

STORES

'Tis the season when department store retailers bring out their big visual merchandising guns. **John Ryan** takes a look at the best Christmas windows

Christmas crack

It is, apparently, the most wonderful time of the year. For the next month it is a matter of breaking out the best champagne, tucking into the fatted calf, turkey or 'turducken', and generally making merry.

It is also the last few weeks of the year that can make or break many retail fortunes – get this one wrong and the other eleven months in combination are liable to pale into insignificance.

One of the most significant elements in the retailer's commercial arsenal is the window, or windows. Across the globe, Christmas windows are where the visual merchandisers have their moment in the winter sun and their efforts are as much a defining feature of the season of goodwill as the chap in red who heads down the chimney on December 24.

While we couldn't put every department store festive window on these pages, what follows are some of the more engaging displays from around the world that have been created to mark Christmas 2014.

Bloomingdale's

Lexington Avenue and 59th Street, New York

Although there are Bloomingdale's outposts across the US, the flagship and the brand are intimately associated with New York and glitzy Manhattan.

This year the unveiling of the 'Holiday windows' was accompanied by some singing courtesy of Broadway singer-songwriter and actress Idina Menzel, but it is the windows that are the real stars.

Bloomingdale's has opted for interactivity to mark the season and its windows are themed around variations on "the iconic bow" used to wrap presents.

Practically, that means a series of windows where shoppers are asked to take selfies and send messages while, along the way, promoting Bloomingdale's.

There is also a Christmas charity appeal with a large bear in one of the windows and a message urging shoppers to buy a soft toy in the store and the proceeds are given to the Child Mind Institute.

Worth noting too are the chequered and striped surrounds in the windows, making pictures of the displays they contain.



To see more pictures of retailers' Christmas window displays visit
Retail-week.com/christmaswindows2014



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KaDeWe

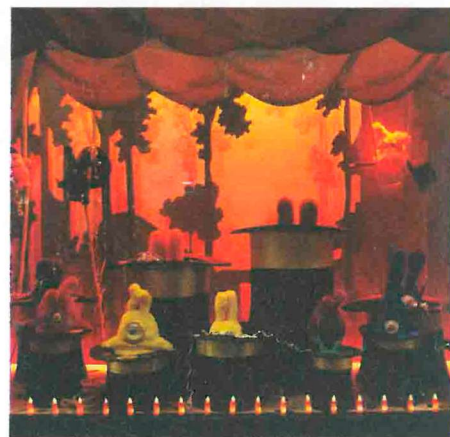
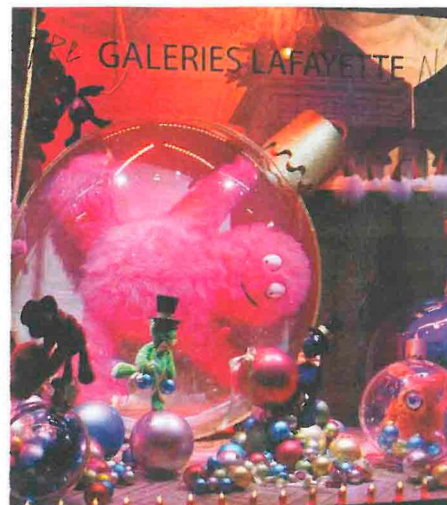
Taentzienstrasse, Berlin

Germany is the home of what many regard as a traditional Christmas – this is where the Christmas tree stems from – and in Berlin, KaDeWe, “continental Europe’s largest department store”, has gone down the Christmas yesteryear route.

That involves Christmas trees, baubles and a lot of fake snow in the majority of the store’s windows. Where this is not the case, snowflakes printed onto a backdrop serve more or less the same function.

The theme is carried into the store as well. The main atrium has been set aside for a floor-to-ceiling Christmas tree surrounded by more snow, decorated birch trees and an outsize deer (or perhaps it’s an elk). Among the many high-profile department stores in Europe and the US, this is perhaps the most obviously traditional.

If you’re in the mood for a *weisse Weihnacht* with all the trimmings, look no further.



Galeries Lafayette

Boulevard Haussmann, Paris

“Gustave and the gang” are, apparently, a team of monsters that have taken over the windows of the Galeries Lafayette flagship in Paris. A wander along the front of this department store reveals that a Muppetesque series of animated puppets have taken the place usually reserved for Santa, Rudolf and suchlike.

Animation has been a feature of the Galeries Lafayette windows for many years and while many department stores are moving towards digital when it comes to offering spectacle, this retailer has stuck to its moving guns.

The other feature of a Galeries Lafayette Christmas has always been the tree that fills the space beneath the ornate Art Nouveau dome and which visitors are encouraged to take snaps of.

This year, in a departure from the norm, the elaborately decorated tree has been turned upside down, making it look rather more like a turnip than a tree.

Model Jerry Hall was drafted in to unveil both tree and window displays this year, in keeping with the celebrity-led events that are increasing in popularity for big stores.

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Henri Bendel

Fifth Avenue, New York

New York's Fifth Avenue is home to some of the world's most expensive retail real estate and just south of Central Park is one of its longest-serving retail denizens, Henri Bendel.

This has been a top-end department store in the city since 1895 and its somewhat patrician-looking storefront rarely fails to draw admiring glances.

Christmas 2014 at Henri Bendel means a relatively simple but striking scheme. The main entrance is flanked on either side by a window decal that takes the form of a white tree. This

extends into the windows above the door and is translucent, so shoppers can peer in at the brightly lit interior.

And when they do so, the major festive feature they'll see is a white tree from which internally lit baubles, outsize cupcakes, ice cream cones and a giant bottle of champagne are suspended.

Compared with many of its Manhattan rivals this is a relatively restrained series of displays, but there is something distinctly New England and 'old money' about it – which is pretty on-brand for this retailer.



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Selfridges

Oxford Street, London

The in-house PR team at Selfridges have been busy when it comes to detailing the work that has gone into creating the 25 Christmas "stories" that are captured in the Oxford Street store's windows.

Selfridges has used 10,000 laser-cut leaves to create the foliage that frames each of the displays and a real Mini was cut in half and adapted into a window prop.

The outcome of all that effort is a long swathe of windows in which gold features prominently as a colour and where stories from Rumpelstiltskin to The Golden Goose are illustrated.

The large corner window at the western end of the building features a life-size carved polyester London taxi that has been covered in gold. There is little clue about which story this is designed to exemplify, but it is certainly eye-catching. All this and a massive sign above the main entrance that trumpets the store as "Destination Christmas".

New York is often cited as the home of Holiday visual merchandising, but Selfridges gives the Big Apple a run for its money this year.