

THE BIG STORY

'A place to shop, do and learn'

John Lewis Westfield London, the standout element in the mall's newly unveiled extension, promises to offer more than a traditional shopping experience. **George MacDonald** reports

Opened 10 years ago in White City, Westfield London's most significant development was unveiled this week – the opening of 740,000 sq ft more trading space.

While some high streets and shopping centres have come under pressure from subdued demand and increased online spending, Westfield London has established itself as a leading retail destination. Last year, footfall stood at 27.5 million and sales totalled £1bn.

It continues to blaze a trail as it completes the £600m expansion, which will make it Europe's biggest shopping centre.

Over the course of this year, 90 shops, eateries and entertainment venues will open as new names such as John Lewis and Primark – the first- and second-most-requested retailers by Westfield shoppers – arrive, and others, such as Adidas, Boots and H&M, open bigger or better branches.

The new 230,000 sq ft John Lewis store – the flagship of the scheme – represents the summation of the department store group's thinking as it reinvents itself to be even more attuned to contemporary and future shopping habits.

As consumption patterns change and John Lewis seeks to create a seamless customer experience, the store features various new technology and omnichannel initiatives, while also playing to the strengths of the experience that can only be provided in bricks-and-mortar shops.

The store, John Lewis' 50th, is, in the words of managing director Paula Nickolds, "a place to shop, do and learn".

She says: "This shop offers customers something different. You can get style advice for yourself or your home, learn a new skill, play with the latest smart home technology and so much more."

Nickolds adds: "It's also a place where we can build a far more personal relationship with our customers – bringing together the very best of our service offer and our outstanding partners."

Customer experience

The intention is to offer customers new things to do and learn every time they visit the shop, and that is reflected in the opening of John Lewis' first Discovery Room and Style Studio.

In the Discovery Room, shoppers will have the chance to learn skills or get advice on everything ranging from how to choose the right sofa or camera through to how to get a perfect night's sleep or garden improvement.

In the 700 sq ft Style Studio, customers can have one-on-one or group fashion consultations. There will be five personal stylists on hand, also offering beauty and make-up advice, and afternoon tea can be included.

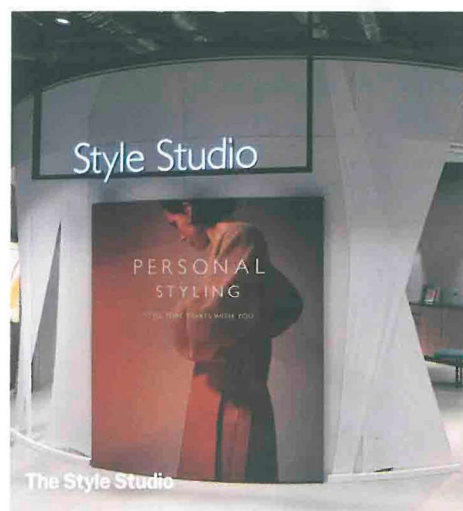
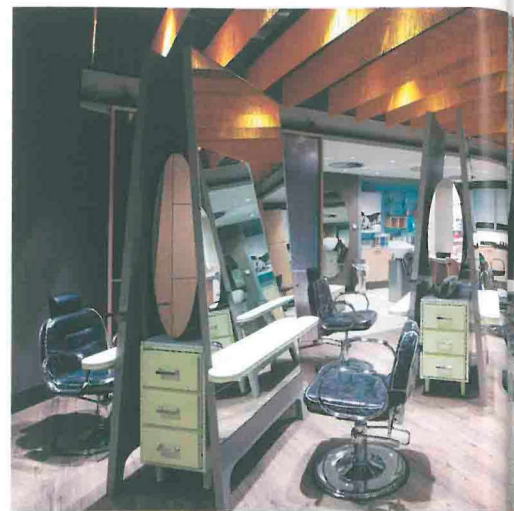
Altogether, 23 services are on offer across the store – two more than at the Oxford branch which opened last October. As at Oxford, a concierge desk features prominently to recommend which services would suit customers for booking in-store events.

John Lewis has also added to the experiential mix by creating the opportunity for shoppers to have 'Instagram moments'. At present, the figure of an acrobat made from fragrance tester cards performs that function.

Creating a difference

Services, advice and experience depend on people, and John Lewis is making the human element more important than ever.

As shoppers enter the store, they are greeted by a welcome sign emphasising that everybody who works in the shop is a partner and "shares the same standards of quality, value and service that have set us apart since 1864".



Such a focus on people as a differentiator, says John Lewis customer director Craig Inglis, helps set the business apart from others, and that message will become ever more important. "You'll see us doing much more of that," he says. "Our partners are more front and centre than in any other shop."

