

STORES

The Selfridges store in central Manchester may be the younger sibling to its London flagship, but following refurbishment it has poise beyond its years. **John Ryan** visits

Selfridges' refine

Located on Exchange Square, the smaller of Manchester's two Selfridges stores is a mere stripling when set against the retailer's Oxford Street flagship. The latter opened in 1909, while the central Manchester store first welcomed shoppers in 2002.

Yet even allowing for its relative youth, the last four years have brought a root-and-branch refurbishment of the 145,000 sq ft, five-floor store, which lends it a new air of luxury authority.

This has come at the cost of £20m, as well as an unspecified 'contribution' from the brands that occupy space in the store – meaning that there was money on tap to take a top-end environment and improve it from the basement up. Work continues on the top floor and is due to be completed in 2016.

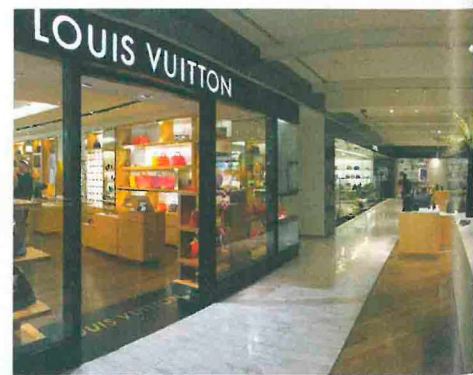
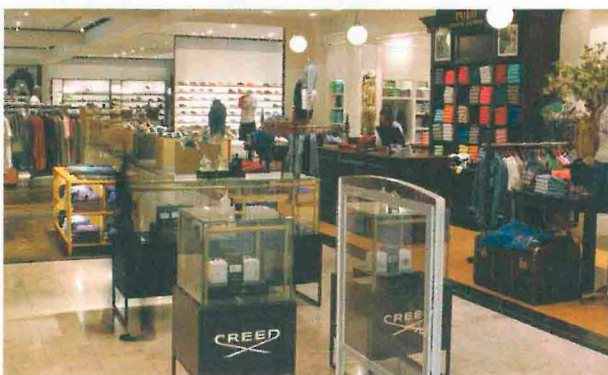
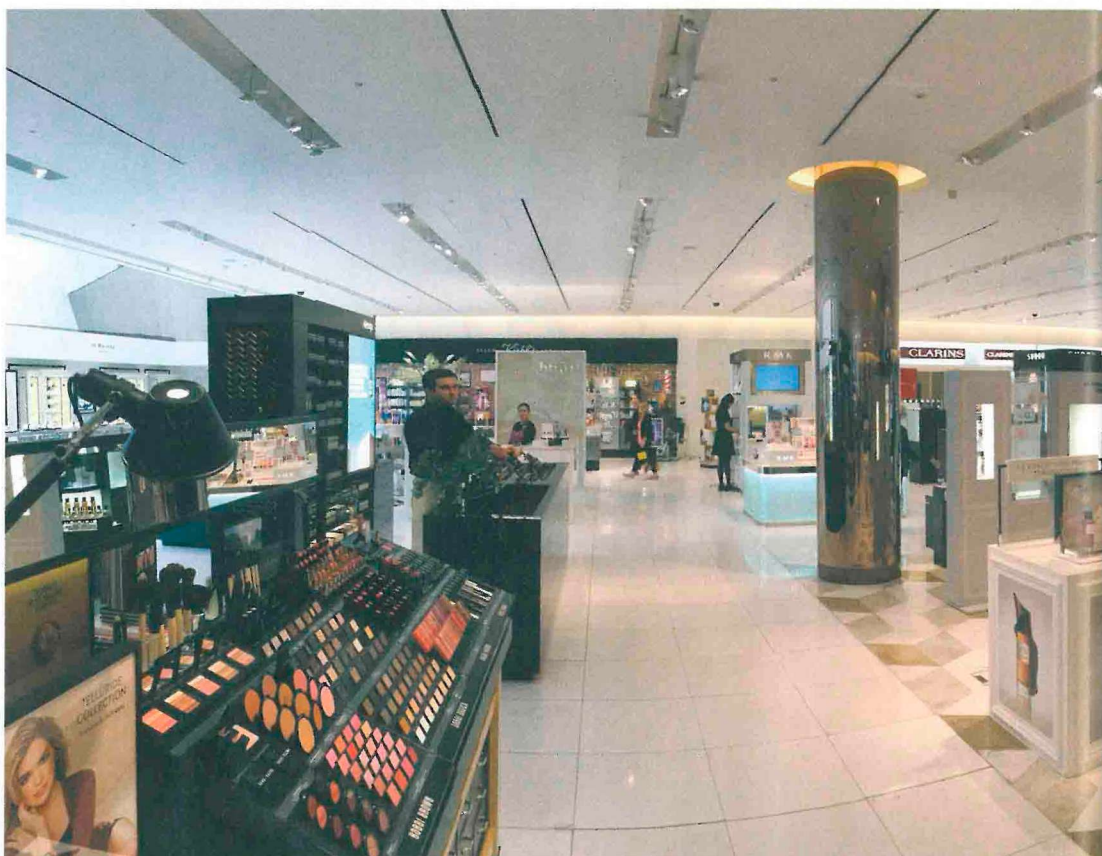
Fancy footwork

There has been a lot of noise in the last few weeks about the new second-floor women's shoe department, which Selfridges says is the biggest of its kind in the UK outside London. It occupies about a fifth of the 22,000 sq ft floorplate and includes a 1,140 sq ft Christian Louboutin area.

