

## STORES

Natural cosmetics and beauty retailer Lush has opened its biggest store, on Oxford Street. **John Ryan** reports

# A Lush interior

**L**ush is a retailer whose stores some might not have visited, but they would have smelt. It has branches that in confined spaces, such as shopping centres, are capable of unleashing a pong tsunami on the unwary.

While that may sound a trifle unfair, anybody who has walked past a Lush store would need to have almost no sense of smell not to clock the distinct aroma.

Worth noting too is the fact it packs a fragrant punch from stores that measure on average about 700 sq ft.

What to make then of a three-floor emporium, which, at 9,300 sq ft, is around 13 times larger than the usual Lush and which features everything from a 'Gorilla Perfumes gallery' to a space where Lush parties can be held?

The store in question opened on Oxford Street two weeks ago and is a *tour de force* in terms of visual merchandising, store design and offering shoppers something that really is unlike anything else on London's longest mid-market shopping strip.

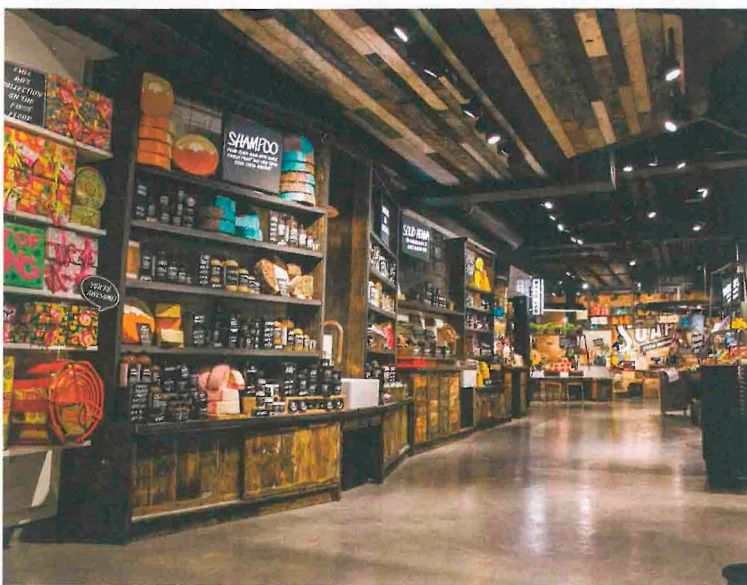
First, a few things that should be borne in mind. There are at present 935 Lush stores around the world; the retailer trades in 49 countries and 105 of its branches are in the UK. This is a truly international retailer, headquartered in Poole, Dorset and which has a reputation as something of an eco-warrior.

All of which informs this latest step and explains, in part at least, why the store interior looks the way it does.

## New direction

From the outside this is less than familiar Lush territory. In place of the usual poster-style green and white Lush logo there is a plain grey window surround with an equally matter-of-fact choice of font, in bold white capitals, for the word Lush itself.

In its previous life this was an outpost of Danish retail group Bestseller in the shape of a Jack & Jones/Vero Moda store and in essence, much of the original shape of that frontage has been maintained, albeit



### LUSH, OXFORD STREET

**Opened** April 24

**Size** 9,300 sq ft

**Number of floors** 3

**Design** In-house

**Architecture** Design Time, Leeds

**Ambience** Retro-market meets sweet shop

the door has been moved and the flashiness excised.

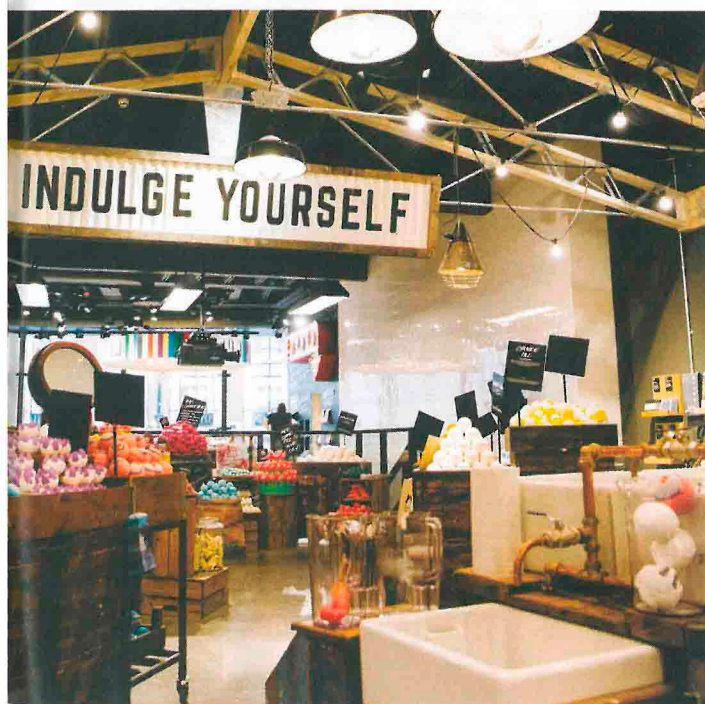
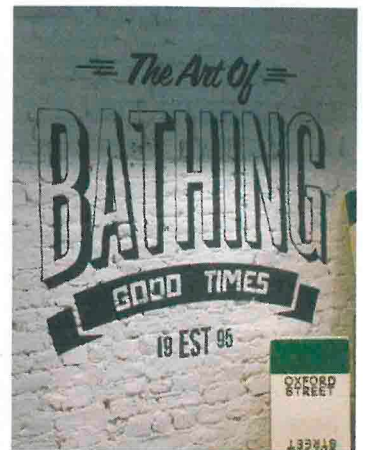
Inside however, thanks to the in-house design team and international project manager Jen Hilton, working alongside architecture practice Design Time, things are utterly different from what went before.

