much to look at apart from the films that are synonymous with LA.

Retail's a star in Los Angeles



CHILLI BEANS Westfield Century City

Brazilian brand Chilli Beans is the largest retailer of sunglasses in South America and has branches across the continent.

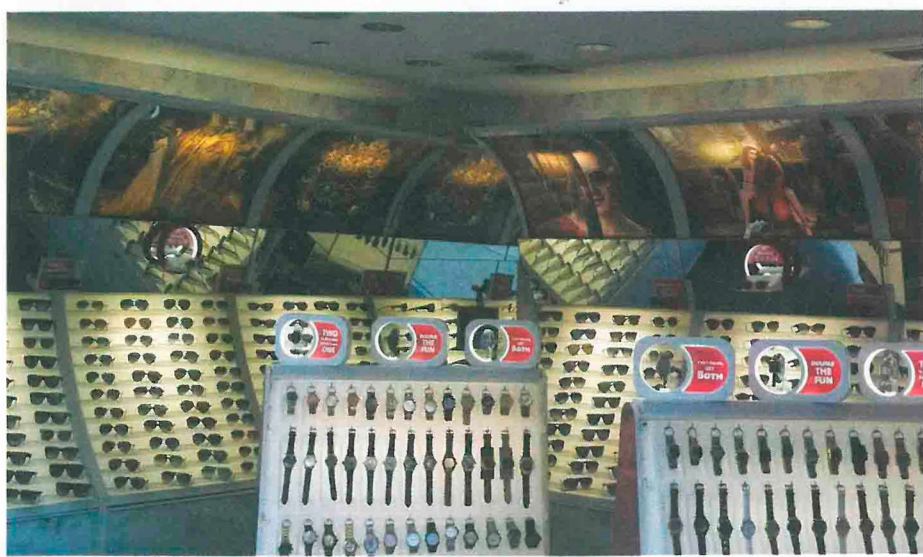
It has just 14 stores in North America however, and 10 of them are in Los Angeles.

The Century City outpost has a distinctly non-standard frontage intended, presumably, to remind the onlooker of a red chilli and everything across the threshold is own-brand.

The store manager branded Ray-Ban as "the enemy" and certainly, given the mono-brand nature of the offer, it was hard not to draw comparisons. All of the displays, mid-floor and perimeter, were backlit and fashion graphics formed a frieze around the upper portion of the shop.

As a brand that is virtually unknown this side of the Atlantic, Chilli Beans is worth a look, if only for the idiosyncratic manner in which the merchandise is shown.

The Century City outpost has a non-standard frontage



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of store interiors go to
Retail-week.com/stores



CONVERSE

Santa Monica

Once upon a time, Converse was a brand that sold sneakers. That is still the case, but now the footwear and the standalone stores from which they are sold have been raised to the level of a fetish. And nowhere is this more the case than in Santa Monica where, from the outside in, there is a large, single floor that catches the eye at almost every turn.

The window display consists of brightly coloured Converse Chuck Taylors that have been fashioned from rubber, rather than the usual canvas. And to prove the point, they have been attached to glass panels set back from the window down which water is sprayed. This is accompanied by the strapline, in bold block capitals: "Wear more rubber" – all of which proves sufficient to have passers-by stopping to admire.

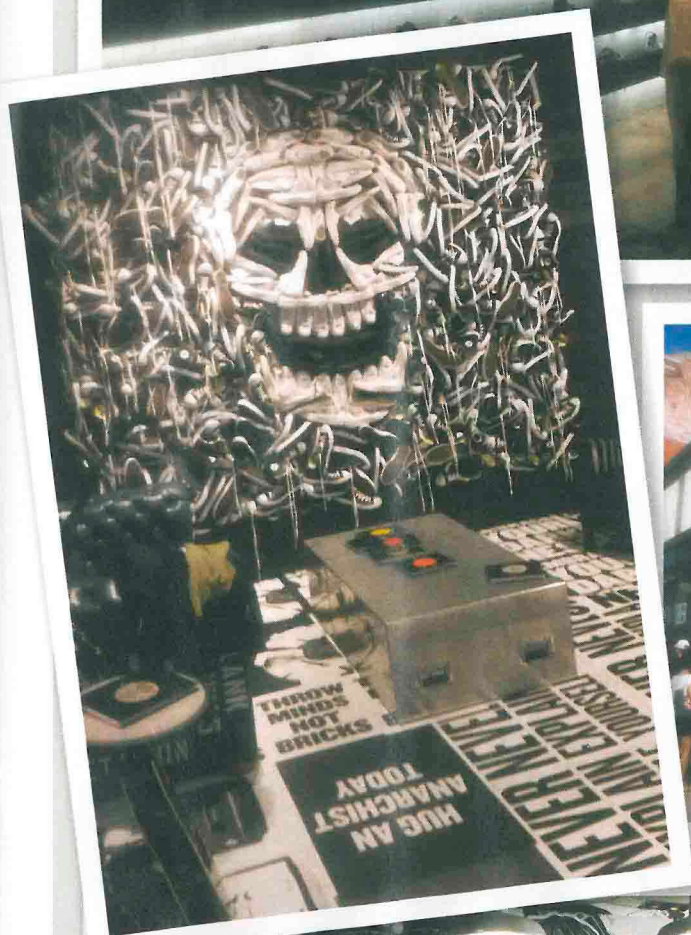
Immediately inside the store there is a large workshop area where shoppers can have their purchases personalised with notices urging shoppers to "Customize your

