

STORES

The B&Q behemoth at Cribbs Causeway near Bristol has had a makeover designed to show what is possible in DIY retail. John Ryan pays a visit

B&Q's 'big-box project' signals change of direction

Drive up to a large-format B&Q, usually on the edge of a big town or city, and you know pretty much what you're going to get – a substantial orange-and-white building. Inside, it is likely to be characterised by long, canyon-like aisles that seem to reach up to the ceiling, and there will probably be a sense of relative darkness and enclosure. There will also be the graphics, which tend to be punchy to the point of obtrusiveness, and 'deals' wherever you look.

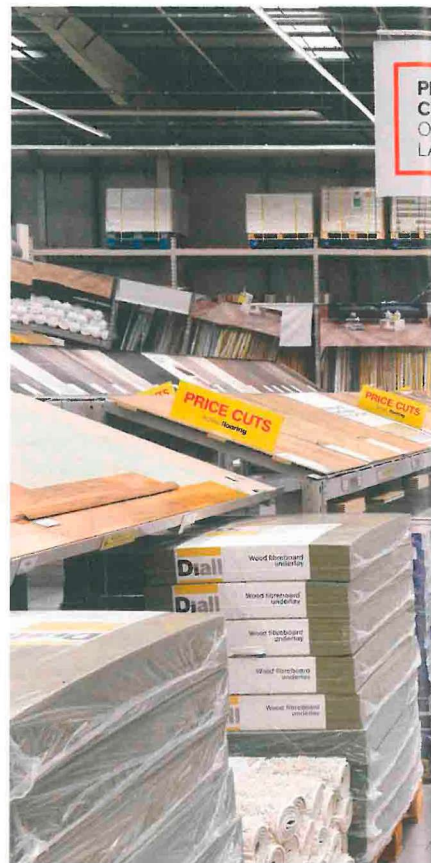
Now head to the retail park at Cribbs Causeway, on the western flanks of Bristol, and alongside a massive Asda there is a huge B&Q.

Following a refurb, this one now measures just shy of 140,000 sq ft (up from a pre-makeover footprint of 133,500 sq ft) and while the exterior is indeed a combination of orange and white, it looks different.

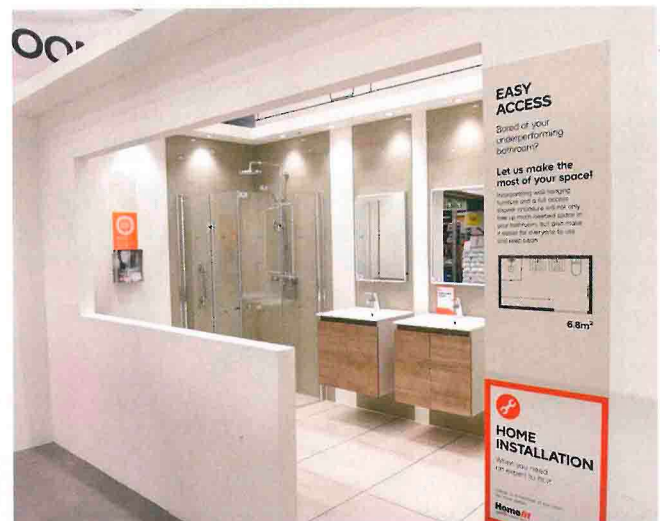
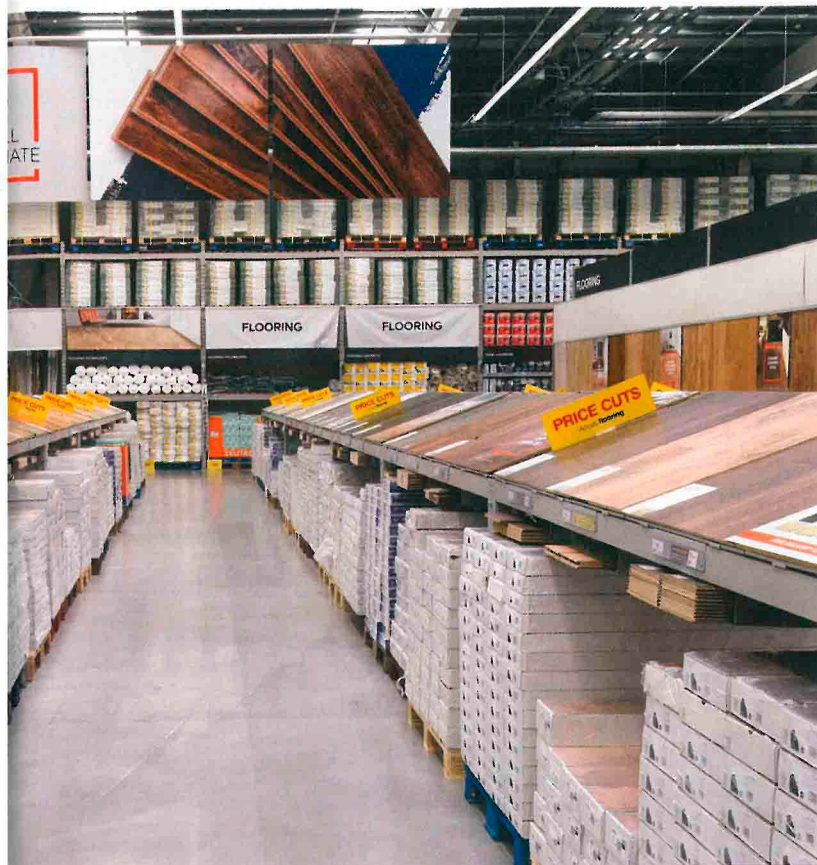
Welcome to the "big-box project", as Michael Loeve, the chief executive who arrived late last year from Denmark, puts it. The external difference is simple – the font for the logo has changed and there is a rather more simplified and modern feel to the orange and white areas across the frontage.

