

TOP OF THE SHOPS

Retail Week's Top of the Shops table brings together the premier league of retail design. **John Ryan** highlights the stores that won the top five spots

Compiling a list of the UK's best shops is never an easy task – this country is at the forefront when it comes to creating stores that really make the shopper stop, think and reach for the wallet.

But we've created this list of the top 30 stores, ranked in terms of how they look and what makes them special. Here you will find the top five – the rest of the list is online.

Top of The Shops is a fluid ranking – stores can be knocked off to make way for others that prove more inventive, unique and customer-centric.

This is retail's design premier league and what stands out is that three of the top five are department stores – testament to the fact that while once they might have seemed destined for a slow path towards extinction, they are now vibrant and innovative. The best are worlds under one roof, places where shoppers head to spend time and cash in environments that can't be found elsewhere. They are experiences in their own right. The same can be said of all the stores on this list.

No doubt you will have your own opinions about which stores should have made the list. Please share your thoughts and make suggestions using #TopoftheShops.

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TSELFRIDGES, Oxford Street, London

Once seen as Oxford Street's slightly dowdy grand dame, Selfridges has to come to be known as a must-visit destination for tourists and local shoppers alike.

Voted for the past three years the best department store in the world by the Intercontinental Group of Department Stores, Selfridges has the knack of continuous reinvention down to a fine art – whether it is show-stopping window displays, the creation of the Wonder Room or personalised products.

At 600,000 sq ft, this is a massive store, even by the standards of London's West End. But it is the manner in which things are changed on a regular basis that marks it out as the vanguard of change. The Weston family, Selfridges' owners, continue to make this one of the UK's most important retail destinations.

Read the top 30 ranking in full on
Retail-week.com/TopOfTheShops



2 APPLE, Regent Street, London

The world's most valuable company by market capitalisation first made landfall in Europe at the end of 2004 when it opened a flagship store on Regent Street. At the time, the glass staircase, Genius Bar and army of blue t-shirted staff seemed revolutionary, and that sense of innovation continues to inform the idea that underpins this store.

Many others in the sector have taken elements of what has been done here and used them as part of their own store designs. The Apple store on Regent Street has therefore exerted a strong influence on design across retail, making this a strong contender for best store not just for its design but for what it represents to others.



3 TOPSHOP, Oxford Circus, London

'Fashion central' as it is known by the modish crowd is a multi-floor edifice epitomising dedication to style.

Topshop's flagship store is in a constant state of flux, which makes it worthy of repeat visits by those in search of something new.

In terms of visual merchandising, the windows alone make this store worth a visit, as does the layout, which means each floor feels almost completely different.



4 JOHN LEWIS, Grand Central, Birmingham

The arrival of John Lewis in Birmingham puts the city at the top of the tree for the number of department stores in a location outside London. This is a multi-level, 175,000 sq ft giant that forms the centerpiece of the newly opened Grand Central shopping centre at the heart of the UK's second city.

As well as being large, the store is also representative of the latest thinking from John Lewis, including an emphasis on hospitality and lifestyle. The store includes the first iteration of the retailer's Loved & Found branded department.



5 HARRODS, Knightsbridge, London

As Europe's largest department store, Harrods is an icon for the sector, a historic landmark architecturally and used by many as shorthand for London.

This Victorian Gothic store undergoes almost continual reinvention as it keeps pace with the changing face of retail. There is almost nothing about this shop that is not opulent, from the world-renowned food halls to the fine jewellery rooms. For shoppers, it is often a case of selecting an area to explore in detail, as the store is almost too large to be digested at a single visit. In recent years, Harrods has opened stores in airports but, for most shoppers, the Knightsbridge emporium is what this retailer is all about.