

Fall back in love

Sainsbury's, pioneer of big-name *cheer*, is offering midweek designs in wonderfully warm colours. Red tweed parka, £95, orange-knit teddy throw with tassels, £25, and orange and navy check tunic, £38. sainsburys.co.uk

The high-street chains are on blazing form this autumn. Katrina Burroughs picks the hottest trends

For catchy trends and good-quality classics, look no further than the high-street home collections this autumn. Chains from M&S to John Lewis, French Connection to H&M, as well as Asda and Sainsbury's, have raised their design game in recent years. Now they are focusing on a new command: how to get us through the door.

The web may be where we make a purchase, but the decision to commit to a new sofa or a set of cast-iron cookware is usually sparked by a real-life encounter. Most interiors acquisitions need to pass the touch test. So the household names are

working hard to tempt us back to 20th-century shopping habits.

Last week, John Lewis unveiled its revamped store on the nation's most famous high street. The woman behind the Oxford Street branch's makeover, the firm's buying and brand director, Paula Nickolds, says the partnership spent £14m on the eight-month project, which includes an enlarged interiors department of 94,000 sq ft. It showcases 25 room sets and, with more than 200,000 product lines, has "the largest range of home products of any store in the UK".

Despite the dizzying figures, Nickolds claims the expansion of interiors is not about cramming in more stock. She says the new-look shop reflects the post-austerity trend for buying less, but better: "Pre-credit crunch, it felt more as

though you purchased volume, and 'new' was all that mattered. Now the mindset has changed for good. If you're going to part with your money, you need to imagine that the purchase will bring you pleasure for a long time."

While some stores try to catch our digital-age attention spans with a packed diary of pop-ups, the key to making John Lewis's hectic corner of Oxford Street more enticing has been to offer a quiet space, with knowledgeable staff on hand – the 294 partners in the home department have a combined 3,254 years of experience – where unhurried interiors decisions can be made.

"What we are trying to create is a bit of an oasis of calm, where you can while away the hours looking through fabric swatches and wallpaper books," Nickolds says.

A scented candle's throw down the road, another of Oxford Street's big beasts, M&S, is also on a mission to strike the best balance between clicks and bricks retail, and to attract interiors customers into the shop. Stephanie Chen, its director of home, says she is taking a cue from the fashion stores on the street. "People are viewing their homes like fashion. They want to refresh a look without spending a fortune."

"If you are a customer who comes in regularly, you are coming in for ideas. I don't want you to see the same things each week. I want you to be surprised. We've got newness all the time – there are deliveries every week."

Realising that these in-store customers will ultimately want to order online, not least because "they don't want to lug furniture into the

car", M&S has developed a clever hybrid mode of shopping that makes the most of both channels. "They can come in to see the product and order it on an iPad in store," Chen says.

Her secret weapon is a highly competitive "visual merchandising" (VM) team. VM is the arrangement of products on shelves, in windows and in room sets. It can offer inspiration in the same way as an interiors magazine – and turns browsers into on-the-spot buyers.

Chen makes a point of celebrating good VM whenever she sees it, inciting friendly rivalry between stores. "We have this in-house social media called Yammer, where you can post photos and invite everyone to look. When I went to the Glasgow store, I Yammered, 'These are the best-dressed beds', and I got an avalanche of responses, as if I'd

By Sainsbury's
Navajo Cushion
(30cm x 50cm), £14.
sainsburys.co.uk

Set of three wall-hanging
mini heads, £14, and red
camping-style lantern, £20.
sainsburys.co.uk

WILDERNESS

Saddle up, partners. Remember last year's vogue for the log-cabin look? It has returned with some enticing twists, and the best examples are inexpensive designs from two outstanding supermarket home ranges: George Home (Asda's interiors label) and Sainsbury's. The latter's offering is best described as "luxurious lumberjack", with a mix of Navajo pattern, metal lighting and chunky plaids.

Get the look with heavy knitted throws, wood and leather finishes, outside hurricane lamps and earthy tableware, with glasses that evoke big skies in cerulean blue or starry hues.



George Home's Tuscany
12-piece dinner set,
£25, and tumbler, £5
for two, and Watercolour
12-piece dinner set,
£29. george.com

This Tan bucket
chair, £299, will be
available at B&Q in
mid-September.
bq.co.uk



3D textured
cushion, £16.
george.com



Sandstone mirror, £8, Tundra
Armas's dispenser, £3, and
tumbler, £3, Chevron Border
bath towel, £6, Chevron bath
towel, £6, and hand towel,
£4, 100% cotton bath towel
in Pumpkin, £4, cotton
towelset in Chantrel, £10,
and Felix & Chilli bathmat,
£8, all from George Home.
george.com

thrown down the gauntlet." All the other teams, she says, were posting pictures of their beds in competition.

"It was fabulous to see that talent and creativity. The more you can get your teams excited, the better, so they'll be genuinely excited about giving advice and showing customers what works."

Can the nation's failing high streets — those that are cloddy, dispirited and desperate to lure back the online generation — learn any lessons from developments on Oxford Street? It's mostly a question of cash, unfortunately. Paul Cook, managing director of Dukelease, the firm behind a £150m regeneration project at the east end of Oxford Street, says revamping and rebuilding is crucial to success.

Cook's firm developed the site that's now home to Zara's flagship store. Far from shrinking in response to the boom in internet shopping, he says, the fashion retailer decided to go big — after all, why would shoppers come if they weren't going to see comprehensive stock?

He reckons the catalyst for investment was Crossrail. "Infrastructure is the parent of regeneration," he says. "In an area less than half a kilometre square, if you add the Crossrail above-ground structure and a bit of roadwork, along with seven big projects, then I think you've topped the billion pounds mark."

That's not a budget available to every high street in the land. Still, it makes anything we spend in an autumn interiors spree sound remarkably modest.

Barnstable look kitchen
hardware: dresser
with wine rack, £1,200,
freestanding work
island, £595, and
butcher's block, £195



Niven side tables in
red, £35, white,
£45, and black, £45



Above: Hawkins green wool and
grey velvet armchair, £295.
Right: Yima black-and-white
ceramic vase, £25, and Langdon
multicoloured ceramic vase, £30



HABITAT

It's the high-street store that's turning into a one-brand trend. We can expect ever more adventurous design from Habitat, as the firm's in-house team takes a step away from its midcentury roots and begins to relish colour and pattern. Look out for its modern Tribal and Memphis/1980s-inspired ranges.

Habitat is growing all the time. By this autumn, it will have 73 shops nationwide (three London flagships and 70 mini branches in Homebases across the UK), as well as an edit of its lines at Argos stores in the UK and Ireland. Glee! directional design — coming to a location near you.
habitat.co.uk



Ebbie Neon
acrylic side
table, £95