

# STORES

Tapi is the first in a chain of stores aimed at offering something new for the mid-market. **John Ryan** visits and talks to boss Martin Harris

# Tapi is a carpet store

In French it's *tapis*, in Dutch it's *tapijt* and in Tooting it's Tapi. All refer to carpet, and it's a fair bet that the denizens of SW17 will pick up the reference to floorcoverings from the word.

That they are even thinking about the word is thanks to a new arrival on Tooting High Street called Tapi. And there is no mistaking that it is in the business of selling carpet, wood floors and suchlike.

It is the brainchild of Martin Harris, son of Carpetright founder Lord Harris and a former director of his business.

Tapi, which is backed by high-profile investors including DFS founder Lord Kirkham, is the first in a chain of stores that will have branches across the country if everything goes to plan. It opened two weeks ago and although it deals in the same commodities as many of its rivals, it is different from the mainstream in a number of respects.

For starters, it is 4,700 sq ft and is in an inner-city location. Nothing too extraordinary about that, except that carpet shops tend to be located on retail parks on the urban periphery.

The first branch of Tapi is at Tooting's less glamorous end, if there is one, but this is gentrification country. With that in mind, Harris has taken a unit on a road surrounded by street after street of Victorian housing – all properties that are ripe for a makeover.

## Family history

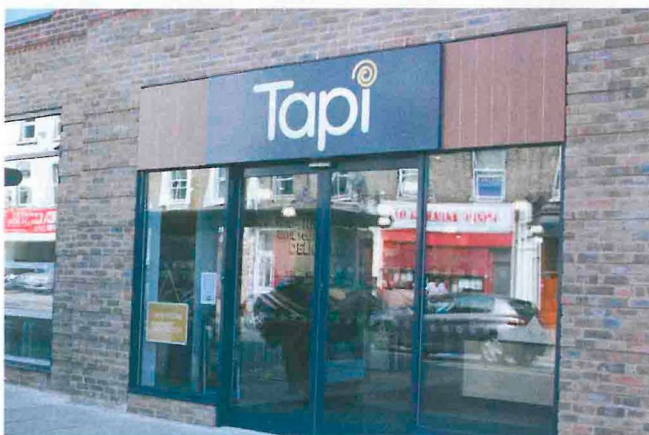
Harris says: "There is actually quite a lot of sentiment about Tooting for my family, so when I was looking at starting Tapi I wanted to keep that history."

He recounts how once the decision was made and work had started on creating the shop, Carpetright, which Harris left, along with his father, last year, ran an advert about one of its nearby stores on the bus shelter directly outside.

"It's a form of flattery really and because I'm a perfectionist we didn't open on the official launch date, which was the same date as the election, and the advert was gone by the time we opened on May 22. They have taken the bus shelter for the entire year though."

Clearly, Harris wants to offer a store environment that will take his former employer on and beat it at its own game, although he might not readily admit it.

He drafted in Brighton-based design consultancy CDW+Partners. Ralph Scott, owner of CDW+Partners, was given a straightforward brief: "Let's do this properly."



The translation for this is that Harris does not want the concept to be about creating a "pile-it-high carpet store", as he puts it.

The outcome is a shop that aims to be different and it is.

Standing in front of the store, the view is simple and low-key with a palette of grey and brown used to give the white logo a neutral background. A small sign states: "The new store for a new floor" and other than the un-garish 50% off signs – this is a floorcovering retailer after all – the prospect is a departure from the marketing approach taken by Tapi's rivals.





See more pictures of Tapi's Tooting store [Retail-week.com/tapitooting](http://Retail-week.com/tapitooting)



# with a difference



## TAPI, TOOTING

**Address** 205-207

Tooting High Road,  
London, SW 17

**Opened** May 22

**Ambience** Unhurried,  
uncrowded, relaxed

**Store design**

CDW+Partners

**Target shoppers**

Aspirational mid-  
market



Step inside and the view is uncrowded. The majority of carpet and flooring retailers tend to have very large rolls of inexpensive carpet towards the front of the shop and it can be quite hard to see into the rest of the interior. Not so at Tapi.

There are indeed rolls of carpet, but they are relatively modest in size and are more for demonstration than as stock that can be taken away. The rolls are along the left-hand perimeter wall and in order to remain competitive, a wall panel is devoted to budget carpets with prices at £4.99 and £5.99 per sq m.

**“It is very different from a typical flooring retailer and a real departure from the norm”**

The floor is covered in grey carpet and the mid-shop fittings are low and allow views through the entire space.

A welcome desk and consultation area dominate the mid-shop at the front of store. It is low, white and grey and has a white floating surround above it. Once again, things are muted, allowing the stock to do the talking.

In this part of the shop, the floor is covered in aged metal-style vinyl tiles and beyond this, it is more carpets and then on to discrete areas for wood flooring (with a wood floor) and vinyl.



# STORES



## ▶ Point of difference

It is an interior that does not feel rushed. There are even two sofas to relax in.

Harris also aims to differentiate through offering what he calls a “sensory” experience. As well as it being a visually pleasant shopping experience, the normal musty smells associated with a carpet shop have been neutralised, the ambient music is calming and there is even an area to test the noise levels of laminate flooring.

Worth noting too is the tone of voice adopted around the store as part of the graphics package. “Hello”, rather than “Welcome” is used for the consultation desk and the interior has messages varying from “We’re really happy you popped in today” to the simple “Patterns”, which sits above pieces of carpet with varied frames around them.

In total, the impression is mid-to-upscale and the design sits comfortably with Harris’s dream of creating a space in which shoppers may consider the floorcovering they want prior to ploughing ahead with a house refurbishment.

It is very different from what would be encountered in a typical flooring retailer and there is sufficient distance from the competition for it to look like a real departure from the norm.

Harris’s story of how “six to seven years ago I took a slightly more affluent plan for a store to the board [of Carpetright] and it wasn’t accepted”, is history. Now it is a reality and he has the makings of a distinct retail brand, and the ambition to open 50 stores this year and eventually to have a 200-strong chain does not sound idle.

Carpet shops can be places that shoppers end up in because they have to, rather than because they might enjoy the experience. Tapi goes a considerable way towards overcoming that experience and is rolling out the red carpet for Tooting’s shoppers. ■



**WATCH THE VIDEO**  
Tapi founder Martin Harris sat down with Retail Week to discuss the new business, his father’s reaction and what makes the brand stand out. Watch the video at [Retail-week.com/tapiopening](http://Retail-week.com/tapiopening)



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