

# RETAIL PLAYGROUND

With several big names announcing plans for major refurbishment work, department stores of the future will be destinations where customers can engage, experience and explore.

Text: Lindsey Dennis

According to the Global Department Store Summit 2016 in Zürich last month, the unprecedented rise in travel and tourism paired with fast-paced changes in technologies is opening up an amazing new world for customers. It promises untapped opportunities for many businesses and brands – department stores especially.

Department stores aren't shying away from big launches. At Selfridges London there's a hive of activity. A £300 million investment will see the eastern side of the store transformed, including a new double-height entrance. The plans include the now open 3,440 sq m Body Studio and a new Accessories Hall, which Selfridges says will be 'magnificent'. The store also recently unveiled a new candle and fragrance location on the ground floor.

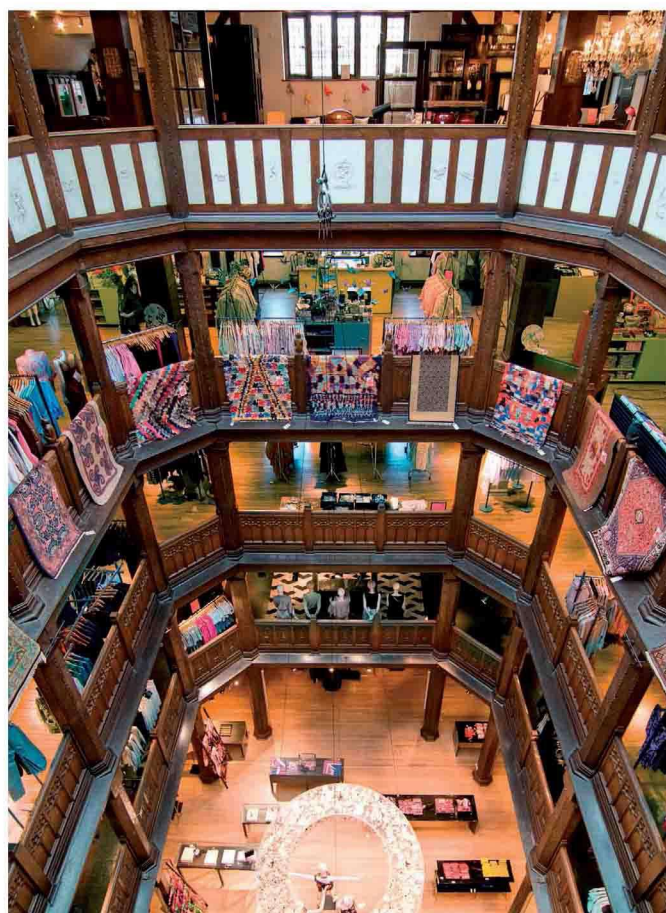
Harvey Nichols is undergoing an ambitious masterplan in Knightsbridge. The new menswear destination showcases the new design concept that was first unveiled at Birmingham last summer. It was a milestone moment for the brand and showcases the new design concept in which Harvey Nichols moves away from the traditional shop-in-shop format. Next on the agenda is the ground floor including the Beauty Hall, International Accessories and Jewellery Box, showcasing a curated edit of fine jewellery brands. The entire Knightsbridge store will look like a very different Harvey Nichols once the refurbishment has been completed,' says Paul Finucane, group stores director at Harvey Nichols.

'Most recently in the new menswear destination we have displayed product by category, regardless of brand and price point, taking away the element of browsing, which our customer insights told us men didn't like,' says Finucane. 'Today's retail market is about catering to your customers' every need, providing an environment not only where they want to shop but eat, drink, be groomed, meet with friends or use as place to work,' says Finucane.

At Liberty, refurbishment work is currently underway in the Jewellery Hall. 'We will have new selling props and POS, counter treatments and bio graphics, and the overall look will be much softer and elegant,' says Ed Bustell, managing director of Liberty. 'A hand-drawn theme will be applied – gilding and leafing – and we will use marble for the creation of key selling stations and displays. It's going to look amazing! Then it's the makeover of our central atrium, from just a scarf hall to an accessory concept shop, selling bags and sunglasses, and a special in-store shop for our own Liberty London Iphis brand.'

