

IN & AROUND

ALBEMARLE STREET

Text: Gemma Balford

In London's upmarket Mayfair district sits a street with extraordinary historic ties to British culture and leisure, balanced by the presence of some of the world's top designers and restaurants.

In 1837, London's first truly luxury hotel, Brown's, opened on Albemarle Street and the influx of wealthy merchants, businessmen and visitors to the hotel started the area's association with luxury boutiques, restaurants and antique shops, according to Mayfair estate agent Wetherell. Fast-forward to today and the street, which sits between Dover Street and Old Bond Street off Piccadilly, is home to some of the world's top designers, restaurants and art galleries.

In the last decade particularly, there has been a marked rise in the number of luxury brands opening stores on Albemarle Street, which according to Savills, has been driven by a number of interacting factors. 'The first has been the growth in luxury spend and with it, the demand for space from luxury brands,' says Marie Hickey, director of Savills commercial research. 'The improved availability and lower occupational costs also allowed brands to take larger units in order to create flagship brand "experiences"; something that would be more difficult to achieve on Bond Street.'

The nature of the street and the fact it is not a 'typical' retail location has also appealed to certain brands looking for something a bit different, claims Hickey.

The street's transformation is being carefully curated by Trophaeum Asset Management, which aims to reimagine the area



Top : Globe-Trotter opened in 2014 with a frontage designed by Christopher Jenner.
Right : Alexander Wang

as a retail-focused lifestyle destination as opposed to a purely retail street. 'The idea is that people can come to Albemarle Street and spend all day here if they wanted to,' says Matt Farrell, retail director at Trophaeum. 'This has meant diversifying the mix of occupiers on the street to encompass a wider range of services, from hotels, restaurants and bars, to galleries, fashion stores and jewellery boutiques.'

In recent times, Italian footwear brands Aquazzura and Casadei have both opened their first UK stores on the street, and later this year US fashion brand Thom Brown is expected to join them with its debut UK store. In addition, Moncler will be expanding its Bond Street store to incorporate a new frontage and opening on Albemarle Street.

Isabel, the sister restaurant to the popular Notting Hill restaurant, Casa Cruz, is also opening on the street imminently.

'The reimagined Albemarle Street manages to strike a delicate balance between old and new, high-end and creative: continuing to be a dynamic retail and cultural hub within London Luxury Quarter,' says Mark Henderson, chairman of London Luxury Quarter.

'Albemarle will continue to be an attractive location for luxury brands wanting something a bit different while still being in close proximity to Bond Street,' adds Hickey. '[However], we're unlikely to see the same rate of change in the profile of retailers that we have seen over the last five years. Any future change will be driven by trends seen in the wider global luxury market. With London ranking top in our retail destination index, the city's and its luxury streets attractiveness to luxury brands will continue.' **RF**



Above : The Amanda Wakeley flagship store is elegant and simple.

Below : Italian footwear brand Casadei opened its debut UK store on Albemarle Street in November 2016, designed by Cesare Casadei in collaboration with architect Marco Costanzi. Photography: Hutton+Crow

