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Sometimes small spaces can be more compelling than larger ones. How is it done? **John Ryan** reports

Making the most

Small is beautiful is a phrase generally acknowledged to have been adopted across the globe following the publication of a book of that title by economist EF Schumacher in the early 1970s. Since then it has been agreed with or vilified depending on the point of view and/or the mood of the time.

In retail however, it is fair to say that at its best, small really is beautiful, and that it has the capacity to garner attention in a way that much larger spaces frequently do not.

Making a diminutive area look good is probably rather more straightforward than a wide-open retail prairie, but it is the focus on creating a jewel-like interior or getting shoppers to pay attention to a specific section of a large shop that is the challenge.

And while small may be beautiful, the work per square foot required to make it so is greater. For this to be a reality, visual merchandising assumes a prominence that might not be so pressing in a larger space.

Waitrose, Egham

At 22,000 sq ft, this Waitrose branch could not readily be described as a small space. This is a new store, open since January, and while there are certainly many winsome parts of the whole, there is one that stands up to particular scrutiny when it comes to making a small space sing. It is actually outside the store: the garden shop.

Situated directly beside the entrance, this is a mini-emporium in its own right. What is on view is the result of a roll-out and is a particularly successful new venture for the grocer, according to Anthony Wysome, head of store development.

In the normal run of things there could be a mild 'so what?' about any roll-out, but as Wysome remarks, each of the garden shops-outside-a-shop is slightly different. "One of the advantages we have is that we control things centrally and that does seem to work for us. Having said that, there are areas where we provide guidelines and then let partners interpret things locally."



Waitrose's garden shop in Egham is aimed squarely at the urban horticulturalist

SMALL BUT PERFECTLY FORMED

- Using space effectively does not mean overfilling. Shoppers still need to be able to understand the offer.
- Visually merchandising a small space compellingly will normally be more difficult than doing the same in a store where space is not at such a premium.
- When space is limited, consider an experiential angle for the passing shopper.
- In small spaces, providing access to a wider offer, via technology, is often helpful.

The positive behind this lies in iPads. Wysome says Waitrose partners are encouraged to upload photos of garden shops that they have created to a dedicated Google+ site using an iPad. This is in order that their efforts can be viewed in others stores and used as inspiration.

The outcome in Egham is what looks almost like a series of wooden packing trunks stood on end side-by-

side and filled in a manner that might remind the shopper of an upscale packing trunk of old when long trips on cruise liners were the thing.

As well as the manner of display, there is the product itself. Pastel-coloured watering cans and a briefcase bearing the words "allotment box", among other items, make this a very targeted offer, with the urban

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t of small space



Laird Hatters

Laird Hatters' store portrays
 a sense of 'Britishness'

“It is the focus on creating a jewel-like interior that is the challenge”

gardener, rather than a dedicated Percy Thrower, in its sights.

Laird Hatters, Piccadilly
 Tucked away in a street behind Piccadilly, the Laird Hatters shop is the smallest outpost of a concern that has just three stores in its portfolio, the other two being in Covent Garden and Cambridge. It is in fact little more than an outsize kiosk, yet it manages

to stock everything from a pork pie hat at £65 to a top hat at £400, all within an environment that is distinctly 'British'.

The British part of the equation is realised through the use of a small wall with leatherbound volumes and wall clocks and a shelf with a decanter of whisky. The idea of the latter is that should a potential customer walk in – and there are few who would enter

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▶ this store without having a hat purchase in mind – then they can be seduced by a tot of the water of life and feel that they may indeed be a laird.

The real point about this very small store is just how much stock has been put into the space, all of it around the perimeter, and the profusion of options that are available.

Like many micro-stores, Laird is a destination and it seems unlikely, given its backstreet Soho location, that many would arrive here without either prior knowledge of its existence or the desire for classy headgear.

Decathlon, Old Street station, London

Anybody familiar with Decathlon stores in this country or in its home territory, France, will be aware that the normal *modus operandi* for this retailer is big-box with stripped-for-action interiors.

It is an almost total surprise therefore to see the Decathlon logo on a store of micro proportions when set against the retailer's norm. And perhaps because of this, the message adjacent to the logo reads: "Discover our huge stores at Croydon, Harlow, Lakeside, Surrey Quays". A bus-stop-style sign announces "free click-and-collect", but the fascia's real message is: "70 sports in-store, online, mobile".

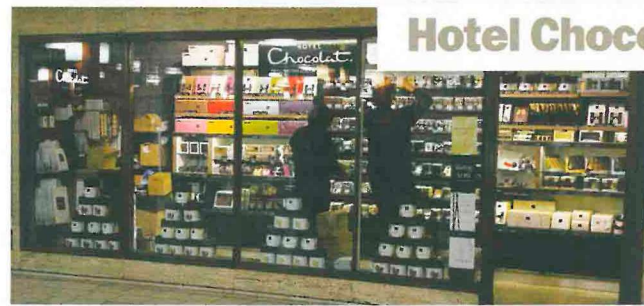
There are 70 different sports and the associated equipment is available at a Decathlon store, but in this branch it is a matter, for the most part, of going online in the store and browsing, rather than expecting everything to be at hand. Nonetheless, Decathlon understands that to generate excitement, there has to be something more.

To this end, on the day of visiting it had set up a boxing ring outside the store and two fit looking types were slugging it out to the bemusement of passing Tube travellers, many of whom paused to watch.

Sports demonstrations are a regular feature of this store and in terms of creating a stir this is a small space that punches very considerably above its weight.



Decathlon creates a sense of theatre with a live boxing match outside its store



Hotel Chocolat



Crosstown

Hotel Chocolat and Crosstown, Piccadilly station, London

With the exception of a few high-profile stores, Hotel Chocolat is a retailer that understands the need to make 'small' worth consideration. Chocolates and confectionery by their very nature tend to be small items and are displayed in spaces that are large relative to their size.

The challenge that faces those operating in this arena is to create a sense of abundance, which is what the best sweetshops of yesteryear were adept at doing.

In the arrival hall of Piccadilly Tube station in London, the overwhelming majority of the beau-

tiful retail units are empty. That is surprising, given the footfall that passes through this subterranean space on a daily basis.

The gently curving fascia of the Hotel Chocolat pop-up is as long as the well-lit perimeter wall inside the shop, allowing the whole of the offer to be viewed at a glance.

This is essential when space is limited and when shoppers are in a hurry to be somewhere else – the amount of time that will be devoted to viewing this store is likely to be even shorter than usual. The appeal to passing shoppers was not being ignored however, and the shop was doing a brisk trade.

The same was true of the Crosstown doughnut and coffee store next door, which managed to combine the health virtues of being "made fresh today in London" with a product that will do little for the waistline.

Worth noting too is the way in which Crosstown uses its window as a display, a piece of in-store merchandising equipment and a stockroom all rolled into one. Making a virtue of necessity is at the heart of this shop.

If there were such as thing as 'artisan doughnuts', this is probably a good approximation of what a purveyor of the commodity might look like. 🍩