Much of what has been done looks vaguely familiar. This is not entirely surprising because general manager Jane Sharrocks freely admits that the shoe galleries in the London store have been a strong influence on the shape of the remodelled floor. Both the ground and second floors are in fact the work of London-based Universal Design Studio and the hallmark of the latter is probably the use of a very upscale material palette.

The shoe department includes features such as see-through prismatic plinths, used as display vehicles for shoes and a central velvet seating area surrounded by glass shelves (which is very reminiscent of the London store).

The rest of the shoe area is made up of a series of low tables fashioned from a variety of materials, affording the onlooker views across the whole of the floor.



SELFRIDGES, EXCHANGE SQUARE

Refurbishment time

Circa four years

Store size 145,000 sq ft

Highest density sales

The second-floor wine shop

General manager

Jane Sharrocks

Ambiance

Contemporary luxe

And then there is the Louboutin space. It is made almost discrete from the rest of the shoe department thanks to a delicate lace-like white frontage that resembles an elaborate Victorian birdcage.

The Louboutin shop-in-shop opened on July 6 and includes both women's and men's shoes (the rest of the men's shoe offer is located on the first floor).

The space is broadly in line with what the shopper might expect of the opulent French luxury brand.

The shoes are displayed in jewel-like settings in the white interior, while the floor is carpeted in red – a sharp contrast to the wooden floor of the rest of the footwear department and a reflection of the trademark Louboutin red sole. In a passing nod to gender difference, the men's part of

See more pictures of Selfridges
central Manchester store on
Retail-week.com/selfridgesmancs



d revamp



This is a luxury interior that would bear close comparison with its Oxford Street store



the concession is black and red, but the brand's red soles are evident for both sexes.

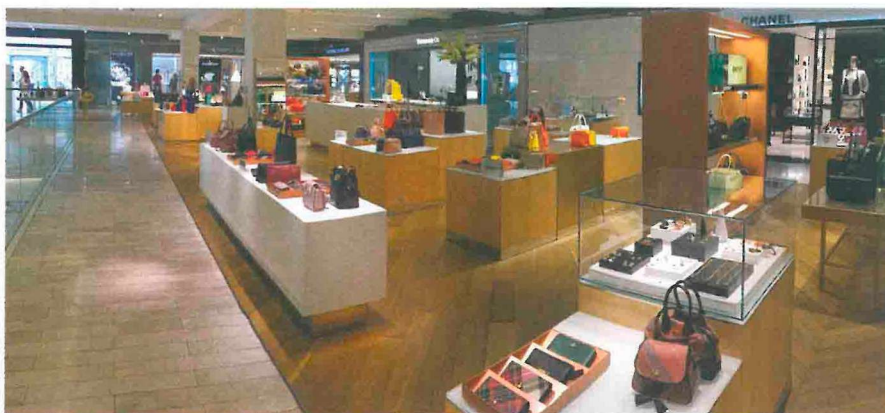
Luxury labels

The rest of the floor is devoted to womenswear and as Sharrocks puts it, there are "fins", protruding from the perimeter. They feature designer brand names demarcating the spaces devoted to each label.

The floor has had more than £2m lavished on it to bring it to its current shape and the entire floor, from the initial electrical installation to a new fit-out, has been completed within the current calendar year.

This is a luxury interior that would bear close comparison with the Oxford Street giant and the same is true on the first floor, the home of menswear.

STORES



WATCH THE VIDEO



Selfridges general manager Jane Sharrocks guided *Retail Week* around the recently refurbished store on Manchester's Exchange Square. Watch the video at: Retail-week.com/selfridgestour



► Prior to refurbishment, one of the complaints that might have been levelled at this store was that it felt a little cramped. Nothing of the kind is evident today.

Stand outside the store in the public walkway that offers entrance on one side to Marks & Spencer and on the other to Selfridges, and the spacious nature of what has been achieved is apparent.

From this vantage point and staring into the menswear department, it is possible to see the other side of the shop. Equipment levels have been kept low, there are visual merchandising features at every turn and accent lighting is a strong element.

There is also something moody about this floor, partly because of the contrast between the marble walkway that follows a route around the central escalator atrium and the diverse floor coverings that abut it.

Oaken opulence

As well as menswear, this floor is also the location of the Wine Shop. It may say something about men that they need the security of

There are visual merchandising features at every turn and accent lighting is a strong element

alcohol close at hand when shopping but, as Sharrocks points out, this relatively small space, housed in wood of the kind that might be used in wine cases, has the store's highest sales density. "We get collectors who come in and buy wines here. It's a bit like buying art," she says.

The menswear floor was finished in August 2014 and has the feel of a design that will stand the test of time.

Basement beauty

Descending once more, the ground floor is about accessories, bags, belts and suchlike. This is classic luxury territory, but the curious thing about this level is that beauty is absent.

When the refurbishment kicked off four years ago, a decision was taken to put the whole of the beauty department in the basement, something that is almost never done in department store retailing, where the ground floor tends to be about cosmetics and perfume.

London consultancy HMKM worked on the beauty project and the one thing that stands out in

spite of the basement location, is the high level of natural daylight. The move was controversial, according to Sharrocks, but the gamble appears to have paid off – beauty sales having risen 40% following the refurbishment.

The beauty department location has given the accessories department breathing space and the sensation is once more one of small items displayed on large fixtures.

The top floor, which is home to young fashion brands such as Ted Baker, Cos and The Kooples, remains under development, but trading continues there.

The building's exterior is also to receive a makeover during the course of the next 12 months with new lighting and materials. All of which means that Selfridges in Exchange Square looks likely to continue being a prime Mancunian retail destination, much like its other branch, on the city's fringes at the Trafford Centre.

This store may be just a teenager, but thanks to the ongoing makeover it has the poise and sophistication of its much more august relation in central London. ■