

## STORES

After a tough 2015, fashion retailer Monsoon has opened a new flagship in Westfield London. **John Ryan** visits

# Monsoon brings its tr reign to Westfield Lon

**W**hen it rains, it pours. In May, Monsoon, whose principal offer is of printed dresses, tops and bottoms, revealed that EBITDA had plunged 59% in the year to the end of August 2015 and that it had incurred a net loss of £617,000.

By any standards this is a tropical soaking and the business of recovering after the deluge is probably ongoing, but the first signs of better weather may be apparent in the new flagship store, located in the Westfield London shopping centre. The notion of getting soaked in fact informs the exterior design of this store on its

"digital cube", which occupies much of the upper portion of the frontage.

The store, which is a relocation (Monsoon has had a store in the mall since it opened in 2008), is one of Westfield's standout tenants thanks to this cube – which has the effect of being wedged into the shop. Equally striking is what it displays: computer-generated abstract swirling patterns and stills from Monsoon's promotional campaigns that show beautiful people wearing the product in exotic locations.

All this and then it rains (digitally, that is) down the front of the cube, drawing the eye to the logo beneath, which the virtual water hits and

bounces off – an engaging piece of visual trickery.

Then there is the garland of copper butterflies. There are 4,500 of these, all of them laser-cut, that have been clustered to create a sculptural chain that winds along a window and through the glass into the store's mezzanine.

Look just above this and the sign Monsoon Children is apparent – in contrast to the digital cube, which exclusively flags up womenswear. Dan Leach, head of store design, says: "It's always a concern when you're trading two levels. How are you going to get people to the upper level?" At Monsoon, this is how it's done, with attention drawn to both elements of its offer. Together, cube and lepidoptera make it impossible for passers-by to ignore the store. When the shopper finally manages to stop gawping at all this, however, it's time to head indoors.

## Champagne lifestyle

Leach details the division of the offer across the two floors: "It's womenswear downstairs and then childrenswear and occasionwear [meaning posh





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frocks and “bridal” upstairs.” On the ground floor, equipment heights are relatively low, the walls are plastered with a variety of subtle treatments, from grey to a softly imprinted finish, and dark wood clads the pillars. The stock is quite densely merchandised in the mid-shop, yet it is fairly straightforward to see from front to back and the gaze is punctuated by graphics, lightboxes



