



RETAIL 2018:
a year worth a decade

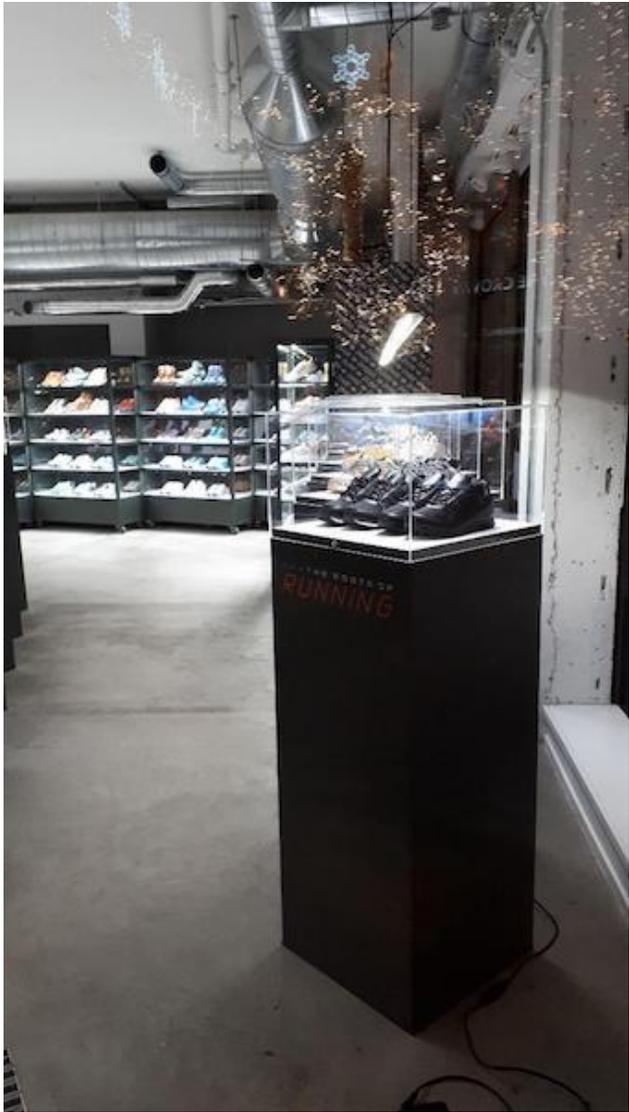
Adidas 'Roots of Running' - London

The unit that forms one of the corners of Earlham Street in the Seven Dials area of Covent Garden might seem ill-fated if you consider its recent history. This is a two-floor site that has played host over the last couple of years to (in this order) sports brand Le Coq Sportif, a pop-up for bespoke Magnum ice creams and Sonos, the speaker brand. The latter was intended to be permanent, but closed in September after trading for 9 months.

And yesterday Adidas' 'The Roots of Running' closed its doors after trading for a full 10 days. In fairness, this one was never intended to be anything other than a temporary 'exhibition' of running shoes from the 1980s to now and as such it was less shop and rather more marketing tool.

That said, its combination of rows of internally-lit glass-topped cases on plinths with tiered shelves along the perimeter make this a good deal better than many of the displays in the area's permanent shops. All of which notwithstanding it will be interesting to see whether there is a brand out there that can make a go of this unit as a standard shop that lasts more than a year.





Skopes - London

The store is, like every new store in the centre, in the extension to the mall and is the handiwork of consultancy Dalziel + Pow. And it has everything that you might expect of a traditional menswear outpost, from men in dark suits ready to assist, to mid-shop rails of suits and pigeonhole shirt displays on the perimeter.

That said, there are touches that set it apart from the rest of the mid-market such as the 3D graphic in a glass box on the wall illustrating the different collar shapes that are available and the bar where shoppers can enjoy a soft drink at the back of the shop.

The real feature however is towards the front of the store and takes the form of a large mid-shop orange frame with multiple drawers and a worktop. This is the service desk, where customers can browse the whole range, order and arrange deliveries. There is nothing terribly remarkable about this, other than that it locates the store among contemporary retailers, rather than looking a mite retro.

There are other Skopes stores, but these are almost entirely concessions within House of Fraser, which does beg a few questions...





GU Style Studio - Tokyo

Gu, the brand from Fast Retailing, owner of Uniqlo, has opened a fashion shop in Harajuku (Tokyo) which is a single floor fitting room-cum-cash desk. Called the GU Style Studio Store, this is a space where nothing can be bought and taken away. Instead it is about coming in, perusing the ranges and possibly trying a few things on.