B&Q is one of holding company Kingfisher's major concerns, and those who are familiar with Castorama, the DIY fascia it operates across France, Poland and Russia, may see similarities between what has been done here and stores in those countries. The reason is simple – elements of what is done in the sister DIY company have been deployed in this B&Q.

Loeve says: "The intention was to create a best practice store in the four countries [within the



For more store format innovations and opinion, go to Retail-week.com/Stores



STORES

Kingfisher empire] that operate big box retail."

First step

The Cribbs Causeway B&Q big box is the first, and the other three 'best practice' stores will follow later this year. It also means that the font that forms the Cribbs Causeway branch logo is the same as that used in Castorama – this also is an exercise in looking at what the synergies between the various Kingfisher operating companies may be. Loeve makes the point that the font being used at Castorama and Cribbs is owned by Kingfisher, while the one used in all other B&Q branches is not and would therefore cost money to use.

Moving into the store, the first things that the DIY shopper will encounter are a cafe, light and space. The cafe is to the left of the main door and features pendant copper lights and 3D-style wall graphics, created by putting gardening tools on wooden pegboards. It's a good-looking introduction to the shop and serves as a waiting area for those who have ordered in store or who have perhaps clicked and are about to collect, prior to walking away with their purchase from the order collection area, which lies just beyond the cafe.

The light and space are the outcome of a high ceiling with LED lighting overhead which, as Loeve remarks, means higher light levels, lower cost and a longer lamp life. The main point, however, is that there is an immediate feel-good factor on entering this store, a trait that is signally absent when entering many DIY establishments.

Loeve points out that there are two big aisles that run from left to right across the length of the floor, and the one closest to the front of the store allows shoppers to inspect DIY tools and hardware.

The other, deeper into the store, is for more "considered purchases", says Loeve. Translated, this means that kitchens, bathrooms, tiles and suchlike, all of which will involve thought and expenditure, are set away from the hubbub of the row of checkouts at the front of the store.



B&Q and Castorama are just starting a programme that will result in a lot of the same merchandise being sold across the two fascias.

This makes sense in terms of economies of scale, and one of the first departments to benefit is lighting, a key part of every B&Q store, and both retailers

now sell the same items. Deeper into the store, more changes become apparent when set against a standard B&Q. The tile department, for instance, is all about display as "it is quite hard to imagine what tiles look like when they are laid, without

seeing them laid out", according to Loeve.

This means that the tile area has been increased and multiple boards show off the range, but also that there is no stock on the floor. As soon as a shopper makes a decision to purchase, the order is collated in the stockroom, ready for collection at the end of their visit.

New version

Similarly, one of the things that marks out a Castorama bathroom area are roomsets that provide details of how much space has been used in each installation.

This helps browsers understand just what they can expect to fit into their bathrooms, where space is likely to be limited.

The other standout area is paint. A (vinyl) wood-clad mixing desk forms the centrepiece of this part of the shop with the ready-mixed paints being displayed by brand and, within that, colour.

Externally, the rather more functional building materials area has had a roof put over it and the garden area has been reduced in size, although it has still been placed so that it can be viewed when arriving in the car park.

Worth noting too is the use of the same font throughout the store as has been used for the logo. For navigational signage this means white on grey and is much less 'shouty' than in other B&Q outposts.

The real question, however, is – once this is completed – how much of what can be seen in Bristol is likely to find its way to other B&Q branches?

Loeve says: "You don't do something like this without seeing if there are versions that can be created that will allow things to be expanded." While not exactly a confirmation of a forthcoming roll-out, this probably means that substantial change is on the agenda for other large B&Q stores over the next few years.

Meanwhile, if you want to see how DIY could be according to Kingfisher, a trip to Cribbs Causeway is worth making, and this really does add a little excitement to home improvement shopping.

B&Q, CRIBBS CAUSEWAY

Store Status

Big box

Size

139,900 sq ft

Mission

To offer shoppers DIY retail best practice

Completed

June 16, 2016