

STORES

Scouse browsing

How do the shops in Liverpool city centre measure up?
John Ryan visits Merseyside and scores its stores

Next year, Liverpool One, the shopping development in the heart of the north-western metropolis, will celebrate its 10th birthday.

A decade is a long time in the shopping centre world. A number of shops have opened and closed and a fair few have arrived in their place.

Liverpool was the site chosen by House of Fraser for one of its two House of Fraser.com stores. This new concept, as it was billed in 2011, would enable the department store operator to trade from locations where it might not otherwise have put down roots.

It is now closed, and in its place is a Hotel Chocolat. Indeed, chocolate shops loom large in Liverpool, from a Lindt to two Thorntons.

Overall, one gets the impression that the city's retail scene needs a mild brush and polish as it heads towards Liverpool One's significant anniversary.

Mention should be made, in passing, of discount department store TJ Hughes. This used to be a force, but now looks as if its time has passed. And the void that was BHS continues to be a major eyesore, which can hardly be considered Liverpool's fault.

Marks & Spencer

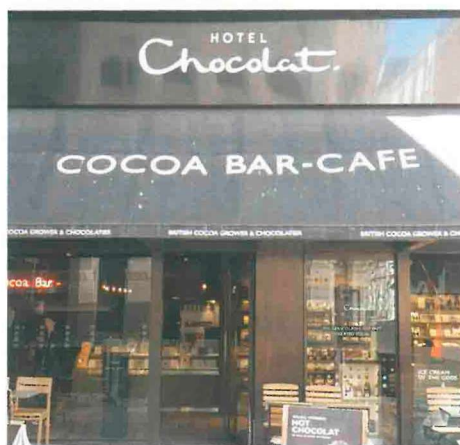
Along with Primark, visitors to Liverpool can enjoy what looks like a little slice of yesterday when they look at the exterior of Marks & Spencer; time seems to stand still in store design terms. Neither store is actually part of Liverpool One, but they are both major landmarks en route to it.

Step inside M&S and a fair fist has been made of ensuring that it is in keeping with the rest of the chain.

There is a white mid-shop wall with mannequins in front of it that forms the introduction to the womenswear.

It's a thumbs up to M&S for the way in which it has used garments organised in graduated colours along the upper perimeter as a visual shorthand for what is on display beneath it – arresting and easily understood and a lot better than a sea of signage.

M&S does, though, let itself down with much of the mid-shop fittings on the ground floor,



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which is all at one level and even though it is divided into bite-sized merchandise areas, the overall effect is one of monotony.

The food hall, towards the back of the store, is a different and better world, but that is the way of things in M&S currently.

Score: 5/10

Hotel Chocolat, Cocoa Bar-Cafe

It is a measure of how things are moving in Liverpool café society that this store is predominantly about hot-chocolate-based beverages.

This cafe-cum-store could do with a spring clean. The awning outside is tired and blotched and, while within the reclaimed wood floor in the café area looks fine, the red neon sign looks like an afterthought – not the normal way of things at Hotel Chocolat.

It would be tough to comment that the mildly down-at-heel feel of this store is emblematic of

the city centre's retail as a whole, but there are a lot of stores that seem in need of a refresh.

Score: 4/10

Lindt

Among the several confectionery retailers in central Liverpool, this one is the star.

Long and deep with both perimeter walls leading to a cash desk at the back of the store; the mid-shop is like an upscale pick-and-mix, while the perimeter makes good use of that weapon in the visual merchandiser's armoury: repetition.

Colour-blocked boxes of Lindt chocolate take the eye deep into the shop, while dark wood on the walls and cream tiling evokes an appropriate mood for the merchandise on offer.

Score: 8/10

Made.com

This, like other Made.com showrooms, is a franchise, and it is located in a shopping mall that was originally a destination for luxury brands.

With names such as Armani Exchange and Hilfiger having flown the nest, leaving their fascias in place, The Metquarter is due a redevelopment.

That said, those seeking designerly home furnishings and a 21st-century way of acquiring them could do worse than spending time in this store, which has been open for 18 months.

Score: 7/10

Porsche pop-up

This Porsche pop-up, which will remain open until the beginning of June, has a pair of shiny cars in it and a series of interactive elements intended to make the visitor think about what it might be like to own a vehicle bearing the famous logo.

No purchase can actually be made in this 'store', and it will appear next in Glasgow.

But it is symptomatic of the trend that sees cheap and expensive car brands alike recognising that there is more to life than displaying their wares in showrooms on the edge of towns and cities.

Score: 6/10 RW

To see what John Ryan thinks about other stores around the country, go to Retail-Week.com/Stores



Clockwise from top: Lindt, Marks & Spencer, Porsche and Made.com