This done, the shopper can, if she wishes (it is a women's fashion store) create an avatar of themselves on one of the screens that are integrated into the mirrored midshop pillars. This is done by uploading a photo of the customer, taken by an in-store camera, and then it's a matter of trying on garments virtually, although there are reports that the digital representations are a little blurred.

When all of this is done, payment can be made via the GU app with the garments' QR codes being scanned which then provide purchase links. Delivery is made to the shopper from an external warehouse.

Many have tried to create stores that are, in effect, physical websites (the Missguided store in Stratford is a case in point), but this comes closer to achieving this than most. By allowing shoppers to try on garments prior to the digital element coming into play, this also answers the question about why a physical or digital retailer would create a store that melds parts of both worlds.





Nike - Dubai

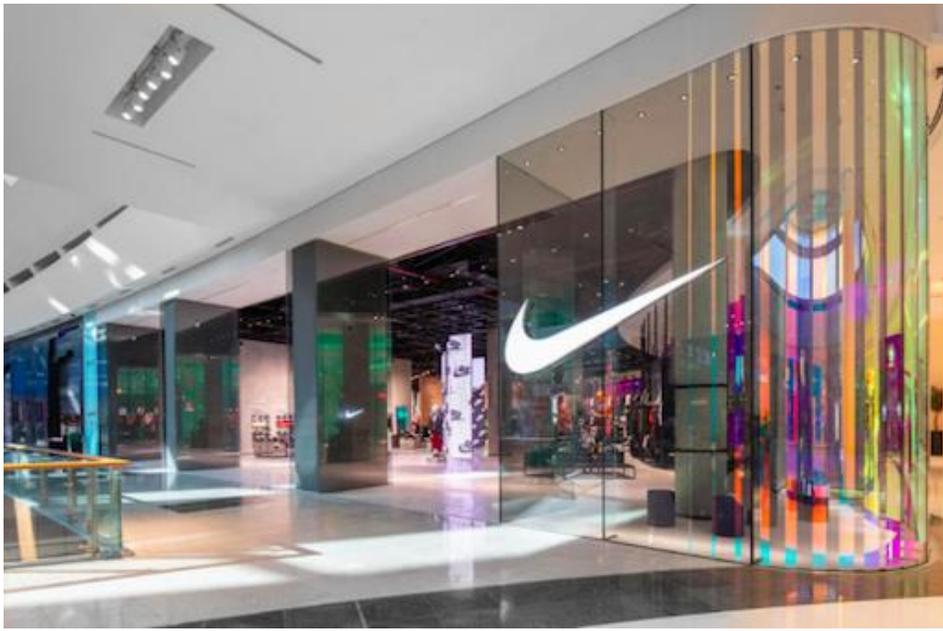
There is a sense that new Nike flagships are almost a commonplace at the moment, yet if you look at their distribution they are thinly spread (with the exception, perhaps, of Manhattan). And hot on the heels of the 67,000 sq ft, six floor branch that opened on Fifth Avenue less than three weeks ago comes another new Nike store, this time in Dubai.

This one is reasonably modest when set against the Manhattan leviathan, but at 35,400 sq ft it is still a big store and there is the now almost usual interactivity built into the store's fabric. On the ground this means that there is a basketball court, the familiar personalisation area and a series of jaw-dropping views out of the store towards the architects playground that is downtown Dubai.

There will also be sports and 'cultural' events programmes staged at sporadic intervals.

The store is located in the Dubai Mall and while it is quite easy to become almost jaded about what Nike does, it does something in each city or area that others don't seem to quite measure up to and it is sufficiently distant from other flagships to maintain a degree of the wow factor.





Hamleys - Fukuoka and Yokohama

Hamleys has opened its first stores in Japan, in Yokohama City (near Tokyo) and Fukuoka in the west of the country. Occupying 90,000 sq ft across the two sites, the shops are a joint venture with Bandai Namco Amusement, the arcade arm of a Japanese video game company and are intended to be an attraction as much as a toy shop.

Practically, this means that as well as the standard Hamleys mix of children's entertainers and demonstrators, the stores also include merry-go-rounds, 'games corners' and infant play spaces. There are around 6000 different toys on sale in the stores, but with its emphasis on entertainment the overall ambience is perhaps rather closer to a theme park than toy store.

The Yokohama store, which opened at the weekend, is the smaller of the two (32,000 sq ft) and the whole enterprise is the first part of a planned programme that Hamleys and Bandia Namco hope will mean 30 stores in Japan over the course of the next five years.

Brand extensions of the kind seen in these stores have something of a chequered history in both China and Japan with the ill-fated Barbie Shanghai being perhaps the prime example of what can go wrong (the 35,000 sq ft space dedicated to all things Barbie-related closed in 2011, following an attempt to position the store as an experience more than a store).