From the moment the shopper steps across the threshold, two things are

apparent: the smell and the recycled, make-do nature of the interior. The smell is almost a given, allowing for the fact that Lush is the "inventor of the bath bomb". But while the in-store recycled elements may not surprise, their profusion does.

In product terms, the store has been divided into a series of experiences, one for each floor. The ground

More pictures of Lush on Oxford Street on [Retail-week.com/lushoxfordstreet](http://Retail-week.com/lushoxfordstreet)



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floor is concerned with promoting Lush's core categories: skincare, hair-care and cosmetics. There is a vast array of brightly coloured items, many of which have the look of fruit about them, accentuated by the decision to display everything in a market-style environment.

Practically that means a seamless hard floor covering, recycled wood

that has been used to create most of the perimeter display units and bare brick and unadorned metal. The latter is used, in combination with more wood, to create the feature staircase in the middle of the shop, which has landings that are used as further display vehicles.

There are also white porcelain sinks. Hilton says: "We've tried to move away from the 'demo-bowls' that we use in

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Vintage furniture and fixtures set off Lush's colourful products to strong effect

▶ other stores and the sinks are used as a feature themselves."

For those in need of a test-drive of some of the products – which look almost good enough to eat – sinks are probably an essential. But more than anything they contribute to the back-to-basics, handmade ambience that pervades this interior.

Lighting is provided for the most part by overhead LED spots. Light and dark are used effectively and there is no consistent level of ambient light overall.

It is also fair to remark that if the faux handmade graphics were removed, an uninformed observer might be forgiven for thinking that what is on view is an old-style sweet shop – but that perhaps is rather the point.

## The retro treatment

Downstairs the mood changes from market to retro domestic interior.

Hilton says the aim is to offer a sense of "cosiness" on this level. The space is home to a suite of soundproofed, wood-clad treatment rooms – the 'Lush spa' and a 'Gorilla Perfume gallery'.

The gallery takes the form of a movie house billboard that ushers



shoppers to venture through a pair of curtains into a series of experiences ranging from listening to music, to sitting in a deck chair near a beach hut, and on to a series of plinths displaying scents, museum-style.

Vintage 'mid-century' furniture is used across this floor. The drawers in a chest for instance, have been partially reinserted into the cabinet upside down, turning them into display shelves.

It's simple stuff, but well executed and there is little sense that what is on view is, in effect, a stage set – it all feels authentic and Oxford Street above seems a million miles away.

And so to the top floor, which is where over-excited teenagers can hold a party at the front of the shop

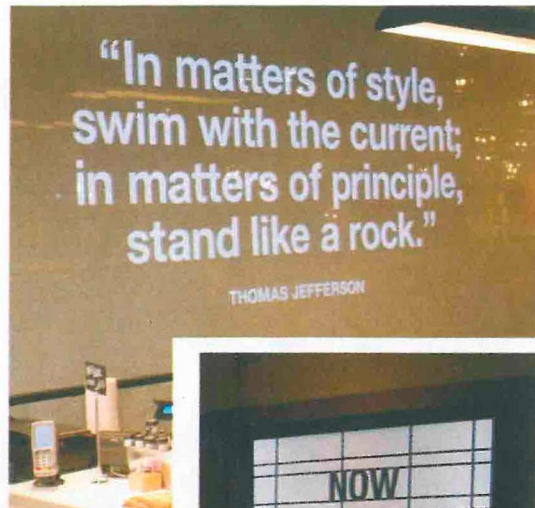
or where all the accoutrements necessary for a heavily scented bath can be found.

This level is altogether lighter and brighter, principally owing to the high level of natural daylight that streams in from the windows at the front.

Heading towards the rear of this floor however, the level of artificial lighting increases and in place of the handmade recycled wood furniture there are slick, white mid-floor and perimeter units.

Finally it is worth noting the words projected onto the white tiled wall above the staircase on this level: "In matters of style, swim with the current; in matters of principle, stand like a rock." Thomas Jefferson knew a thing or two, and his aphorism seems to encapsulate what Lush is about.

This is a store that takes a highly principled ethical stance – more than many in the same sector do, but this branch does not rush to shout about it externally. The Lush



The Lush spa perfume gallery

devotee will understand this and that is all that is needed.

As for the future, Hilton says that the shop is a piece of scene-setting for the brand and a nod in the direction of future large shops to come. To judge by the reaction of those in the store on the day of opening, it is a piece of retail theatre that should win a ready audience. ■

**An uninformed observer might be forgiven for thinking that what is on view is an old-style confectionery shop**