

STORES

Lessons from Down Under

Australia has a fair amount of retail that might readily be overlooked, but there are a number of outfits of note, says **John Ryan**

Australia is a very long way from the UK, and yet lately many retailers from Oz have decided it's worth making the journey and setting up shop here.

From Typo to Bunnings by way of Kikki.K and R.M. Williams, the variety of formats and retail categories has been substantial, with only food yet to test the chilly British waters.

Back Down Under, there are plenty of other retailers that may be pondering how things might go if they were to set up shop in Blighty.

Country Road, Brisbane

The nearest equivalent to Country Road in the UK would probably be Next, and like that retailer, this one has a degree of ubiquity in its home market that few can match.

It is overseen by John Dixon, who departed the UK and Marks & Spencer to become chief executive of department store David Jones (aka 'DJ' – the posh department-store operator found in most Aussie cities), who has subsequently taken Country Road under his wing.

The thing that will probably strike the visitor about this branch is the prominence afforded to homewares, occupying at least half of the space just inside the store's long entrance.

Looking like a cross between Ikea and a branch of US kitchenware specialist Williams Sonoma, there is much to commend in this well-scrubbed-looking Scandi-New England hybrid, and this should be on the must-visit list of any retail executive spending a few days Down Under.

Daiso Japan, Brisbane

Anyone familiar with Poundland would probably feel at home in a branch of Daiso Japan. The difference, however, is colour.

Daiso Japan hails from a very long way north of this store – there are more than 2,500 outlets across Japan. In this outpost, the overwhelming impression is of pastel colours and plastic.

From 'Tasty Food' to bundles of brightly coloured coathangers, all is light and very bright. Large graphics dotted around the extensive, single-floor store estate, "almost every item" is AU\$2.80 – or around £1.70.

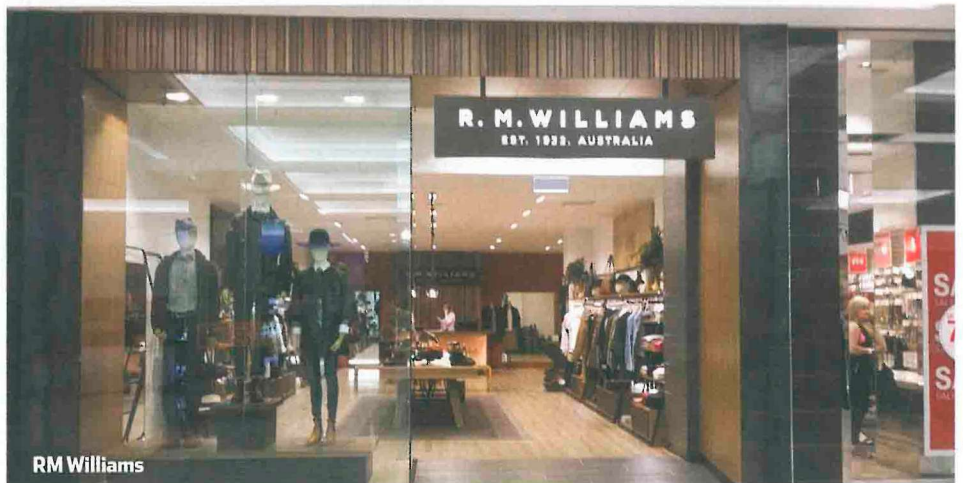
"Country Road should be on the must-visit list of any retail executive"



Country Road



Daiso Japan



RM Williams

See more images of these Aussie retailers at Retail-week.com/Stores-Down-Under



This might not be the snappiest marketing slogan, but the message for shoppers is clear. It's an environment that Poundland and its ilk might do well to take a look at.

RM Williams, Brisbane

Becoming the owner of a pair of RM Williams boots is a rite of passage for many young Australians, and the LVMH-owned retail brand is found in most Australian cities.

Whether many visitors to the mid-market Indooroopilly mall in Brisbane would be prepared to fork out north of AU\$450 (around £270) for a pair of these boots is a moot point, and like the UK store (in Westfield London), this one was conspicuous for its lack of customers.

Had anybody ventured inside, they would have been treated to a fit-out with a heavy emphasis on wood of various hues.

There is nothing flashy about this treatment, but given the intrinsically conservative nature of the product, perhaps that is the point.

JB Hi-Fi, Brisbane

The nearest equivalent to JB Hi-Fi would probably be Currys PC World Carphone Warehouse, but the interior of this store is more like a badly organised bring-and-buy sale.

The days of overzealous point-of-sale material seem to be a thing of the past in the UK, but in JB Hi-Fi it is alive and well.

So profuse and intrusive are the overhead banners that at various points it is quite hard to see the product, much less to work out which category is where.

If only as a pointer to how not to do it, this is instructive, serving as a reminder of how things used to be not very long ago.

Harris Farm Markets, Sydney

Unlike Coles and Woolworths, the national grocery duopoly in Australia, Harris Farm Markets, is a local New South Wales act with a very heavy focus on Sydney.

And unlike the bigger supermarkets, this small chain is about offering a market-style ambience with 'fresh' being very much to the fore.

Pride of place must go to the 'breadfall'. It is like a carousel that has been stood upright, creating a waterfall of bread, which can be activated at the pull of a rope until the shopper finds the required loaf.

It probably does little to increase sales, but it is certainly eye-catching and manages to stand above the rest of the offer, even in a store where impressive food displays are a given.

"It is like a carousel that has been stood upright, creating a waterfall of bread"