Morphe – Birmingham

Following the opening of a UK pilot store in the Westfield London mall, Los Angeles-based make-up brand Morphe has opened a second store, in Birmingham's Bullring. The 3,300 sq ft store is on the shopping centre's middle level and as well as the make-up and brushes for which the brand is best known, there is space inside the store for beauty classes and events (probably involving 'influencers' – Morphe has a vast social media following thanks, in part, to heavy promotion by YouTube celebs – including somebody called 'Jaclyn Hill').

Prior to its arrival at Westfield, Morphe products were only available in the UK via third party online distributors. The store itself is a straightforward affair with graphics at the entrance inviting visitors to 'Unleash Your Inner Artist' and a series of black tiered gondolas along both left and right-hand walls, with the mid-shop space being occupied by heavily branded units inviting shoppers to 'Turn It Up'. Overhead, it's a simple white ceiling with square light boxes and spotlights, lending a fashion studio feel to the whole.

It is probably fair to say that more might have been done in this store to create an experience, particularly given the excitement that the brand generates online, but nonetheless it has been extensively covered by local media and national fashion magazines.





The Drop - London

Any streetwear brand worth its salt, from Palace to Supreme, will focus on the 'drop' – a weekly delivery of semi-one-off items that will have the faithful queuing round the block. This is the basis of a pop-up that opened in the Westfield Stratford mall on Wednesday night called, somewhat predictably, 'The Drop'. That said, this one comes with a twist. There are indeed 'drops' of stock (the store is open for two weeks, Thursday to Sunday, with two stock injections during the period), but everything that is on view is for rent, rather than sale. All proceeds go to the 'Big Up Uganda' charity, part of Save the Children, and as might be expected the range centres on heavily branded trainers and associated clothing.

Renting, rather than buying, is seen by some as one of the ways forward for niche retailers and making designer streetwear available for a not wholly unreasonable price, albeit for a limited period, would seem a canny move in terms of getting a name or label out and about. On opening night the store was crammed with modishly dressed types with many of them anxious to take selfies in the 'infinity cube' a fitting room with mirrors and purple neon tubes designed to give the impression of endlessly repeated reflections of the viewer.

This is also a creative use of an empty unit in a shopping centre, rather than the usual outpourings of the local art college





Harris Teeter - Bern

'The world's largest Harris Teeter' supermarket opened in New Bern, North Carolina, on Wednesday. The fact that this grocer operates in just seven South Atlantic US states, where it has 246 branches, need not detract from the claim. At 100,000 sq ft this is a big store of the kind that used to open when large footprint supermarkets were the norm, rather than the exception.

With a distinctly retro logo above the main door, in-store this is actually a relatively old-skool space in terms of appearance and the sense that this is what US supermarkets used to look like. It does however have a fair number of elements that mark it out as being aware of food retailing's vanguard, from a sushi bar, complete with conveyor belt, to a series of 'island'-style counters. Prime among the latter is probably the 'World Cheese' counter, which has the flags of the countries whose cheeses are represented, including 'England', which either says something about the cheese options in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, or the US view of the UK...

All of which means that 'market' thinking, in terms of layout and presentation is the order of the day Harris Teeter, New Bern, which looked busy on opening day.





H&M - Hammersmith

At 2,300 sq m, the refurbished H&M in the heart of the west London borough of Hammersmith is a big store, but in the retailer's scale of things it would be little more than that. What sets this one apart is that other than the logo above the door it neither looks nor feels much like one of the Swedish fashion giant's outposts with an exterior, on one side of the Kings Mall shopping centre, consisting of black metal, glass and a lot of green plants either side of the windowline.

Within, this is an exercise in walking excitable H&M shoppers towards a more measured and sophisticated take that ensures that they are in the fashion vanguard. Or put another way, with lower equipment heights, brown and magnolia as the predominant interior colours and a wrought iron staircase in the mid-shop connecting the store's three floors, this is more Banana Republic or perhaps Urban Revivo than traditional budget fashion. All this and a 'make do and mend' desk where customers can bring in their already-owned H&M clothes and have them repaired (in light of the current move away from clothing being disposable).

Also worth noting are the touches that have been added to make this different from the rest of the high street at this level. Practically, this means that in common with the standalone H&M Home store that opened a few weeks ago in the Westfield London shopping centre (less than a mile away), there is a semi-discrete florist in the middle of the shop. Other than in market stalls, there are in fact relatively few places nearby to buy bouquets, cut and potted flowers and to judge by H&M Home, it seems to be finding a ready audience. This is a grown-up version of young fashion. Whether it is in fact about appealing to an older demographic or offering a more upscale feel for the H&M core shopper is an unanswered question, but it is certainly a new departure for the brand.



