

STORES

There is diversity in the visual merchandising approaches being taken by retailers on London's Oxford Street, but common themes emerge.

John Ryan reports

Spring into the sea

It was the first official day of spring just a week and a bit ago and, bang on time, the weather flipped as an Arctic blast brought lower temperatures, snow, ice and hail.

Cue the arrival of lighter-weight clothing in the stores and windows designed to reflect the sunnier times that lie ahead.

For those who like to stock up in anticipation of the warm weather, this might seem the right thing to do, but the bulk of shoppers will probably be left wondering why there's nothing seasonally appropriate in the shops.

In fairness, general merchandise retailer Tiger makes a good fist at seasonality with a window in its flagship on London's Oxford Street that is all about Easter.

As shoppers shivered, however, there must be the occasional thought that retailers live in an alternative world with windows that show how we'd prefer things to be, rather than how they really are.



JD Sports, Oxford Street

The JD Sports flagship has been up and running since the middle of last year and 'the undisputed king of trainers' has set out its stall on the basis of a highly interactive, digital in-store environment.

It is no surprise therefore to see a large screen in one of the shop windows, but this probably demands less attention than the vista next to it, which features five rows of trainers, each of which has five rotating plinths with colourful footwear on them.

This would be interesting anywhere as movement

of a physical kind remains more engaging than screens with mood content, no matter how good.

In this instance, the overall effect was only slightly marred by one of the plinths not having a trainer on it, and the fact that it rotated continually only served to emphasise the absence.

The lesson to be drawn from this is that if a retailer is going to have an arresting window, then it has to be looked at critically and often in order to ensure that nothing has gone awry.

Tiger, Oxford Street

When Tiger opened on Oxford Street in the autumn of 2014, it billed the event as the arrival of the first variety store in the shopping mecca.

More than 18 months later it is a well-established feature on the street's eastern reaches and its windows consistently add a splash of colour to the area.

Easter is early this year and Tiger has pounced on the event, filling its windows with everything from the inevitable eggs, in multiple colours, to baskets adorned with plastic flowers and gardening kits for the urban horticulturalist.

The outcome is a pair of windows that are almost impossible to ignore.

While pocket money prices are certainly part of the appeal of any Tiger store, it's the array of clashing hues that really grabs the eye.

This is a feast of plenty with a wide variety of Easter-related merchandise without having to rely on just chocolate and confectionery.



More pictures of Oxford Street's spring visual merchandising campaigns on
Retail-week.com/SpringStores2016



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- Mannequin groupings are stronger than ever
- 'Magazine' visual merchandising treatments are increasingly important
- Screens and movement in windows remain a prominent feature
- Seasonality continues, in many cases, to be at odds with consumer desires and reality



This creates the impression of editing in exactly the same manner as a fashion magazine would do

Topshop/Topman, Oxford Circus

The Topshop/Topman flagship at Oxford Circus is frequently referred to as 'fashion central' and perhaps with this in mind the Topman element of the shop has a window that treats the store like a fashion magazine.

The group of mannequins that crowd the window are framed by a series of concentric neon tubes in white and blue with an overarching message that announces 'the spring issue'.

