

In pictures: The coolest retail offices in the UK

30 August, 2013 | By John Ryan



In-store design and theatre are increasingly important factors in retail, but does the industry boast equally inspiring headquarters for staff? John Ryan tours some of the coolest head offices.

It's one thing to visit a store and enjoy the experience, but how do retailers measure up when the destination is head office? Does the HQ reflect the brand values and, perhaps just as importantly for the staff there, is it a decent place to work?

In some instances retailers' head offices turn out to be bland and singularly anonymous buildings, and the product and customer-facing environment (ie shops) bear no relation to the places from which they originate.

But if retailers want staff to empathise and enthuse about the organisation of which they are part, then a head office that in some manner mirrors the reality of the shops is a good idea.

Retail Week has toured some of the more toothsome head offices and considered whether they are inspirational places in which to work, and whether they are a mirror of the brand.

The best are minor architectural masterpieces of the kind that would make those working in them feel special, or at least different, on a daily basis. Given that staff need stimulation as much as shoppers, shouldn't this be something approaching the norm?

Share this article



Connect with Retail Week



RELATED ARTICLES

- ▶ **Charity begins in Edinburgh**
February 5, 2010
- ▶ **Wild Orchid to launch new UK fascia on Oxford Street**
14 February 2008
- ▶ **TK Maxx lives up to eastern promise**
November 20, 2009
- ▶ **Restoring the spirit to Esprit**
6 July 2012
- ▶ **Doing Dallas: How does NorthPark measure up?**
October 2, 2009

Burberry, Horseferry Road, London

Designed by architectural practice Gensler, Burberry's corporate HQ in the heart of Westminster covers 160,000 sq ft and is intended to reflect the design concept and layout within the premium fashion brand's stores. It features British-made furniture throughout - an essential element of the retailer is its UK heritage - and the office has an atrium that connects all seven floors.

The materials palette reads like a litany of luxury, with Corinthian grey marble, dark oak and polished black chrome all contributing to an interior that smacks of quiet opulence. Working in this environment means enjoying a sense of the privilege that Burberry shoppers probably feel when in one of its stores.

Asos, Mornington Crescent, London

Spanning three very long floors, including one formerly occupied, in part, by Retail Week, the various levels of the MoreySmith-designed Asos head office in Mornington Crescent are linked together by a large hole cut in the floor that is surrounded with balustrades. This affords the fashion retailer's employees views of an architectural-looking, open space.

Good use has also been made of the fact that Greater London House, the multi-floor building that houses Asos, has huge amounts of natural daylight, meaning that the many break-out and meeting areas can have an air of the contemporary home about them.

The office is also a good example of the maxim that if it stands still, clad it with wood.

The White Company, South Kensington

The White Company has created an entire business based on crisp, white linen, and the aspirational atmosphere doesn't stop at its stores.

Everything at its South Kensington headquarters is clean and potentially slightly clinical - it would be easy for the space to look more luxury hospital than inviting homewares retailer.

But the splashes of colour from the furniture, as well as the obligatory white orchids, just about hold it back from that.

The office is a masterclass in making a HQ reflect the brand - as soon as staff are through the doors, there's no mistaking who they work for, and this no doubt plays a role in inspiring the retailer's buyers and merchandisers.

Agent Provocateur, Clerkenwell, London

The brand whose libidinous credentials need little advertising doesn't stop at doing so in its head office.

Whether via lip-shaped sofas, sepia-tinted images of lingerie-trussed posteriors on the walls or deep crimson furniture, this is an office that really lives the brand.

The interior, which was created by Berkhamsted-based Studiofibre, combines dark wood floors with red lace-covered walls and Chinese lanterns overhead, producing an interior where bordello meets opium den.

Working in an office of this kind would probably not suit the shy, but if in-your-face sensuality appeals, then this would certainly be a favourite.

White Stuff, Brixton

White Stuff stores are all different and yet they are all the same, insofar as the brand imprint is sufficiently robust for them to work no matter how the space is organised.

The same, broadly, holds true for the retailer's head office in Brixton, which offers everything from 'The Heritage Chalet' - a pine-clad room with a table and granny's kitchen chairs - to 'The Dog House', another wooden room, but this time with scatter cushions.

There is also a strong sense of the domestic about the office, particularly in the reception area, where wooden floors, comfy furniture, ceiling roses and chintzy wallpaper combine to create the impression of something familiar and warm.

Pride of place, however, probably goes to 'The Kitchen Meeting Room', which houses retro accessories such as melamine tables and a starburst clock.

Net-a-Porter, Westfield London

The top floor of a major shopping centre would probably not be the first choice for a retailer in search of a cutting-edge head office. However, it is fair to say that designer clothing retailer Net-a-Porter has a work space that is an exercise in monochrome good taste.

With everything from dramatic theatre steps and glass walls that reveal a boardroom to clear Murano glass chandeliers, this is an office that breathes sophistication and which is clearly in step with the top-end products the retailer sells.

Like Agent Provocateur's office, this 40,000 sq ft space was designed by Studiofibre, and stands as an illustration of how a building's uppermost level can be used to positive effect.

- ▶ Is your head office more cool than our top six? Please send your pictures to Rebecca.Thomson@emap.com