

STORES

The refreshed Jones Bootmaker store at Fenchurch Street reflects a larger stride forward for the footwear chain. **John Ryan** visits

Step in the right

The mid-market footwear arena is a crowded place and the decision about where to position an offer (this is a broad church in terms of price) is likely to determine both the chances of success and the way in which the retailer is viewed.

At the better end of things is Jones Bootmaker. This 110-store chain, serving both men and women, has been a stalwart of high streets and shopping centres since 1994 when its current name was adopted. It morphed then from a long-standing small chain into a footwear concern with national coverage.

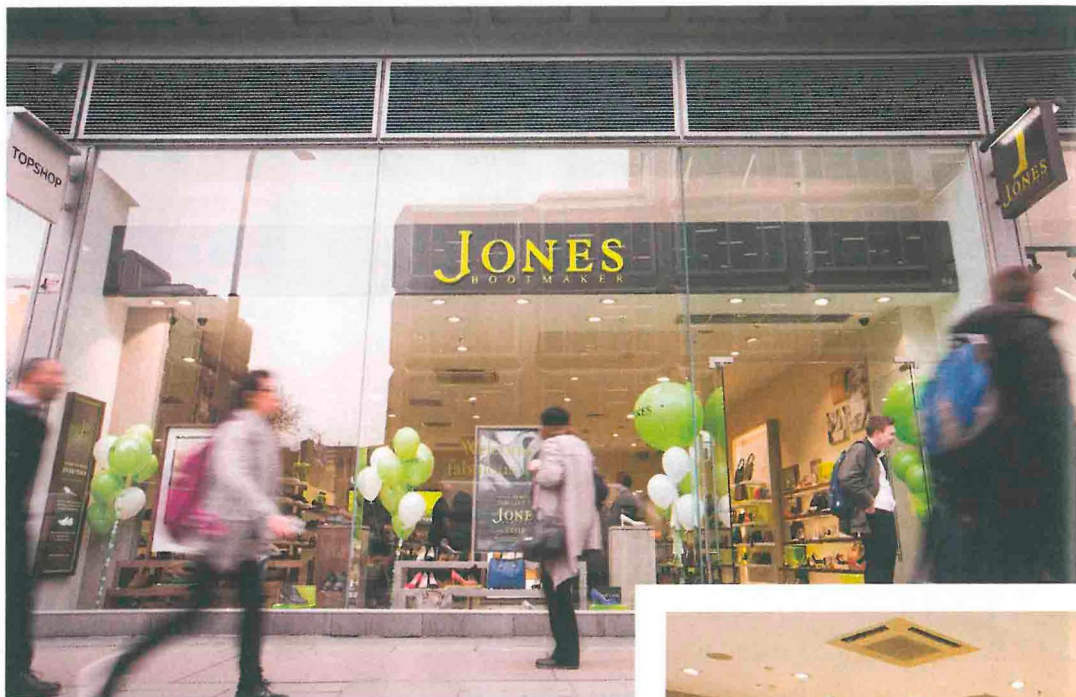
For a while, following a makeover a few years ago that saw dark wood shelving and high-density displays become its hallmark, that was it. Jones Bootmaker continued on its way with the likes of Dune, Aldo and Clarks for competition. There was also the matter of the big fashion chains, such as Zara, Marks & Spencer and Next, all of which offer footwear and can make the going tough for specialist standalone operations.

Restoring relevance

With this in mind, along with a sense that the stores were looking a little tired, a decision was taken to look at the portfolio and create a template to refresh the estate. The chain is, in fact, owned by distressed retail investment firm Alteri and the move has been part of a project to restore relevance to Jones Bootmaker as a high street footwear force.

The outcome of the process can be seen in London at the Victoria and Fenchurch Street stores, both of which have had a complete refit and represent the future for the chain. The Fenchurch Street branch actually opened on May 4 and, at around 2,000 sq ft, is modestly sized.

That said, it packs a lot into a space that is dissected in an almost scalpel-like manner down the middle, with the men's offer on the left and the women's to the right. Before getting to this, however, we should take note of the large window, which



features floor-to-ceiling glass and affords passers-by views deep into the shop.

The door is set to the right of the main window, meaning display tables for both genders are on show, with bleached wood used for the women's offer and darker wood for the men's.

There is also a graphic that purports to show how the shoes are

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direction



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made, something retail operations director Daniel Shaw says is aimed at showing off the Jones Bootmaker "heritage". It's a theme that is returned to in the store.

As far as the windows are concerned, though, the overall impression is uncluttered, with the logo set back from the glassline and forming the end of the internal

ceiling canopy as it reaches the front of the shop.

