

HARRODS

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Harrods

Haute horology hotbed

The new Fine Watch Room at Harrods contains Europe's largest collection of luxury timepieces, carefully curated to provide the perfect selection for both international and local clientele

BY ANN HAVERSHAM/ANIMATION MAINFRAME

Designing the world's largest room dedicated to luxury timepieces can't be that hard, can it? Eva Jiricna, the Czech retail design expert charged with the task, doesn't agree. Particularly as she needed it to sit easily next to the neighbouring and equally prestigious Fine Jewellery Room, which she also designed six years ago.

"This is Europe's largest watch collection," says Jiricna, the elegant, silvery-bobbed principal of her own London-based architectural practice, whose glamour and good taste are demonstrated through a cool cream trench, beaten metal bangles and a minimal bracelet watch. "I wanted to extend the fine jewellery experience but watches have a different character. They are much more masculine, much more serious. So we needed a similar concept but aimed at a different kind of client."

Over the 128 years that Harrods has been in its current building, many architects and interior designers have wrestled with its size and the shape of its rooms. The flat Brompton road frontage hides a curved, irregular pentagon-shaped building that sits on Hans Road, Hans Crescent and Basil Street. The new Fine Watch Room is a slice of the ground floor that at different times has housed an ice cream parlour and a pizza restaurant.

"The shape of the new room was something of



challenge in its own right," says Jiricna. "My job as an architect is to create 'wow' – that's different things for different people. There's a ceiling in that room that has been there for years and we wanted to make a feature of that although it's not in the best condition throughout the room. So we made a circular cutout in the lower ceiling to reveal the original beams and cornicing. I think it's important to keep Harrods in its own context – some people come here hoping to see some heritage, and I try to enhance the history."

The approaches to the new area replicate those that existed already: dark tunnels that act as a transition from the Food Halls. Jiricna believes it's important to have breathing space between the rooms. "Then at the end of the tunnel you find a surprise – a little bit of magic," she says. Meanwhile, the room itself has three circular cutouts that sit beneath the original section of ceiling, which almost appears to hover above the black carpeted and granite floor. Individual boutiques are spaced around the edge of the room. The doorways to each boutique are flanked by two ear glass columns that house display cabinets.

"We have used masculine materials like black granite, and a French glass that has a metallic 3D treatment, so it looks silvery and sculpted," says Jiricna. "The black carpet joins the granite almost invisibly so that the line of the room is unbroken for the entire length. The carpet is Swedish, printed with vinyl and very luxurious and soft, so if something is accidentally dropped it won't get damaged. You have to think about those things when you are designing for a space like this. The ceiling outside of the cutaway section is black too, and there are sandblasted panels hanging from it, featuring a pattern made up of watch parts."

The hardest part of the job for Jiricna, however, has been getting the lighting right. In the olden days, watches were most often displayed flat, making the lighting relatively easy. Today, most watches are shown upright, with the face up, and the straps done up behind them, which requires 3D lighting.

"Watches are small and you need to be able to see every single detail, so that means serious lighting," explains Jiricna. "Also, the customers aren't going to have the sharpest eyes in the world (as you age, you see less detail) – if we were designing a toy department, life would be a lot easier!"

"I never forget why I'm here. My purpose is to sell products, and I need to create the best possible conditions to display them. I love the contrast of the granite with the glass and the sparkling light. People need to feel uplifted. They need to feel that the object that they are buying is worth the investment, so a luxurious atmosphere is required throughout. And the more sparkle you create, the more magical it all becomes." ■

- WATCH BOUTIQUES**
- A. Lange & Söhne
 - Audemars Piguet
 - Breguet
 - Chanel
 - Hublot
 - IWC
 - Jaeger-LeCoultre
 - Omega
 - Panerai
 - Richard Mille
 - Rox
 - Vacheron Constantin
 - Vertu
- BRANDS**
- Baume & Mercier
 - Bell & Ross
 - Blancpain
 - Breitling
 - Bremont
 - Celsius X VI II
 - Corum
 - De Grisogono
 - Franck Muller
 - Frédérique Constant
 - Girard-Perregaux
 - Hermès
 - John Isaac
 - Longines
 - Maurice Lacroix
 - Montblanc
 - Oris
 - Parmigiani
 - Philip Stein
 - Rado
 - Roger Dubuis
 - TAG Heuer
 - Ulysse Nardin
 - Zenith

