

STORES

The Christmas season may be in full swing but there's still time to deck the halls with festive trinkets. **John Ryan** takes a look at London's Christmas shops

Step into Christmas - showcasing London's stores

Time was when getting in the Christmas spirit was relatively straightforward – buy a tree, decorate it with tinsel, add baubles and then stand back and admire. But for those wishing to put themselves in a festive mood today, the solution is to head for a Christmas shop.

These, for the most part, are not standalone entities, but areas within large shops, although there are a few exceptions.

It's much too late to do anything about adjusting an offer to compete with what is on display here, but as a pointer towards what should be considered for 2016, checking out this year's sprinkling of Christmas shops is a worthy pursuit.

And if nothing else, it is worth noting the rise to prominence in 2015 of the festive stag. Whether it's covered in sequins or sprinkled in glitter, it is the must-have item that no interior with seasonal pretensions should be without this year.



Diamante wreath and stag decoration from Liberty



Christmas 2015

Product A glitter stag should be part of the product mix

Colour red is less prominent than might normally be the case

Environment Christmas market presentation is the look sought by many

Merchandising Dense
Ambience Wintry

Selfridges, Oxford Street

Like most of the other big department store retailers, Selfridges has opted to locate its Christmas shop on the top floor, taking shoppers up through the wide-open spaces that surround the escalators as an ascent is made to this level.

The mild disadvantage of the top floor in this store is the ceiling height, which is substantially lower than much of the rest of the store.

To disguise this fact, iridescent stars have been strung from the ceiling across the whole of the space.

The area is densely merchandised, ensuring it is the product that captures the eye of passing customers, rather than the equipment.

Christmas trees and baubles notwithstanding, shoppers will also know that they are in the right place owing to its demarcation from the rest of the floor via a simple, plain wood frame.

This does, however, make it seem a bit functional and is perhaps mildly lacking in the 'magic' of the season, which so many other retailers try to foster.

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More pictures of London's Christmas stores on
Retail-week.com/LondonChristmas



In House, Shoreditch

Billed as the smallest Christmas shop in London, the 110 sq ft seasonal pop-up at In House on Redchurch Street mixes vintage Christmas decorations with antiques that might find their way on to a festive table on the big day.

In House is a permanent pop-up space and residencies in the property vary from a couple of weeks to a few months.

For retailers, the shop has the advantage of being at the heart of an area frequented by well-heeled design-led types and the Christmas store is a response to this, even though, like most festive shops, it will disappear once 2015 is done and dusted.

The premises features a relatively low-cost fit-out, meaning the interior is all about visual merchandising.

It is amazing how many products have been fit into the shop without it feeling overcrowded. There is a real sense of abundance here, which is appropriate at this time of year.



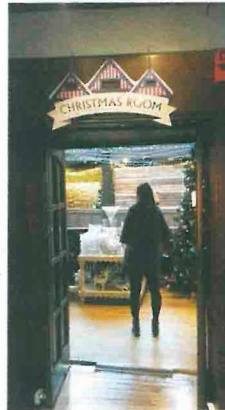
Liberty, Great Marlborough Street

Styling itself 'The home of Christmas', Liberty has put its Christmas shop on the store's fourth floor and with no escalators, it's a case of walking up the stairs or queueing for the lift to join the human traffic jam that awaits.

Even so, this is probably the most glamorous and narrowest location in which to buy festive trappings in London.

The shop consists of a series of faux market stalls set around the central atrium over which shoppers were leaning in order to capture the best shots of this twinkly space. Each of the glittering market stalls is colour coded and there are sparkly reindeer throughout.

The building itself helps to foster the sense of a winter wonderland. The dark wood arts-and-crafts surroundings are reminiscent of a German Christmas market. Webs of white fairy lights criss-cross overhead and the entrance to this department is guarded by a vaguely realistic looking Rudolph – yours for more than £600.



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Christmas guides are on hand to direct any customers for whom the store's massive interior proves too much

John Lewis, Oxford Street

As with the majority of the big department stores that have a Christmas shop on Oxford Street, John Lewis has decided to locate its festive section on one of the upper floors.

This serves the twin purpose of getting shoppers to ride the escalator up to the rest of the store, and not clogging up the high-price ground floor trading space, where products tend to be small and expensive (think beauty).

A Christmas shop in a larger store is a destination for shoppers, and John Lewis has responded accordingly by festooning its lower levels with signs that point the way towards this part of the interior. Staff wearing green 'Christmas guide' sashes are also on hand to direct any customers for whom the store's massive interior proves too much.

When shoppers finally arrive at the Christmas shop, what awaits them is a slick operation.

The space is marked out by a red arch with a white neon 'Christmas Shop' sign. Pass through it and this is a very densely merchandised area where the stock is set up in discrete areas labelled 'Christmas Dreams' and 'Enchantment'.

Breaking up each of the Christmas shop departments are colour-themed trees rising from floor to ceiling.

In terms of impact, this may not be the most beautiful that the West End has to offer, but it is among the most comprehensive.



▶ Harrods, Covent Garden

Harrods? Covent Garden? Well, yes. The UK's largest department store has opened a pop-up Christmas shop in Covent Garden – one of a number of retailers that have taken temporary units in the area's Royal Opera House Arcade.

Inside, there are Christmas decorations aplenty, but if shoppers find themselves short of festive teddy bears or Star Wars products, look no further.

In marked contrast to the densely merchandised efforts of other retailers operating in the Yuletide space, there is actually a fair amount of room to move in here – Harrods has clearly taken the view that space equates to luxury.

It is also in keeping with the domestic scale of much of Covent Garden's retail and acts well as a standalone proposition.

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