

RUNWAY

# MatchesFashion.com Is Opening a Breathtaking New Space, 5 Carlos Place, in London. Just Don't Call It the Store of the Future

MatchesFashion.com is opening a breathtaking new space, 5 Carlos Place, in London's Mayfair, on September 4. Like all new homes, regardless if it's a beautiful and considered renovation and reimagining of an iconic red brick Queen Anne building, as this is, or the teeny-tiny apartment that took years to save the down payment for, 5 Carlos Place is both a recognition of where everything currently stands, and all of life's potential as one looks forward. Still, as Ulric Jerome, the brand's smart, forward-thinking CEO, points out in the conversation that follows, he's loathe to call it a store of the future. You can understand why: Nothing preserves something in time, immediately ossifying it, like saying it's going to be the very definition of tomorrow.

And yet, and yet... There's no denying the pleasure of the sensory overload to be had from wandering around 5 Carlos Place. How could there not be, what with its Josef Frank dining tables, the Wassily lounge chairs, the Adolf Loos wall light that sits in the lobby, and a sofa modeled on the original that once belonged to photographer, writer, and dandyish aesthete Cecil Beaton, all thoughtfully placed in an environment that's colored and shaded in white, teal, and an exquisite shade of pinky terracotta.

But what's really impactful here—and does indeed highlight where things are going next—is that this space is conceived as something that one can inhabit physically and digitally, something which has marked the company out for the last few years thanks to the previous innovations wrought by founders Tom and Ruth Chapman. Here the two realms are seamlessly fused together, so that you can become familiar with it, whether you're actually there in London, or accessing it via one of the many happenings planned for it throughout the year via the wonders of digital technology, and inspired by the company's forays into having pop-up residencies around the world. In an era when Instagram allows us the familiarity of walking down unknown roads thanks to the feeds of those we follow, it seems fitting that there's a store that can, finally, let us do the same thing, underscoring that virtual experience isn't an impediment to creating a sense of comfort and intimacy.

A couple of weeks ago, Ulric Jerome took some time to chat about the genesis of MatchesFashion.com's latest venture, the need for retail to really think about accessibility and inclusivity, and what to expect in the coming months in the way of events—events, incidentally, where absolutely everyone is welcome.

## What's the backstory on 5 Carlos Place?

We've been in business for more than 30 years, and we've always considered that we're not only building a brand but that we're close to our customers; our stores have given a very good experience in a physical space has meant a lot to them, and we've been amplifying that through digital and physical opportunities.

We first tested the concept [of 5 Carlos Place] last April, when we did a series of residencies, taking over amazing spaces in New York, Paris, and Los Angeles, showcasing a great edit of looks, and live-streamed some of the conversations we had during them—Isabel Marant in Paris, a fitness class in New York with Akin Akman, and in L.A. a conversation between Zandra Rhodes and Arianne Phillips. You could RSVP on the site to actually come to the physical space or take part digitally from wherever you were in the world; we were able to reach 45 million people simply because of that technology.

We'd been looking for a proper home for a while, so we could do these all year round, and decided to launch a permanent address in Mayfair [in London]. It's not the easiest thing to do, but it's super key that we create the most personal luxury shopping experience in the world. Anything that's not on at 5 Carlos Place can be there in 90 minutes; every piece on our app is shop-able when you are there. For so many of the people who shop with us, the more they use digital, they're also looking more and more for a cozy, warm experience in an actual space.

## Tell me a bit about the space itself...

It's 7,000 feet spread over five floors: two floors of shopping, two floors of private shopping, and the one is a media hub. The house was built in the late 19th century, and we worked with the architect P. Joseph [founded by Philip Joseph] and he understood we wanted to stay true to who we are and to the spirit and aesthetic of the place; it's Queen Anne Revival, and we spent a lot of time building something around that story. It's important that the house speaks the same language as the experience we want to create there. It's listed, so we had to do the construction on it by the book, and we're keeping everything in terms of the historic architecture: the original staircase, the ceiling, the fireplaces, and where we could, we've made them look better without losing the sense that time has passed. And the user experience of 5 Carlos Place was really important; the architect spent a lot of time understanding what was going to go on in that house.

## So, what will be going on in it?

On September 3, we'll launch on MatchesFashion.com a program of all the events we're planning; whomever wants to attend—not only customers—will be able to RSVP directly on the site, whether it's to be actually there in person, or to watch the live stream—and since we're archiving it all, you could also then listen to it as a podcast. The media hub [will carry] transcripts of everything that's going on at the house will exist, to bring the physical and the digital together.

We've got 43 events coming up over September and October, starting with a Prada installation with Storey Studio, the creative studio set up by Richard Storey, and an exclusive collection for men and women; Mario Sorrenti will be launching his book *Kate* and be doing a signing; there's a conversation between Richard Quinn and Sarah Mower; a master class on flower arranging with Scarlet & Violet—and another with an amazing chef called Skye Gyngell; a performance from Theresa Wayman of the L.A.-based band Warpaint—she's doing a special acoustic set as part of our monthly Musical Matches series; and another exclusive collection and installation with Marine Serre.

## What are your ambitions for it—not only in terms of what you want to do there, but how it fits into the overall MatchesFashion.com empire?

There's a phrase that I'm not very keen on, and it's "store of the future." For me, the in-your-face tech that you see when you walk in some stores doesn't work. The question for us was: How do you find the right blend [at 5 Carlos Place] and then make it available all over the world? We're using tech as an amplifier, to create a sense of community through a very personal and authentic approach. It's about building a brand, building a destination, and it's about sharing—all the things we love as a business.

## This new space seems to me like a really good example of transparency and inclusivity; that everyone should be able to come along and take part, regardless of who you or what you do, an abandoning of the usual (and tired) hierarchies...

What you've described... that feels really natural to us. We want to be inclusive. That's super important. The way to run a business now is to be inclusive of the customer and their experience, our brands, and our partners. It's not about us thinking we need to strategically do this; 5 Carlos Place is a very tangible example of our come-together world. We don't see business as one-dimensional. You need multiple connections today, to be a 360-degree operator.

## The sales floors aside, 5 Carlos Place seems to be a case of engagement first, commerce later. I know it's a business, but that approach, in our shopping-saturated era, is refreshing.

I think the best compliment you can ever give to 5 Carlos Place is that there is no word for it. It's a place of discovery, intended to create a sense of community and convenience—that's what it is. That's how we define commerce, that it is inclusive exclusive. We need to knock people off their feet when they walk into the space, to be amazed by what they see. We don't need to give them the hard sell.

Vogue.com, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2018; 5 Carlos Place feature at MATCHESFASHION.COM by Mark Holgate  
Unique Users: 67,200,000

<https://www.vogue.com/article/matchesfashioncom-5-carlos-place>