

STORES

Once considered a poor relation to the UK, Australian retail is on the rise.
John Ryan reports from Brisbane

Australian retail has, in the past, been regarded by some as a relative backwater in need of a shot in the arm to bring it up to UK standards.

But on the evidence of recent arrivals to the UK, such as tea specialist T2 or the brightly coloured kids stationer Smiggle, there is a fair amount to be learnt from this part of the world.

Couple this with the fact that British retail chiefs have recently headed Down Under – Target in Australia is run by Stuart Machin and last month it was revealed that John Dixon, ex-clothing boss at Marks & Spencer, will take the reins at department store group David Jones in January – and it is clear that the country's retail scene deserves closer attention.

But what is it that sets Australia apart and why should those visiting the Far East, perhaps, make a side trip and head down to the land of kangaroos and didgeridoos?

Rather than making a pilgrimage to the obvious, Sydney, *Retail Week* headed to Brisbane, an important, but second-tier Australian city, to take a look at the shops and the latest thinking in Australian retail.

Coles, Indooroopilly Shopping Centre, Brisbane

Supermarket Coles has been around for just over a century, making it very old by local standards.

It has not become mired in tradition, however, and the store in the Indooroopilly Shopping Centre is an example of the latest thinking to emerge from the Melbourne-based grocer.

The first things shoppers will notice is the market-style presentation of fruit and veg.

Much of this is shrink-wrapped, giving the whole display a somewhat ersatz feel, although there is a real sense of abundance.

While there is a fruit and veg retailer almost directly next door to Coles, neither store seems to disturb the other's operation and it is reasonably common to find two similar stores near each other in large Aussie malls.

Look towards the perimeter and there are a series of 'market street' stalls that run along the left-hand

Retail Down



BRISBANE RETAIL

Seasonal dress

Shorts and T-shirts

Must-visits

Coles,

T2, Peter Alexander,

RM Williams

Highlight

Coles market street feature

Brisbane climate

Never cool

Reason for visiting

the city It is not Sydney

and back walls of the store. Morrisons, the UK's self-professed owner of this form of supermarket presentation, could do worse than take a look at what has been done here.

Fresh cooked pizza is a given, as is an in-store bakery, but the fishmonger takes fish out from behind the counter to a table in the aisle in front of it where the fish are cut up and turned into plate-sized portions. Blue buckets filled with fish and ice

add to the feeling that this is a just-off-the-boat stall.

Above the fish counter, and mirrored by the butcher next to it, red corrugated steel signs with the names of each department picked out in faded pink give the store a no-nonsense aspect.

The rest of the shop is about ambient goods, but this branch is worth visiting for the fresh food and market counters in their own right.

More pictures of Brisbane's retail offer on Retail-week.com/BrisbaneRetail



Under



T2, Indooroopilly Shopping Centre and QueensPlaza mall

Loose leaf tea specialist T2 is a relative debutante in the UK, but in its home territory it has been around since the 1990s and is a staple of shopping centres and high streets alike.

The interesting thing about the Aussie stores is that they are different from the UK versions and different, in part, from each other.

Visit the Indooroopilly Shopping Centre outpost and yes, the orange

packaging and black walls and shelves are apparent, but the tasting table, a feature of the UK stores, is given additional heft at the front of the shop by the inclusion of a mix of teapots and packaged tea.

Head over to the QueensPlaza mall and the store frontage has a T2 logo formed by red light bulbs, while the circular table at the front has a large black pendant light suspended just above it, with tasting jars underneath. This interior has a modern feel and presents a contrast with what has been done in London.



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RM Williams, central Brisbane

It is, apparently, the aspiration of many Australians to own a pair of RM Williams boots. There are 50 branches of this upscale chain aimed at the typical working-class Aussie 'Ocker', which sell everything from waxed coats for shepherds, to the broad-brimmed sun hats associated with the country.

The point about this store is that it takes what was originally everyday workwear and turns it into something desirable by dint of canny merchandising and a fit-out that might normally be the domain of posh menswear.

Highlights include the hat and boot displays and the outsize graphic of a billabong tree – naturally – that forms the backdrop on the wall behind the cash desk.

It is a measure of how successful the brand is that its positioning makes what, in other circumstances, might be deemed merchandise for tourists into something that is consumed by the local population by the shedload.



Peter Alexander, Indooroopilly Shopping Centre and Queen St, Brisbane

There are five Peter Alexander sleepwear stores in Brisbane and its suburbs and for those in search of a distinctly pink experience this is probably about as good as it gets.

Pink doors, dark wood floors and blue skies with fluffy clouds on the ceiling make this a saccharine interior. There is no arguing with success however – this is a chain that stretches across Australia and which already has an online operation that reaches as far afield as the UK.



Pride of place has to go to the wall behind the cash desk, which is a predominantly pink picture gallery interspersed with gift boxes festooned with pink and sky-blue ribbons.

In the Indooroopilly mall, a pair of embracing mannequins, him in leopard print and her in grey marl, complete the kitsch picture.

This may be a teenage dream, but menswear forms part of the picture as well and the store has the merit of being instantly recognisable.



Cotton On, Queen Street, Brisbane



Catering for men, women and children, Cotton On does for Australia what a combination of Gap, Primark and Uniqlo do in Europe, and it is a conspicuous Australian success story.

With Halloween approaching, the kids' department, housed in a semi-discrete space with its own entrance in the basement, was filled with hanging black bats.

The rest of the store is a lifestyle offer crammed with summer clothing and large-

format graphics depicting men and women in various sunny locations.

This is certainly a good store if cotton-led garments are on the shopping list, but there was little to distinguish it from others that do something similar.

Price was certainly not a differentiator and it will be interesting to see what happens when Uniqlo opens later this year in both the Indooroopilly Shopping Centre and central Brisbane's Queen Street. ■

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