

## STORES

American Eagle Outfitters has made its European debut with three London stores.  
John Ryan reports

# American Eagle

Check shirts, jeans and a simple V-neck jumper. Sound familiar? Anybody who's watched a TV drama that purports to show life in small-town US will be familiar with characters wearing versions of this type of clothing – it is as American as apple pie.

And a lot of retailers have arrived in the UK from North America offering such apparel, from Hollister to Gap, Abercrombie & Fitch to Banana Republic.

While it might seem that there are already a fair number of purveyors of such fashion, there are plenty more where they came from that have not yet made a European debut. Until last week, Pittsburgh-based American Eagle Outfitters, more commonly known simply as American Eagle, was among them.

That omission was righted last Friday and Saturday in Westfield London and Westfield Stratford respectively, followed by a store at Bluewater on Wednesday.

## A changed brand

It is a brave move for a brand that suffered heavily in 2013 in its home market following a successful 2012.

Things are on the mend, according to American Eagle's senior vice-president Simon Nankervis. "We had a phenomenal 2012, but our own hubris got the better of us and the customer told us. It was a humbling experience," he says.

But Nankervis thinks things are looking up in 2014: "The brand's changed since 2011. We've gone from being a US retailer to being a global retailer."

He says that American Eagle is a retailer that constantly changes the appearance of its stores: "We do iterations literally every year. We've opened the space up more for the UK stores than in the US and our visual merchandising changes around the world depending on where we're opening."

That means for the shopper standing outside either of the Westfield stores that the vision is one of height and depth.

Outlining the retailer's international strategy Nankervis says that American Eagle had been looking "for a long



American Eagle's Westfield London store goes big on its jeans offer with floor-to-ceiling displays of product

## AMERICAN EAGLE, WESTFIELD STRATFORD

**Opened** November 15

**Size** 2,800 sq ft

**Floors** Two

**Ambience** North

American outdoors

meets technology

**Number of stores** 853 in the US, 70 stores in 14 other countries

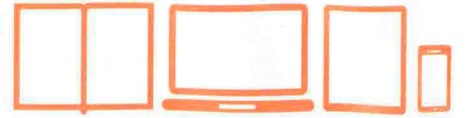
time" for suitable sites in which to make its UK debut: "It's important that we're represented in the leading cities in the world. You have to be impressive to work in London and if you can work here then you can work anywhere else in Europe."

Nankervis says that what will set American Eagle apart from the rest of the competition in the UK is the customer experience. Certainly, the initial vista is nothing if not panoramic. In the

Westfield London store a vast blue neon eagle dominates the high glass frontage, drawing the eye upwards so the shopper gets a view of both floors and the staircase that connects them.

When shoppers enter the store Nankervis wants them to feel that the "greeting is authentic and genuine". That may sound pretty North American, but it is hard not to feel welcomed by the amount of space that gives shoppers room to move.

To see more pictures and a video  
of this store go to  
[Retail-week.com/americaneagleuk](http://Retail-week.com/americaneagleuk)



# lands in the UK



Jeans are big business for American Eagle – 30% of its turnover comes from “bottoms”, according to Nankervis, and in the Westfield stores jeans are the first products encountered.

The floor-to-ceiling display consists of library-style ladders on wheels, meaning that the upper reaches of the presentation are accessible. ‘Jean advisers’ are on hand, all of whom have access to iPads that are used as selling tools.

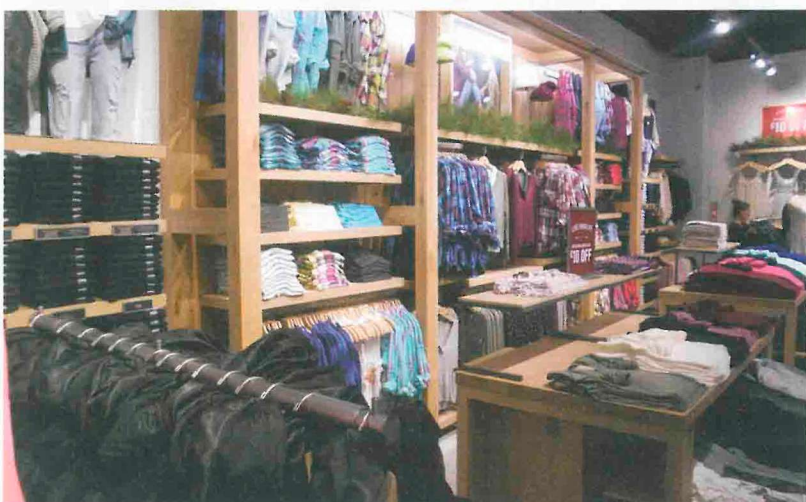
**For the shopper the vision is one of height and depth**

There are also screens, one on a mid-floor pillar and one on the perimeter wall, that look like airport destination boards of old, flicking and changing constantly until the appropriate city/town is displayed. In American Eagle they are used to display jean fits. Both screens are set against a white tile backdrop, the intention being to make this feel like a “subway”, according to Josh Denton, American Eagle’s vice-president of global store operations.

Womenswear is on the ground floor in Westfield Stratford and extensive use has been made of wood and matte metal to create the in-store environment. The floor is plain wood planking and overhead the ceiling void has been filled with spotlight gantries that keep the light on the stock rather than the shop. The bulk of the mid-shop equipment is solid-looking wood fixturing, providing a relatively neutral setting for the generally brightly coloured stock.

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The Westfield Stratford shop features airport-style digital displays

► The perimeter is, for the most part, formed of backlit wood surround open-fronted wardrobes.

Despite the traditional approach to store design, technology has a part to play over and above the deployment of in-store iPads.

The most obvious sign of this are the two large screens displaying American Eagle promotional videos that have been installed on both floors behind the cash and wrap counters.

There are also digital call buttons in the fitting rooms and shoppers are asked for their first names when they try something on. Denton admits that may be difficult

## “We’ve gone from being a US retailer to being a global retailer”

Simon Nankervis, American Eagle Outfitters

for some British shoppers, but says the key will be the manner in which the approach is made. All staff have been trained to make the greeting appropriate for the UK.

Menswear is on the first floor and, as in the womenswear section, a heavy emphasis is placed on jeans. There are graphics across this part of the store that inform shoppers about how to wear and care for

their denim purchases, and the fact that the commodity is located at the front of each floor indicates how important it is for American Eagle.

### Building a nest in the UK

The question has to be whether American Eagle’s offer is sufficiently different from that of, say, Uniqlo, Gap or even Levi’s – all of which have substantial presences

in the Westfield and Bluewater shopping centres. Certainly, the price points are competitive and American Eagle does look like a serious denim contender. And if casualwear is sought, then the retailer will also be on the shopping list.

The Eagle has landed and has revealed three spectacular nests. It will be interesting to see how UK consumers take to this latest North American migrant and where it alights next. Contrary to what might be supposed from its initial foray, there are other cities in the UK – and London’s West End must be tempting as well. ■