

Drapers

The fashion business



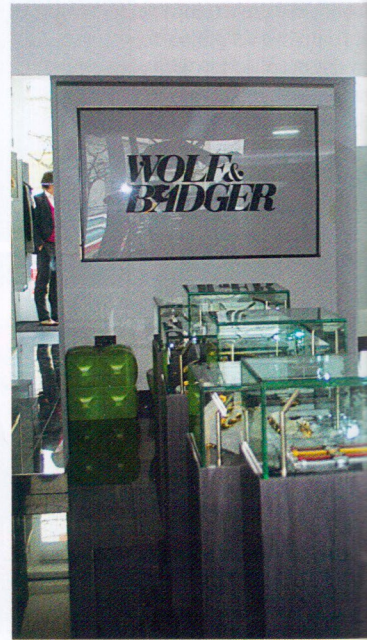
FOOTWEAR & ACCESSORIES

Step up your autumn 10 buying with our essential guide to the leading trends and brands for men and women



MODA SHOW REPORT | NEW YORK FASHION WEEK | THE EXHIBITION AT LFW

Wolf & Badger Notting Hill, London



OUR EXPERT



John Ryan
Group stores editor

With a background in fashion buying, including a 10-year stint at C&A in the UK and Germany, John Ryan writes about visual merchandising, store design and the business of launching new shops. As a journalist, he has covered the sector for more than a decade

At what point does high-end become luxury? It's a fine dividing line and for Primark habitués, for instance, Marks & Spencer might be perceived as heading towards high-end. That said, most people's understanding of luxury is that it's something that's not for them and if it is, then it's a rare treat that will enable them to gain access to an exclusive club.

For those fortunate enough to live in the ultra chi-chi London neighbourhood of Notting Hill, luxury is something of an everyday reality, as many of the shops found in the area begin at the high-end and then head upwards. And at the heart of this expensive "village" is Ledbury Road, the thoroughfare that welcomed Wolf & Badger earlier this month.

This 1,250 sq ft, two-floor fashion and accessories indie could have been tailor-made for Notting Hill. Posh-sounding and Sloaney-looking staff greet anyone crossing the threshold and if you have a taste for luxury, you'll feel right at home.

Director, founder and co-owner Samir Ceric, who also runs a contemporary art

gallery in London, says Wolf & Badger aims to give young designers the chance to shine without the financial risk of opening their own store.

The business model that Ceric and his bag designer wife Zoe Knight have created is a store in which the fixtures are available for rent, meaning all of the stock that is on show appears because the designers have paid for it to be there.

Ceric plans to take the model to other cities around the world within the next five years.

Key looks and merchandise mix

In a word, upscale. It matters little whether you've come into this shop to buy a small piece of jewellery at about £50 or a grey marl sleeveless mini dress with decorative knots on each hip, by a designer called Toshi at £795, this is a place where the impulse purchase will have little part to play. Ceric says "there is something for everybody" and that the decision to locate the shop in Notting Hill was because this is traditionally a place where luxury is almost the norm.



the art gallery-like space
 this high-end store
 new design talent the
 chance to display their
 wares to the moneyed
 shoppers of Notting Hill



Essentials

Address 46 Ledbury Road, Notting Hill, west London

Size 1,250 sq ft

Owners Samir Ceric and Zoe Knight

Number of labels on display 75

Store design

Gus Brown

Fit-out cost

£250,000

Store's previous life

Art gallery

Projected future openings

New York, Beijing, Moscow, Paris and Manchester

In all, there are 75 designers displaying their wares in Wolf & Badger and the range is wide, with everything from men's shoes, some of which are on sale at £500, to demerara sugar-coloured knitted shift dresses at about £400.

There are even lights in the form of black hats, which the designer pays £55 per week to display in the store. When talking about shops of this kind, it is common to hear the word cornucopia employed, as somewhat lazy shorthand for a bit of everything. The point however about this shop is that while this is the case, it is an instance of careful retail editing and an intense selection process. Ceric says that after an initial marketing effort, which involved canvassing all of the major art schools, more than 1,000 wannabes applied for space in the shop. It may be fashionable, it may capture the zeitgeist, but it does look pricey.

Score 7/10

Visual merchandising

One of the advantages of the store's design is that around the perimeter of both floors there are a series of different-sized black-framed boxes that act as open showcases for the stock. Nothing terribly remarkable in this perhaps, except that they are not of uniform size and have small rails inside that allow the product to be side hung or front-facing. The mid-shop on both floors is about internally lit edge-to-edge glass cases, imparting the sense of an upmarket gallery – very much in keeping with what this store is about and perhaps a nod in the direction of Ceric's gallery-owning antecedents.

Elsewhere, things have been kept relatively simple, although tasteful, and a less-is-more aesthetic is evident throughout. The window display is also noteworthy with a tree-like object, formed of black polystyrene, dominating the view and created by a set designer. The relation between this and the two female mannequins in the window is rather tenuous, but it's strikingly modern and does succeed in capturing the eye.

Score 7/10

Store appearance

Ceric says he met the store's designer, Gus Brown, through the Royal College of Art Summer Show last year and was considering his work when he discovered he was also an architect and asked him to design the Wolf & Badger store. The outcome is something of a one-off. The variously sized mini display wardrobes create the sensation of being on the verge

of discovering something precious as you glance around – in spite of the shop's relatively modest dimensions. Details such as the hats used as lights and the furniture next to the fitting room on the ground floor, all of which is bespoke and unique, make this an interesting place to visit.

The store cost about £250,000 to fit out – a lot of money considering its size. This is accounted for, perhaps, by the slate slabs that front the staircase leading to the basement and the shiny black marble tiles on the floor. Couple this with details such as the tree trunk in the basement that appears to support part of the ground floor and you can begin to understand where the money has gone. In fairness, the shopfit is in keeping with the nature of the stock in the shop.

Score 8/10

Service

Staff working in this kind of store environment are unlikely to be troubled by a stampede of shoppers eager to snap things up while they're still on the shelves. Instead, on the day of visiting, the two identikit, black-clad females were furiously applying Mr Sheen to the glass cases. When a potential customer did enter the shop, they were scrupulously polite, treading that fine line between being over-eager and ignoring the person inspecting the goods.

A luxury store, or even a high-end one for that matter, demands a particular kind of service and this appeared to be in hand here, although it was quite hard to tell, as only one shopper entered during the Tuesday morning hour.

Score 7/10

Would I buy?

Probably not, but then neither would the majority of readers of this magazine, for no better reason than that it would be beyond their means. That said, if you do live in Notting Hill and money really isn't a preoccupation, then there is plenty about this shop that might appeal, including the sheer breadth of the offer and the pleasing lack of uniformity.

Score 7/10

VERDICT

An interesting addition to an already idiosyncratic part of London. Whether Ceric's dreams of making the Wolf & Badger model global can be realised remains an unknown quantity, but this is a good store that deserves to be frequented by a select demographic.



High aspirations: the expensively furnished shopfit is in keeping with the high-end product, all of which is from up-and-coming designers

36
50