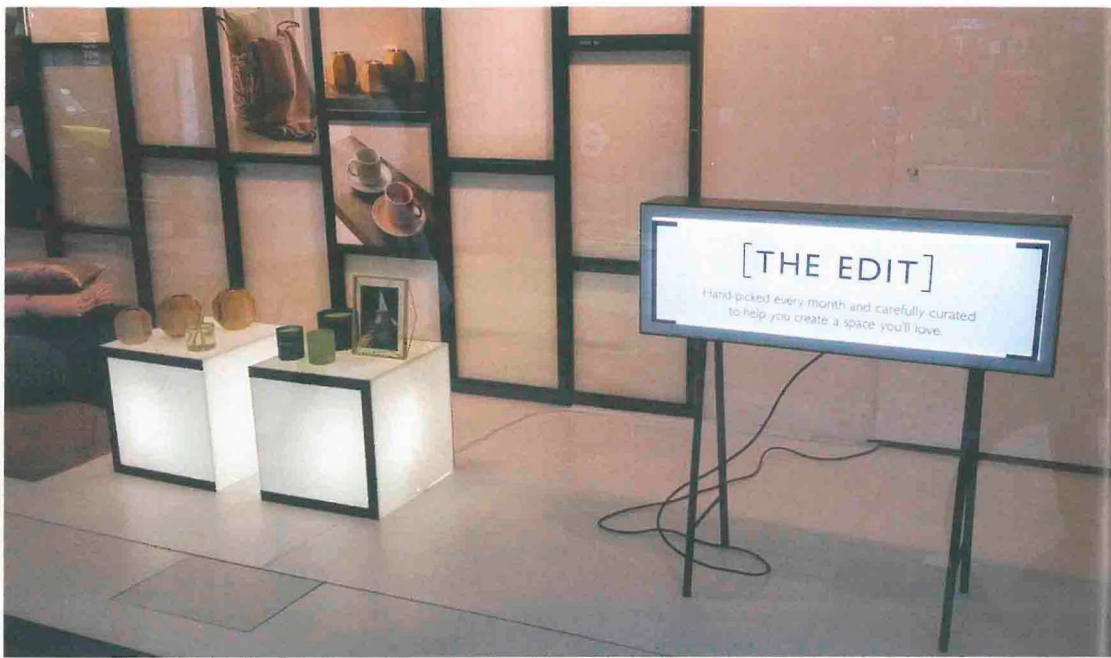
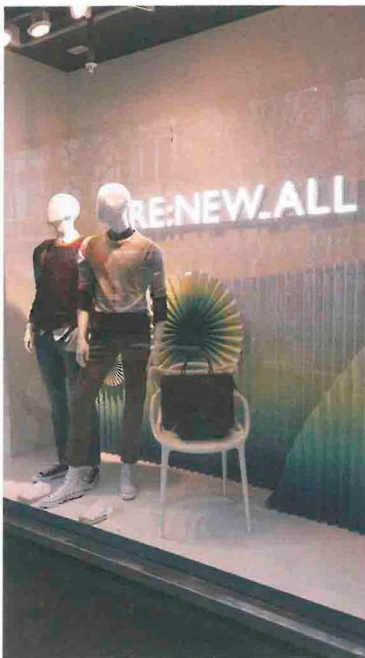
This is simple stuff, but hard to miss, and it pulls off the trick of using a brightly coloured framing device to draw attention to a fashion vignette

where the colours are muted. It also creates the impression of editing in exactly the same manner as a fashion magazine would do, instead of just putting a bunch of figures in a window and hoping for the best.

Beside this window, the Topshop scene features female mannequins on plinths with the glassline covered in yellow and turquoise dots.

Again, it has a high profile, but the focus is rather more on the window surroundings than the clothes that are on display, which may not have been the intention.

STORES



► John Lewis, Oxford Street

In department store terms, John Lewis' Oxford Street-facing windows are conspicuous by the almost minimalist treatment.

While 'editing' and 'curating' may be implicit in what has been achieved by Arcadia at Topshop, it is absolutely explicit in each of these windows, right down to the freestanding light boxes that state 'the edit', in a mid-century style.

The visual merchandising team at John Lewis has decided to make quasi-museum pieces of the articles that have been pulled

together for these displays. The result is a series of very considered windows where there is a lot of empty space – the temptation to fill it completely has been robustly resisted.

A few of the windows also make use of a play on the word 'renewal', which morphs into 'Re:New.All' and again, both colour palette and the number of items on display have been rigorously controlled. This is a strong theme and one that succeeds as much by omission as inclusion.



Uniqlo, Oxford Street

There are two branches of Uniqlo on Oxford Street, as well as one at the southern end of Regent Street. And next week the one in the middle reopens following a hiatus of more than a year during which it has been undergoing expansion and refurbishment.

Until then, however, the store to the east of Oxford Circus is where many in search of Uniqlo's fashionable offer will head for. And when they do, they will be greeted by windows filled with metropolitan scenes.

Unlike some of its fashion rivals, Uniqlo varies the weights of the fabrics it uses from one season to the next and the changeover from autumn/winter to spring/summer is less stark than in many other retailers.

At present, this translates as somewhat monochromatic displays worn by white mannequins and gathered together by a strapline across the glass that reads 'clothes that work'.

The window is one of many in the West End to feature groups of mannequins backed by floor-to-ceiling graphics.

As in Tiger, low price is a given, rather than a feature of these windows.