As an exercise in capitalising on a brand's image, this store takes some beating

Converse in 3 steps" alongside "Converse blank canvas". The backdrop to this is a Pop Art-style graphic in black and white and for those choosing the service, there are iPads on which to create the pattern that will be applied to the shoes.

The store's most arresting feature lies behind a screen, used to break up what is a big space. Here, a semi-3D image of a skull has been created, once more in black and white, using pairs of Converse sneakers. And the odd thing about it is that it is more apparent when viewed as an image on a camera than when the shopper stands in front of the assembly. The mural is accompanied on the floor by appropriately counter-culture messages, ranging from "Hug an anarchist" to "Throw minds not bricks".

As an exercise in capitalising on a brand's image, this store takes some beating and even the clothing – T-shirts for the most part – may be new, but still has about it the sense of rebellion. This is principally owing to the manner in which it is displayed, which is more art gallery-cum-installation than retail outlet.



STORES



TOPSHOP TOPMAN

The Grove

In February Topshop will celebrate its second birthday in Los Angeles and as the anniversary approaches, this store continues to stand out from its US rivals in the long-established open-air shopping centre that is The Grove.

The reason it does so is simple – this is not a roll-out of a very familiar format. Instead, a stringent effort has been made to make it appropriate to its southern Californian location with a white modernist exterior.

Many visual merchandising tricks and store design tropes have been deployed with the area to the left of the entrance featuring faux cracked paint walls, a wooden canopy used for the 'boutique' area and exposed brick walls at sundry points throughout.

Across the whole of the store there is space, helping to promote the notion that this is a store purveying fashion for which customers can expect to pay.



BLOOMINGDALE'S

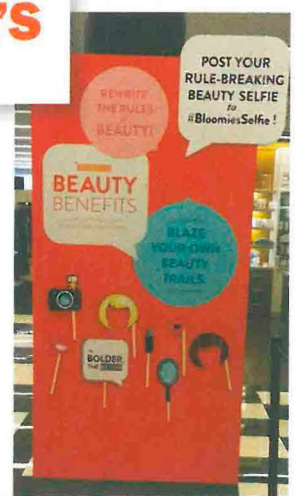
Westfield Century City

Just along the road from the astonishingly well-kempt Beverly Hills is the high-rise business district of Century City and Bloomingdale's has a large store that forms one of the anchors of the Westfield Century City mall.

For a retailer that is perhaps most closely associated with New York, this always looks like an incomer when it is encountered in other US cities. But with black and white tiled floors and large footplates on each of its three levels, it bears comparison with the Big Apple mothership.

The thing that is likely to strike shoppers most about this store is the appeal to take a selfie. Banners and graphics across the ground floor urge shoppers to "Post your rule-breaking selfie to #BloomiesSelfie". The lucky winner will be awarded a \$1,000 Bloomingdale's gift card.

Given the nature of a city where image is all, this promotion is likely to strike a chord.



UNIQLO POP-UP

Santa Monica

The Japanese fashion retailer has been present on America's West Coast for a while now with branches in San Francisco and two areas of Los Angeles, but the pop-up that it has opened in Santa Monica is a departure.

The store is at the rear of an open-air shopping centre that, for the most part, is occupied by upscale retailers and brands. It occupies a single floor and banners across large parts of the centre advertise its arrival.

A member of staff remarked that the intention had been not to remain in downtown Santa Monica, but that the response had been so positive that a permanent store is to open on the



shopping centre's upper level in early 2015.

And the pop-up has been open since July – meaning that it is rather more of a long-term temporary store than a true pop-up.

It also looks rather more like a permanent member of the local retail community rather than anything more evanescent and calls into question the notion of what constitutes a 'pop-up' these days.