Trading hours at Fenchurch Street are more restricted than in other locations; the store is open Monday to Friday as the City tends to be deserted at the weekend. Its location also means, as Shaw notes, that the shop is "rammed" at 8am as time-pressed financial-sector workers

STORES

make a footwear pitstop on their way to the office.

It also means an affluent demographic. This store has an average selling price of £75 per pair, heading up to £300 for Cheaney shoes, one of several upmarket brands stocked here. For those choosing to pay a visit, this store does look different from other Jones Bootmaker outposts, thanks to the design and visual merchandising, both of which are the result of work carried out by consultancy Mynt Design.

Double feature

Mynt was employed towards the end of 2015 with a brief to reaffirm "the brand's desirability and express its quality, trust and heritage", according to Shaw. In practice, this means feature walls on both the left and right of the shop as the visitor pauses at the entrance.

There are also two floor coverings:

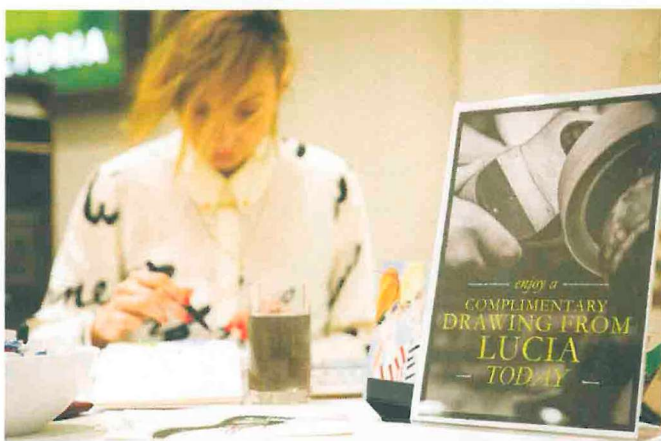
Amtico marble-style tiles for the women's area and, beyond the very low display wall in the mid-shop that divides the offer, vinyl wood flooring for the men's.

The mid-shop equipment has changed very substantially from the Jones Bootmaker of old.

In its former avatar, a typical branch featured high wall-like mid-shop fixtures that allowed high density to be maintained but gave the interior a very enclosed feel.

In Fenchurch Street, there is a mix of low tables with the same wood treatment as in the window, so the shopper can see from one point to any other in the store. Density is generally lower, but if you are in the business of shifting brands such as Loake, Barker and Cheaney, crowding the stock into a smallish space would be a little off-putting for shoppers making highly discretionary purchases.

The same is true of the perimeter, which consists



JONES BOOTMAKER, FENCHURCH STREET

Status Refitted store

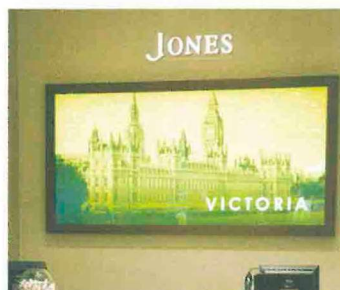
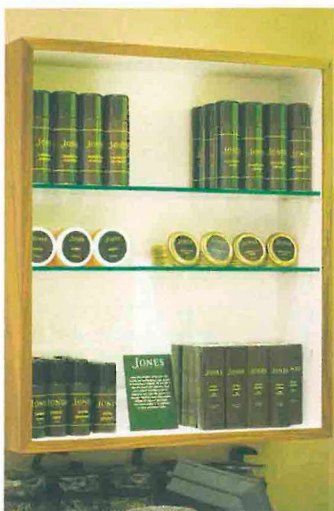
Design Mynt Design

Reopened May 4, following one day of lost trading

Size 2,000 sq ft

Ambience Clean and efficient

Highlight Ease of navigation



of a fairly straightforward shelving system. However, two types of graphics are used to break this up: heritage images are mixed with fashion shots to show that this is not just about buying traditional footwear.

The cash desk is at the rear of the shop and features a light box with a green monochrome image of the City around Fenchurch Street. Shaw says these light boxes are a feature in all the stores that have been refitted or had the new visual merchandising treatment, giving the example of a Robin Hood picture in the Nottingham store.

In total, this is a straightforward store design, but it is readily understood, unfussy and a very distinct improvement on much of the Jones Bootmaker estate. The new store concept actually launched at Birmingham Grand Central and the look is being taken to a further 15 branches this year, with 12 in London (Leamington Spa, Nottingham and Edinburgh form the balance).

This is a fresh start for the retailer, suggesting practical turnaround steps for the chain are being taken. Jones Bootmaker is a retailer that looked as if it might go the way of all flesh, but it now appears to be on the road to recovery.