

🏠 > Lifestyle > Fashion > Events

Could Matchesfashion.com's new destination be a blueprint for the future of shopping?



It was the lacquered walls in “off” colours (teal in one, a rose-brown in the other, obviously conceived to spark comment) in the personal shopping suites that did it for me. They’re the size of a quite grand London studio-flat. Like the rest of the new matchesfashion.com store store-come-house-come-school-come-gallery that opened this week in London’s Mayfair, they’ve been designed by architect Philip Joseph, an alumnus of Ilse Crawford (the woman behind the original Soho House aesthetic) and partner of the designer Erdem. Their clear intention is to lead rather than follow taste.

The furniture and art, the discreet, well informed staff, the scented air (matchesfashion.com’s own branded candles) have a curious blurring effect. The traditional transactional end-game that’s an intrinsic part of shopping has been muted. There’s no hard sell. It’s like giving birth with gas and air – you know there’ll be pain somewhere along the line, but everything’s being done to hold it at bay.

An hour in those suites, with the lighting and music tweaked to your personal taste, and all the clothes, in your size, that you’ve salivated over this season– and some you hadn’t thought of, all edited around your particular predilections - and you think, ok, House of Fraser almost went down this year, but maybe there could be a future for the high street, if retailers are prepared to think slightly outside the stale boxy shop fit.



The Prada installation at 5 Carlos Place.

Telegraph.co.uk 7th September 2018; MATCHESFASHION X PRADA Launch and Carlos Place feature by Lisa Armstrong

Unique Users: 21,470,000

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/fashion/events/could-matchesfashioncoms-new-destination-blueprint-future-shopping/>

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the new matchesfashion.com flagship is that there isn't a lot of merchandise. There's a chi chi café. An exclusive Prada installation on the ground floor for those who like their clothes mounted as if they're in a gallery – the first of many temporary “exhibitions”. There's a small garden, art, and free seminars teaching flower arranging (courtesy of florist's Scarlet and Violet) cookery (courtesy of Sky Gynge), also live interviews with top designers and well-being talks. Educationally, the curriculum is pitched somewhere between Professor Higgins, Martha Stewart – and this week at least, Miuccia Prada. It's a window on food, paintings, décor....all curated by Matches.

Other stores already offer elements of this. Amanda Wakeley has been hosting evening soirees for loyal customers in her Dover Street store covering anything from the menopause to dancing. Up the road, Roksanda holds happenings while Self-Portrait offers a comprehensive alterations service that just take up a hem but remodels the garment so that the line and patterns remain pure – unprecedented on a dress that costs £350.



5 Carlos Place promises all this and more. The key is personalisation. Customers can scan items in the store on their apps, see a variety of options which can be zapped over from the warehouse in 90 minutes. 90 minutes? That's a long wait. But this is about slow, mindful consumption. It's the antidote to the crack cocaine of convenient internet shopping (the tentacles of which powered matchesfashion.com from a small, local boutique in Wimbledon to an eetail superpower).

Unlike other upmarket fashion sites such as netaporter.com or mytheresa.com, matchesfashion has always run real shops alongside its virtual platforms, but recently they seemed like mere portals to the website. The fact that matchesfashion.com has invested serious time and money in a striking terracotta bricks and mortar - 7000 square foot - is a big deal. Last year, according to the Local Data Company, 5,855 shops closed on British high streets. This year's shaping up to be equally brutal.



The Prada installation at 5 Carlos Place

So why, having honed itself into an etailer that was bought by the Apax group last year for £800 million, has matchesfashion.com returned to physical selling space? And, on the corner of Mount Street which, while undoubtedly an imposing 1880s architectural gem, is famously under-visited, despite also being home to big names such as Celine and Balenciaga...

The answer, as Ulric Jerome's Matchesfashion.com's French-born CEO tells me, "is because our customers want it. They love the ease and speed of the internet, but they're looking for a more meaningful shopping experience as well. They want to feel part of a community".

“As you'd expect from a retailer that has invested heavily online, technology features large.”

The average spend per transaction on the website is £542, but there are plenty who spend far more, several times a month. These are customers who presumably have their choice of entertainment, private members clubs and restaurants across the

world. But still, says Jerome, "they want the matchesfashion.com point of view. International customers come to London for the season, or for the theatre, or for Frieze and they want their shopping experience here to be equally elevated".

The building retains the feeling of a wealthy collector's house There's no plate glass window, although everything's for sale. If customers want to commission a piece of sculpture like the one by Nick Hornby (not the writer) positioned on a bay window, or have their garden landscaped like the matchesfashion.com one, they can swipe the matches app (the same on they use to shop on the website) on their smart phone to access the relevant information.

As you'd expect from a retailer that has invested heavily online, technology features large. When "guests" check in on arrival via their app, staff can instantly access their profiles to see what's already in their baskets. Jerome demonstrates by going into my own details: everything I've bought and returned, all the crazy, incriminating, delusional items on my wish-list. It's disconcerting to have my shopping fantasy laid out for public consumption. "Not public," corrects Jerome. "This is between you and your personal shopper. It's there to provide a guide to what you like so that we can make suggestions that don't waste your time".

Anyone can drop in for a browse, wandering its floors in anonymity if they wish. But if they pre-book a personal shopping appointment, the team will pull in rails of options and whisk them up to those suites for dress up time. The outer front door to 5 Carlos Place will always be open, promises Jerome, even in winter, to make entry less intimidating. (And for those who can't break with their computers, those seminars and talks will be available to view online).

Telegraph.co.uk 7th September 2018; MATCHESFASHION X PRADA Launch and Carlos Place feature by Lisa Armstrong

Unique Users: 21,470,000

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/fashion/events/could-matchesfashioncoms-new-destination-blueprint-future-shopping/>