## MONSOON, WESTFIELD LONDON

**Status** Relocated  
flagship store

**Opened** Mid-June  
of 2016

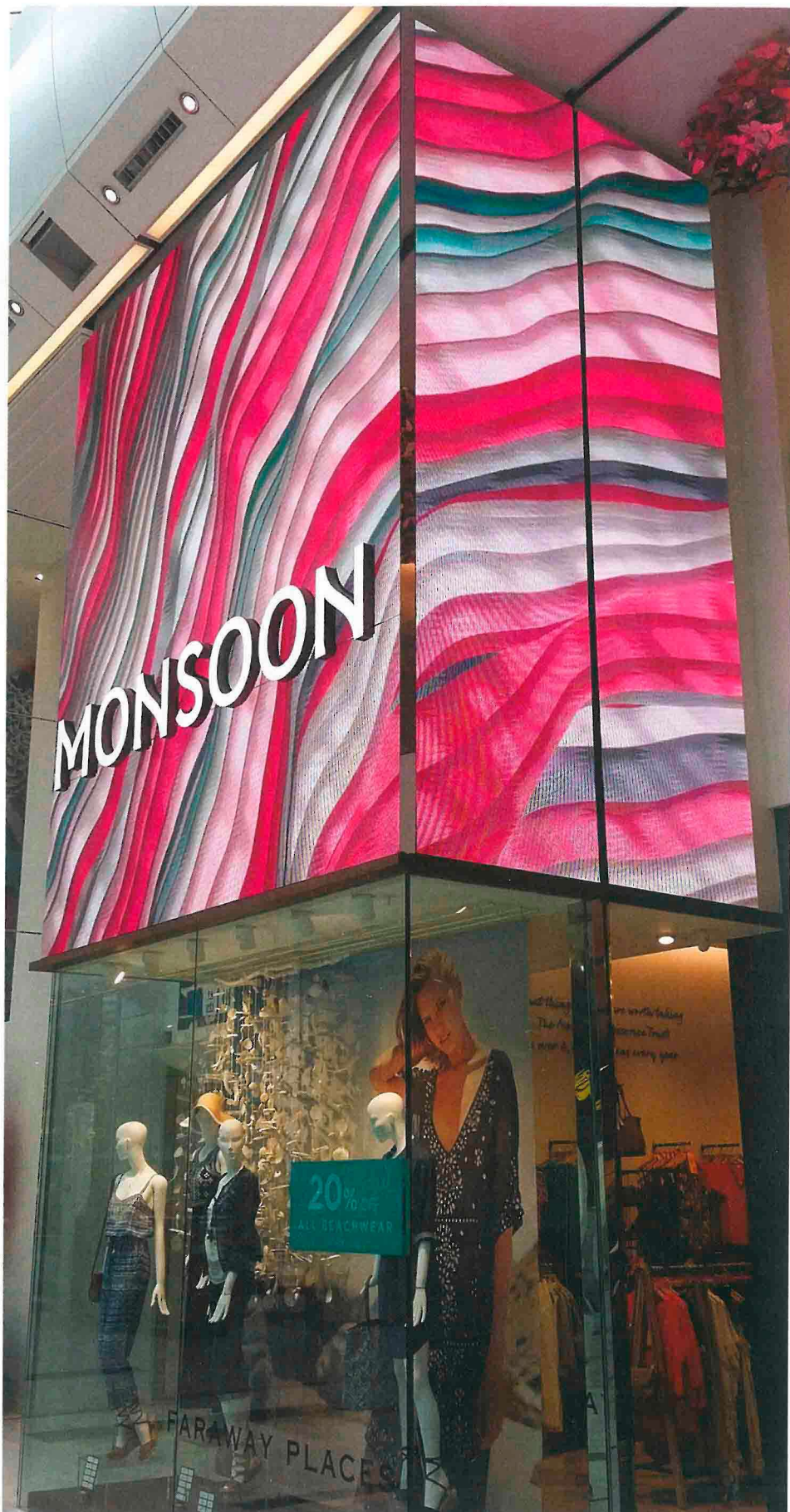
**Design** In-house

**Store fit-out** ISG

**Ambience** Floral and  
mother of the bride

## THE BRIGHT AND THE BEAUTIFUL LIFE

Far left and right: the  
cube shows exotic  
locations and abstract  
swirls. Centre: the  
personal shopper area.  
Above: a floral theme





# STORES



**“Peter Simon, Monsoon’s founder, is a keen collector of contemporary art and some of his collection is in this store”**

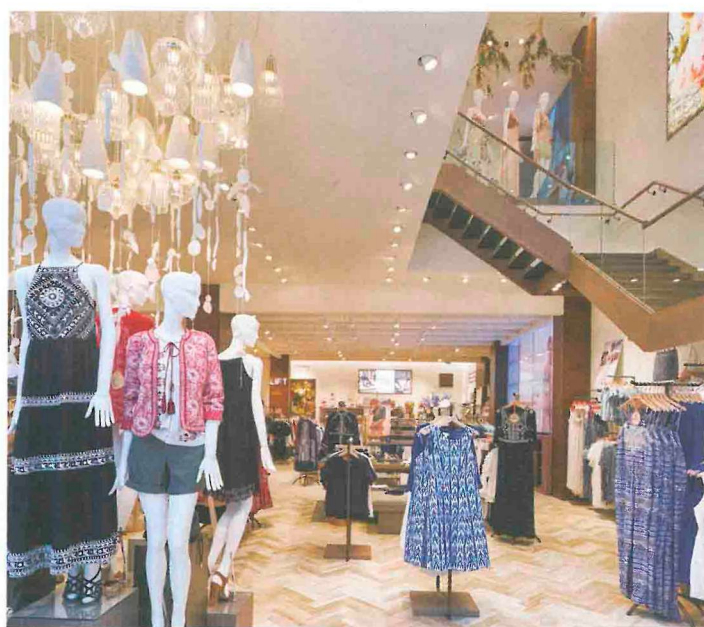
with static images and another digital screen, behind the cash desk, with moving content. There are also works of art.

Peter Simon, Monsoon’s founder, is a keen collector of contemporary art and some of his collection has been put into this flagship store, with the most impressive piece being in the plush antechamber to the fitting rooms, where a large collage is on view. The fitting room area also has a personal shopper room, complete with a kitchen (and another artwork) and refreshments including “Champagne for bridal shoppers”, as Leach remarks.

## A stronger identity

The store was previously a large La Senza outpost and much of that interior has been retained, although the entrance has been moved. That said, few clues about what went before remain, such as the makeover that this interior has received.

Upstairs, the divide between childrenswear and occasionwear is apparent from the moment the shopper arrives. The perimeter wall is lifted by transfers of stylised trees with a monkey swinging through the branches and a five-tier



**A SPLASH OF FLORALS** Light and dark wood features evoke a tropical mood for womenswear and occasionwear. Below: the plush fitting-room antechamber



display of shoes beneath the legend “So Many Shoes”. Seating on this level takes the shape of mid-shop leather- and faux-metallic pouffes. The occasionwear area is a more subdued space, providing a moment of peace and reflection while a selection is made.

This is one of just a few standalone Monsoon stores – the bulk of the branches are twin enterprises with sister brand Accessorize. This means a “stronger identity” for the Monsoon brand in the Westfield London store, and there is a new branch of Accessorize set to open a couple of doors along the way in the autumn.

Leach says anything new that is trialled by Monsoon is likely to be done in this store, for no better reason than the retailer’s head office is just across the road in Notting Hill.

The store looks good and has been trading above expectations in the two weeks since it opened, according to Leach. The challenge then will be taking the shock of the new, digitally aware Monsoon and exporting it to some of the other branches in less prominent towns and locations. If the retailer can succeed in doing this, it may be on the road to recovery.

