

CHILDREN'S RETAIL: ROOM TO GROW

Retailers specialising in goods for parents and children are introducing store concepts that blur the lines between retail environment and play area, finds Retail Focus.

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Image: Hufton+Crow

According to a report by market research firm Technavio, the global childrenswear market is expected to grow at a CAGR of more than six per cent by 2020. Factors such as the rise in high income and working women population, and the growing purchasing power of the populace in developing countries is expected to bolster the sale of children's apparel.

In the UK specifically, Euromonitor International found that childrenswear continued to grow in both current value and volume terms in 2015, to £5.8 billion; a figure it expects to rise by 2020.

In terms of design however, baby and children's retail is behind the curve compared to other sectors, believes Richard Bennett, design director at Dalziel & Pow. 'There is a real opportunity for brands to take market share by acting now to carve out a position for them,' he says.

The London-based design agency worked with Mamas & Papas on its new retail concept, which launched at Westfield London in March. Developed with millennials in mind, the new store provides

a digitally enhanced, full-service shopping experience to 'inspire confidence and support young families' as they navigate the world of parenting. '[We tailored] the store concept to Mamas & Papas' core customer demographic of tech-savvy, experience-driven 28-35 year olds, delivering the superior service, interactivity and community that these consumers have come to expect from retail today,' explains Bennett.

The interior is designed to create a sense of calmness and clarity, and is organised into 'worlds' based around new parents' key shopping missions. 'Our retail vision was to create a concept that gives parents and their baby the best start in life,' adds Bennett. 'This vision was a benchmark for design features that are visible throughout the store.

'Millennials, used to a certain level of aesthetic and fashionability in their lives, don't want to give this up just because they become parents, so we're seeing brands respond to this by creating fashion-relevant concepts for baby and children. Our Mamas & Papas concept is a baby store that takes cues from high-street fashion and creates a comfortable transition to parenthood.'

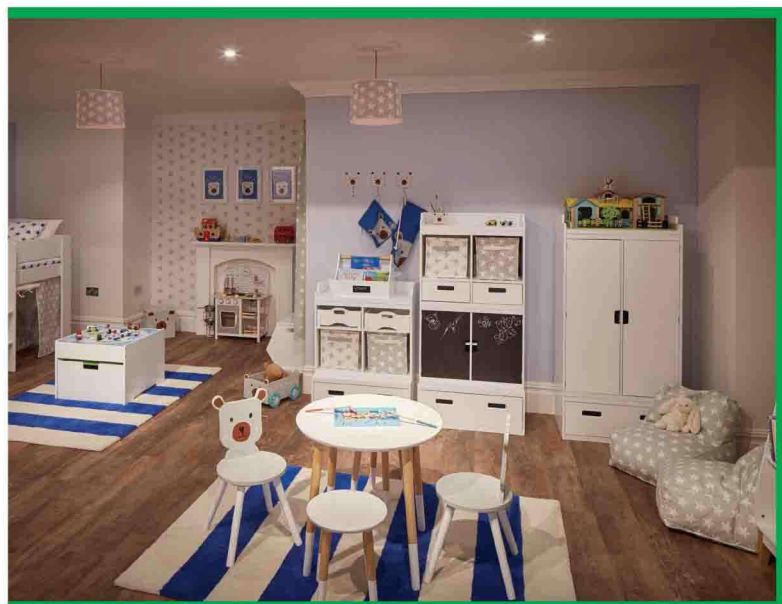
Mothercare is two years into its turnaround strategy, which includes the roll out of a new store design concept by 20.20. In its full-year results for the 52-week period

to 26 March 2016, the company recorded a 51 per cent growth in underlying profit before tax; something which Mark Newton-Jones, chief executive of Mothercare, puts down to improvements in the brand's customer offer, both in store and online, and the look and feel of the store estate. 'In the UK, almost 40 per cent of space is now in the new and much-improved format,' says Newton-Jones. 'We have invested in product, service, systems and the team which is delivering a significantly improved experience for our customers both in store and online. Our vision remains clear: to be the leading global retailer for parents and young children.'

Earlier this year, Harrods unveiled its Mini Superbrands destination for children's designerwear, following the successful launch of Superbrands in womenswear in 2014. Designed in collaboration with B&R Architects and Woods Hardwick, the space houses 'mini-me' designer clothing in a fun environment. 'Creating a playful environment was paramount during the design process,' says the retailer. 'The life-sized Fendi robot monsters, colouring tables, and tablets loaded with games will ensure that children, too, will love Mini Superbrands.'

Kids footwear is another area of

Above: Kurt Geiger footwear at Harrods, designed by Campaign.



retail that is growing fast. To reflect this, British footwear and accessories brand Kurt Geiger opened two very individual store environments in Harrods and Selfridges, designed by Campaign to capture the imagination of both kids and parents. In Harrods, the luxurious and magical space is inspired by the Japanese animation 'My neighbor Totoro', with white abstract trees that reach up to the ceiling canopy of a folded chrome leaf installation. Floating into the space are large furry creatures in green mink that children can climb into and play on iPads while their parents shop. In Selfridges, the playful, modern retail space is inspired by Monsters & Dr Seuss's 'The Cat in the Hat'.

'The two biggest children's store design trends I currently see are the rise of in-store digital in conjunction with a sensorial rediscovery,' notes John Regan, creative director at retail design and brand consultancy FITCH. 'It implies a return to playing; a need for disconnection of the mundane day-to-day reality. Clearly these two are increasing at a rapid pace.'

'Mamas & Papas is a great example of how digital has been used to create key touch points along the customer journey, enhancing the store experience,' he says. 'For example, how they project cloud animations on the wall that take on animal shapes.'

'A truly immersive experience is also on the rise: getting back to basics, where experiences are playful and naturally engaging.'

This was the aim of The Great Little Trading Co's (GLTC) first physical retail space, which opened in London's Wandsworth in April. Designed by Resolution Interiors, the showroom features a series of inspirational room sets where children can interact, discover and play

Above: GLTC opened its first physical retail space in Wandsworth, London in April, designed by Resolution Interiors.

Right & below: Harrods has opened a Mini Superbrands destination for children's designerwear, following the successful launch of Superbrands in womenswear in 2014.



with the products.

'By using familiar and premium materials, it allows parents to visualise the GLTC products in their own home,' says Laura Burnside, creative designer at Resolution Interiors. 'GLTC products and the beautifully considered room sets immediately create a wonderland for all children. They get lost within each space and are happy and content in their own little world interacting with the products, which in turn makes very happy parents.'

'Spaces designed for children are

evolving into all-encompassing spaces for various activities, including crafting, relaxing and engaging in role play,' states Burnside. 'Large spaces are being brought into the playroom and smaller spaces are becoming secret spaces providing a special hide out for kids.'

The new GLTC showroom, along with a growing number of other stores designed for parents and children, are blurring the boundaries between retail space and play area to enhance the overall shopping experience. **Rf**