

STORES

Refurbishing the homemaker

Dunelm's seven-year-old Milton Keynes branch has been revamped. **John Ryan** visits to see what has changed

Last week Dunelm unveiled its preliminary results for the year to July 1st. Sales rose by 8.5%, but pre-tax profit fell 15.2% to £109.3m. During this period Dunelm acquired online operation Worldstores, which had substantial trading losses, and also invested in its store portfolio.

The store investment impetus is clear in Milton Keynes, where a Dunelm branch has been in place since 2010. I last visited this branch in February 2014, and while the offer in the store was substantial, the environment was outmoded and unlikely to be of interest.

Since last October however, much has changed. The first thing of note is the logo has had a makeover. Once known as a 'Dunelm mill', now it is simply 'Dunelm', with the outline of a house surrounding the last two letters.

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Simplicity is key

The interior is simpler as well. The previous store layout was dense and confusing. While there are still a lot of products on display, finding your way around is now much more straightforward.

There is also more natural light, as more skylights have been punched into the ceiling of this two-floor branch.

Previously, views around the perimeter were restricted by a row of cash desks at the front and a customer service counter with high, freestanding walls, just inside the entrance.

The cash desks now run along the front wall on the right hand side of the store. Not only has this greatly improved sightlines, it has also created more floorspace and walkways that are more defined.

With lower equipment heights in place as well – some of which have screens showing product videos – the difference is clear.

Around the upper perimeter are the store's graphics. Here hard-sell messages such as 'Brilliant quality products at the best possible prices' and 'It's a great feeling when your home is just as you like it' are prevalent, and good use has been made of product shots.

Plates, cutlery and copper-bottomed pans, among other items, have been arranged in groups to form image-led graphics, and they look good when surveying the store.



Much the same approach has been taken for the graphics that sit behind the product displays, with large-format signage separating each homewares section.

Easy exploration

This store has a deep mezzanine, and it can be a challenge to get shoppers to explore further with this type of layout. However, the LED lighting works well to ensure the area doesn't feel too dark or forbidden.

At the rear of the ground floor is Dunelm's haberdashery. In terms of size – complete with a winsome fabric-cutting table – this matches John Lewis' haberdashery, with a lot of space devoted to a 'Made to Measure' section, which has attracted shoppers even on a quiet Wednesday afternoon.

Upstairs focuses on bedding and lighting, with the latter looking rather similar to the lighting department in B&Q.

The gable outline of the Dunelm logo is repeated on both floors as a display trope, which gives symmetry to the interior as a whole.

While profits are down, there is room to be optimistic looking at this revised store. The real question has to be whether the 11 stores that have already had a refurbishment to date will lead the way for a full refit roll-out, and whether this can be done quickly. **RW**

See more photos from
this Dunelm store
Retail-Week.com/Dunelm-Milton-Keynes



The new Dunelm fascia has the outline of a house as part of its branding



Graphics and product shots are used throughout the store



The haberdashery department matches that of John Lewis' in size