

INTERIORS

A chance for cycling fans to test-drive products helps upscale cyclewear retailer Rapha stand out from the crowd at its newly opened clubhouse store in London. **John Ryan** pays it a visit

Rapha gets into gear

Since opening its first London store in 2012, ritzy cyclewear brand Rapha has become a fixture on the cycling scene. And now it is welcoming shoppers to its second standalone store-cum-clubhouse in the capital.

This time it has set up in a former bank in fashionable Spitalfields, the heart of that part of east London that attracts the modish and downright outlandish in equal measure – and which has more recently become an anchorage for bike shops, indies and chains alike.

Competitive arena

Rapha has joined the likes of Boardman/Peloton, Evans, CycleSurgery and the sole outpost of road bike specialist Swift Cycles, which are all within a two-minute stroll of the new Rapha Cycle Club.

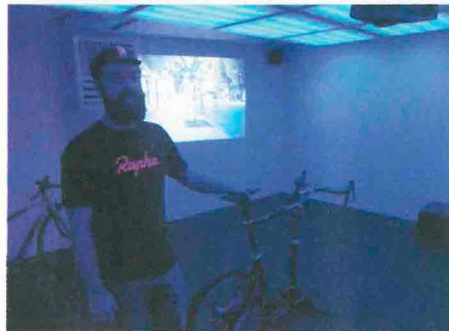
And as a two-wheeled retail destination, the area attracts plenty of cycling enthusiasts. The challenge is therefore to create a level of differentiation to ensure the steady stream of shoppers choose your store over the others.

For Rapha, a listed bank vault repurposed to offer a shopping experience for the more serious cyclist is that point of difference.

Enter Rapha on the ground floor and you will find the more populist fashion cyclewear, plus the clubhouse coffee shop where glass-topped merchandise cases double up as tables.

Head downstairs and the atmosphere changes. This is where the high-performance cyclewear is displayed and where, by appointment, customers can enter the vault – clad in their potential purchases of Rapha clothing – to test-drive them within a climate-controlled chamber.

Using a static bike, with an adjustable temperature ranging from 0°C to 30°C and a variable headwind, this is about helping the customer get a feel for Rapha apparel in their own riding position without leaving the store.



RAPHA CYCLE CLUB, SPITALFIELDS

Opened November 2015

Number of floors Two

Design Brinkworth

Ambience Slick



The ground floor is home to fashion cyclewear and the clubhouse coffee shop, while downstairs is the vault – a nod to the store's banking past

Customers can enter the vault – clad in their potential purchases of Rapha clothing – to test-drive them

It's fair to say that Rapha is at the top end of cyclewear when it comes to price, and to justify this, it has to do something distinctive.

For London-based design company Brinkworth, tasked with creating the interior – as it did for Rapha's Soho store – the major consideration was how to handle the massive vault door and the space behind it.

What has been created is an experience in its own right and certainly sets the store apart from its neighbouring rivals.

It is exactly what fans of the brand should expect – products that speak money and design, and interiors that are about adding a twist to the standard operations within the cycling sector.

Care has also been taken to preserve details from the building's banking past, from the heavy-duty GPO phone (pictured) to the front doors.

The latest addition to the Rapha empire fits well within its neighbourhood and provides ample reasons to pay it a visit.