The retailer has provided extensive training to ensure staff are able to deliver on the store's service, services and experience promise.

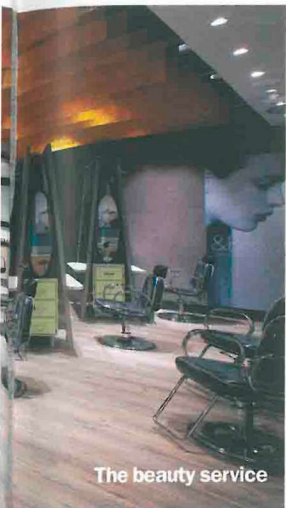
As at the Oxford store, they have been trained in theatre skills, while former Vogue fashion director Lucinda Chambers has advised the personal stylists, and a new role of product coach has been created to equip

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Find out all the latest
on John Lewis
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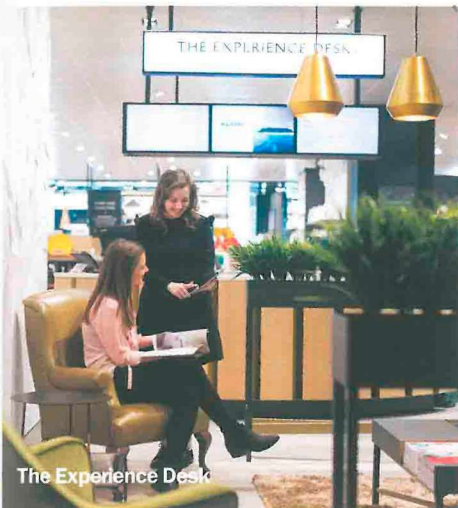
Managing director Paula Nickolds



The beauty service



An 'Instagram moment'



The Experience Desk



Order collection area

partners with the expertise to advise on technical and complex purchases.

The retailer hopes to deepen the relationship between customers and partners through the use of a new app, enabling continued contact and conversation post-purchase.

Partners will be able to keep customers informed – by text or email – about forthcoming products or events likely to interest them, based on their preferences. “We’re trying to take the relationship beyond the shop,” says Inglis.

Exclusive appeal

John Lewis aims ultimately to generate 50% of sales from own-brand or exclusive products. At the new store, about 35% of the assortment meets that ambition, and signage throughout hammers home the ‘only here’ message.

At Westfield, John Lewis has staged the UK launch of US denim brand Madewell and the first Apple Smart Home experience area in Europe. It has also brought its Loved & Found to London for the first time.

Described as “an Aladdin’s cave” featuring John Lewis’ “most-coveted fashion finds in regularly updated collections”, Loved & Found brings a boutique-style element to the shop. That boutique feel aligns with the contribu-

Westfield London

- Opened in 2008
- The extension will be 740,000 sq ft of retail, dining, entertainment and leisure space, with an £8bn redevelopment under way in the surrounding area
- There will be a new Imperial College campus, 1,522 new homes, and £7m is being devoted to upgrading the local transport infrastructure
- The total number of outlets upon the extension’s completion will be 450
- The extension stands on the land originally occupied by White City, with exhibition buildings that hosted the Entente Cordiale in 1908. It was visited by eight million people
- Now, 110 years on, it is anticipated that seven million people a year will crowd though the new entrance to the Westfield extension
- New arrivals include: Chinese fashion brand Urban Revivo, which will open its first store outside Asia, Space NK and Urban Decay
- Upgraded stores include Adidas, Boots, Cath Kidston, Lush, Monsoon and White Company
- Approximately 8,000 new permanent jobs will be created

tion staff will make, and is central to the store’s appeal, says Nickolds. She maintains: “We’re bringing a new level of personalised, curated shopping which until now has been the preserve of boutique shops.”

Connected shopping

Alongside the new app and the reflection of shoppers’ interest in digital technology with the Apple Home area, the digital shift is evident in the store’s collection area.

The rise of online shopping has meant that many retailers have retro-fitted their click-and-collect areas. They can consequently feel squeezed in, inconveniently located or even a bit shabby – an anomaly given the popularity of click-and-collect.

At the John Lewis store, the importance of in-store collection is recognised with a roomy, comfortable lounge area in which customers can relax and interact with partners, as well as pick up their orders. “It’s integral to the shop,” says Inglis.

Last Friday evening, John Lewis drew 1,700 customers to the store for a special preview.

If all goes to plan then, as Nickolds says: “Retail is changing, but today’s department store is as relevant as it ever has been in responding to the needs of our customers.” **RW**