The store is planning to hold an 'In Conversation' series so customers can go in store and meet designers, suppliers and creators and ask them questions. 'It's all about interaction and offering something unique; that's the Liberty way,' says Bustell.

John Lewis is continuing its expansion programme with two new store openings in Leeds and Chelmsford, the latter its first to open in Essex. 'Our shop in Leeds is creating 550 jobs for the local community and will be our most service-led shop yet, with more than 30 in-store services such as the 6Beauty spa, a foreign



**Above:** Liberty is currently refurbishing its jewellery hall and will then makeover its central atrium from just a scarf hall to an accessory concept shop selling bags and sunglasses.

**Below:** A Bombay Sapphire Rooftop Retreat is currently residing at Harvey Nichols in Knightsbridge.







**Left:** John Lewis will open new stores in Chelmsford (left) and Leeds later this year.

**Below:** Selfridges has unveiled a new candle and fragrance location on the ground floor, as part of its £300 million transformation.

exchange and home design service. The breadth of services that will be available in John Lewis Leeds reflects our ambition to expand the experiences within our shops,' says a spokesperson from John Lewis. The retailer plans to open shops in Westfield White City, Cheltenham and Oxford in 2017.

Mark Broadhead, centre director at Queensgate Shopping Centre in Peterborough, says department stores bring a huge amount of benefits to shopping centres. 'Choice, brands, depth of range, exclusivity and the convenience all under one roof. Coupled with a shopping experience and theatre within the store presentation. Reliability and confidence for the customer is key,' he says.

Marks & Spencer Queensgate has undergone a major refurbishment to improve customer service, including a new third floor. The store now includes a refreshed 929 sq m womenswear department and 464 sq m menswear area alongside refreshed lingerie, kidswear and homeware offerings.

'Department stores are considered a trusted source,' notes Broadhead. 'Customer trust and loyalty are often a big draw. Although customers will test the market, and look around especially online, they will often revert to their comfort zone to make the purchase with total confidence in the whole customer service experience all under one roof.'

Several department stores are using their rooftop spaces to offer a variety of experiences. Selfridges London has been doing this for several years, and its latest venture is the Forest restaurant complete with floral-themed potting sheds on the terrace. John Lewis in Oxford Street has collaborated with pop-up specialist Night Tales to bring three restaurants to its roof throughout the summer months, while a Bombay Sapphire Rooftop Retreat is currently residing at Harvey Nichols Knightsbridge.

Over in America, architectural firm CallisonRTKL captured architectural elements that are signature to Hawaii throughout the new Bloomingdales store at Ala Moana shopping mall. The challenge was to localise the store without destroying the roots of the iconic New York department store. 'There's a lot of wood beam ceilings and tropical wood shutter designs that we used as accents throughout the store,' explains David Cassidy, senior vice president and department stores sector leader at Callison RTKL.

In terms of how department stores have evolved, Cassidy says he is seeing smaller footprints and more offerings. 'They're looking at trying to attract that next customer. The department store customer is a very loyal and destination-type shopper and now we're trying to adapt stores to a younger generation: high tech, social media, things like that. All those aspects have to be woven into the department store. We can't alienate the current customer; we're training the next generation customer.'

'In store theatre is an important part of retail today. With shoppers constantly taking in new experiences via social media and web surfing, it's essential to feed this appetite in store too; it needs to be a place of discovery. It's about offering the customer a sensory experience, in which they can relate with the product, feel at ease with the surroundings and want to explore.'



**Above:** To celebrate its 125th anniversary, Fenwick of Bond Street organised a Decade of Drama Millinery exhibition in May and June.

**Below:** Callison captured architectural elements that are signature to Hawaii throughout Bloomingdales at Ala Moana shopping mall.

