

# STORES

## Bringing Arket to market

A second UK branch of H&M brand Arket has opened in Covent Garden. **John Ryan** visits and talks to the brand's creative director about who it is aimed at

**W**ith a month of trading under its belt, the normal procedure for a new arrival on one of Europe's busiest and most expensive retail thoroughfares would be to sit back and take stock.

Not so Arket, the latest fascia from H&M. Instead, roughly three weeks after Regent Street was the stage for an Arket global debut, a second, two-floor store has opened on Covent Garden's Long Acre, less than a mile away.

Architecturally, this one is a little different from the Regent Street store, being housed in a four-storey art deco building complete with black-painted steel-framed windows on the first and second floor (the latter is a stockroom), a feature mirrored by the grey-outlined shop windows at street level.

Another difference is that it is womenswear that takes centre stage on the ground floor (and in the basement with kidswear), while the menswear offer is on first – a reversal of what was done in Regent Street.

### Arket's target market

But who is Arket for, given H&M also operates Cos and & Other Stories, and is it sufficiently differentiated from others in the Swedish stable?

Ulrika Bernhardt, creative director at Arket, says: "Arket is aimed at a customer who has high demands but little time. We believe our customers are looking for quality as a broader concept, and part of this is building a wardrobe to last for a long time, filled with fewer but more versatile pieces they can keep coming back to."

This does not entirely answer the query about difference between this and other H&M brands, but it does perhaps mean that Regent Street and Covent Garden will be the first of a good number of stores that will open across Europe's major metropolises.

And for those venturing into either of the London stores, the merchandise notwithstanding, what is apparent is that these are modular fitouts and that even before the first shoppers had crossed the Regent Street threshold, the roll-out button had been pressed.

### Attention to detail

It is fair to comment that along with Inditex, H&M has few rivals when it comes to its ability to unveil a fully fledged format, complete in every detail, and then to open it in a variety of locations and markets.

Making this a reality, however, takes a lot of work, and as Bernhardt puts it: "[Following research], we concluded that the physical store must be a place where customers feel at ease and are happy to spend time.

"The typical retail calculation traditionally considers empty space a wasted opportunity, but we found just the opposite to be true."

She adds: "Rather than focusing on other brands, we took inspiration from places that dealt with these same challenges – museums, archives and storage systems."

This may sound a mite improbable, but head into the homewares space in either store and a series of grey perimeter pigeonholes look like the kind of thing that you might find in the materials library of an upscale design consultancy.

This look and feel permeates all the other areas in Arket, from menswear to kidswear and on to the pared-back aesthetic that informs its Nordic-style café.

### Arket ID

And for those who visit one of these stores and want to revisit, but haven't got the time, there is always the Arket ID. Every item on the rails and shelves has a nine-digit serial number

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**Ulrika Bernhardt, Arket**



attached to it that is intended to make reordering via the web straightforward, in much the same manner as the store is about keeping physical shopping simple.

"As well as being a tool for our archive it is a way to record and preserve our products and an expression of the long-lasting nature of our collection," says Bernhardt.

This is confident, and perhaps that is the hallmark of what has been done with Arket so far.

On opening day in Regent Street in very late August, Arket was also launched online in 18 markets across Europe, and has since established itself on the ground in Copenhagen and Brussels, with Stockholm (of course) to follow imminently.

All of the stores, as would be expected, are in prime retail locations, and given the price structure of the merchandise, it seems likely that there will be little deviation from this.

Bernhardt says that the stores do take elements of "our Nordic heritage – simplicity, functionality and durability", but that these values are not uniquely Scandinavian.

Certainly true, but it is hard to escape thinking that the Swedish invasion of our high streets continues. **RW**



See more images of  
this Arket store  
[Retail-Week.com/Arket-Covent-Garden](http://Retail-Week.com/Arket-Covent-Garden)



## Arket

### What makes it different?

- A pared-back layout for a mass-market audience
- The Arket ID provides a link between digital and physical
- A store design that takes its cues from museums and storage facilities
- A collection that is aimed at repeat purchases, albeit not necessarily in the same fabrics



The layout in the art deco building is pared back

