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The legendary department store impresses with dedicated 'athleisure' area the Body Studio, **John Ryan** reports

Selfridges' Body Stud

Athleisure is one of those words that was most likely invented in an idle moment. Although it might sound clunky, it does summarise fairly neatly a trend that seems to be gaining traction for fashion retailers and beginning to merit standalone space in its own right.

Athleisure has moved on from the tracksuits of Juicy Couture that had their place in aspirational wardrobes a few years back and is now a standard part of most branded fashion collections, from Hugo Boss to Adidas by Stella McCartney. The trend received a boost this week with the launch of Ivy Park, the collaboration between Beyoncé and Topshop, which is available in Selfridges.

Demonstrating its ability to ride the zeitgeist wave, last week Selfridges opened the Body Studio, an athleisure proposition for women on the third floor of its Oxford Street flagship. This is in fact not the first time that Oxford Street's grandest department store has opened a 'studio'. Just around the corner from the Body Studio sits the Denim Studio, the thinking presumably being that the word 'studio' sets it apart from the rest of the offer and turns it into a mini in-store destination.

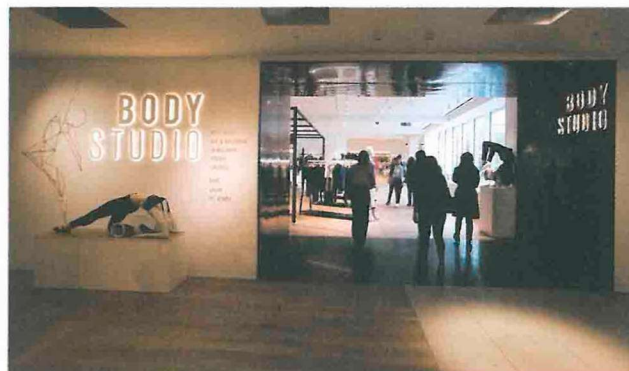
The principal access to the Body Studio is via a mid-floor escalator that sits within the Shoe Galleries on the floor below. Arriving in this manner there is an abrupt change of tone from almost everything else in the store.

In large measure this has to do with the high level of natural daylight that floods the 37,000 sq ft department – the largest department that Selfridges has opened in its history.

Championing bodywear

Anne Pitcher, Selfridges' managing director, explains the thinking that underpins the new department: "It's the first time a department has represented a fully integrated fashion offer across all bodywear categories from lingerie, nightwear, swimwear, sportswear, activewear, athleisure as well as wearable technology and fitness accessories all in one destination."

The Body Studio is in fact the first manifestation of the £300m investment that Selfridges has pledged to transform



the Duke Street side of the store. Most of the new space has been claimed from what was previously part of the retailer's head office, which accounts for the daylight. This is a big space that spans a number of rooms and is more than a repository of fashion married with sportswear.

This means a restaurant-cum-cafe, lingerie, sportswear, beachwear, a beauty salon and a total of 150 brands from

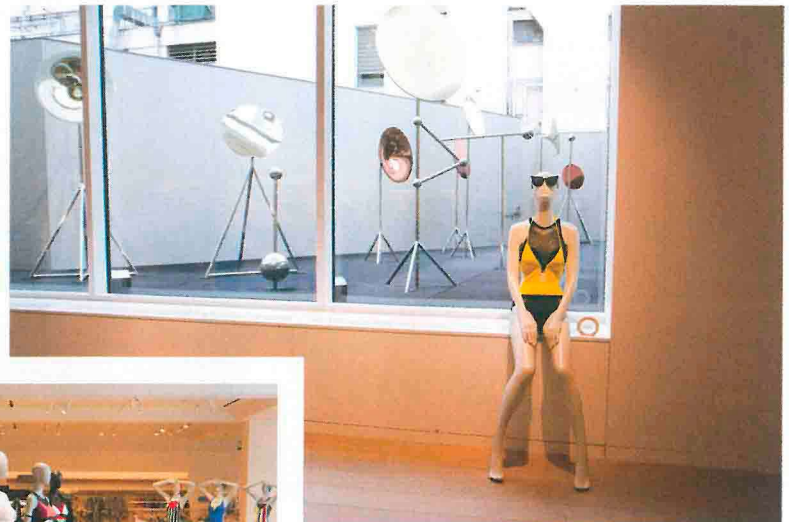
More pictures of Selfridges' new
athleisure-led Body Studio on
Retail-week.com/BodyStudio



o hits ground running

**THE BODY STUDIO,
SELFRIDGES,
OXFORD STREET**

Size 37,000 sq ft
Opened April 4, 2016
Ambience Upscale spa
**Number of brands
on offer** 150
Highlight Natural
daylight and a natural
materials palette



Helmut Lang to Adidas. All of the brands emphasise the interest in athletics and there is a Fit Studio for expert bra fittings. There is an element of 'ladies who lunch' and then head to the gym about all of this.

Standing at the top of the escalator there is an almost zen-like sense of peace about the initial view thanks to the use of light wood grids covering white light shades, giving the feel

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of a traditional Japanese home.

This is reinforced by the self-consciously neutral colour of the garments – predominantly grey, black and white – worn by the line of mannequins in front of the escalator balustrade. And if all of this doesn't set the mood, a quick glance across the escalator atrium reveals a mannequin seated in the lotus position, also clothed in grey and black.

For those who are feeling peckish, a ▶

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few steps will take them to Hemsley + Hemsley, a cafe for the healthy, or at least those who crave delicacies such as beetroot mung bean hummus and roasted chickpeas.

Look through the windows to the right and amid a jumble of air-conditioning trunking on the roof there are a series of installations in shiny metal that look like a cross between upscale gym equipment and musical instruments.

In the room immediately to the right of the escalator, a long window provides more daylight and the windowsill has been filled with 20kg weights, all of which are painted a glossy grey. This space is about fitness proper and suspended from the black frame that turns the room into a quasi-gym are female busts attired in sports bra tops.

Another line of athletic mannequins guard the area at the front of the room, next to the walkway, and as in the rest of the Body Studio, a broad range of brands are on offer.

Lingerie into the light

At some remove from all of this is the lingerie space, which lies to the left of the arrival escalator.

Pitcher says: "As a category lingerie and swimwear has typically been presented in a dark back corner



of a department store, but with the Body Studio Selfridges is presenting this category in an immense space that embraces natural light, and services that are both welcoming and enjoyable."

In keeping with other parts of the Body Studio, suspended busts and torsos are deployed across this area to highlight items from the rails beneath them.

That there are brands is clear from the mid-shop graphics, but they have been contained by a format that allows the brand's font to be used while ensuring that they are all set against background mid-shop display boards that are the same throughout, irrespective of the name on the label.

The temptation to overcrowd this area has been resisted and light wood and white walls are the dominant theme.

Finally, mention should be made of swimwear, which is displayed in an almost identical manner to lingerie and nightwear and, as across the rest of the Body Studio, a neutral fit-out ensures that the stock is allowed to shine.

Selfridges claims this is the first time that a totally "holistic" approach has been taken to athleisure.

There can be no arguing that this is a comprehensive offer for female shoppers in search of branded lingerie (there is even a Agent Provocateur shop-in-shop), swimwear, nightwear or fitness apparel.

It is also a good-looking space when taken as a whole and is so different from the rest of the shop that it really does function as an in-store implant. In terms of sheer athleisure category dominance, there is nothing that comes close to this in the rest of the West End.

