

Shop! Mary Portas joins the fan club as attention to detail sets Reiss apart



Rating 9/10
Good for
accessible luxury,
design and style.
Bad for
underwhelming
leather goods

In the past I've divided the British high street into three clear and distinct types of shop: value, mass and premium. Value shops did what it said on the tin and no more. The mass market was inhabited by generalists who sold us everything, often without specialising in anything in particular. And the premium shops sold us fewer things that were a little bit better than everyone else's. But as a result of the recession everything is now a bit topsy-turvy. We have value stores that look like premium stores: the windows at Zara regularly put some expensive luxury brands to shame; Uniqlo, another affordable basics retailer, is setting global merchandising and marketing standards that have made many expensive brands green with envy. At the recent Retail Week Awards, Primark controversially scooped both the Retailer of the Year and Best Designed Store gongs. (I wasn't on the panel.) All of which means that the higher up the food chain you go, brands are having to work harder than ever to convince us to pay a little more. Reiss has always sat unashamedly at the premium end of the high street, and has successfully taken the codes of luxury and applied them to mass-market women's and menswear. Its founder, David Reiss, started the business with one shop in 1971. There are now more than 90 stores worldwide and the brand attracts fanatics. My business partner is so obsessed that I no longer ask where he buys his clothes. That's a nice new shirt. Reiss. Great suit. Reiss. What would you like for your birthday? Reiss. I took my son Mylo to the branch nearest our office in London.

The windows In 2007 Reiss opened a spectacular flagship just behind Selfridges on Barrett Street. Two floors of fashion occupy the downstairs floors; upstairs is devoted to offices and a design studio. If you peep down Barrett Street from Oxford Street, you'll spot the shop's extraordinarily confident cascading glass facade. It has become



Reiss Barrett Street, London W1
Visited Friday, 1pm
Number of stores 90
What they sell women's and men's fashion
Website reiss.co.uk
Who's in charge? David Reiss, CEO

one of the capital's most audacious retail spaces, and I don't think anyone has topped it.

Shopability What separates the good from the great in retail are the details. Reiss has made the study of details an art form. The music is soft yet uplifting and cool. The changing-rooms are just the right size. The merchandising hits the perfect note between too little and too much product. And the packaging ritual makes the purchase of even the smallest item a joy. The retailer's latest development is the Reiss 1971 sub-brand. Pitched at a slightly younger customer, this 'aims to bring an edgier,

The music is soft yet uplifting and cool. The changing-rooms are just the right size

Eternal striped shirt, £75; Navona navy blue and white shirts, £69 each; Farnell double-breasted mac in navy, £250



more youthful element to the product offer, and provide Reiss's customers with its first significant denim range' (or so the press release goes). I also liked the new oversize lightboxes on the upstairs men's floor and the video wall downstairs in women's. My only slight criticism is of the leather goods. Leather remains one of the luxury industry's signature materials, but despite Reiss's many triumphs in fashion and accessories I have always been a little underwhelmed by its leather jackets and shoes.

Was I being served? The service here was genuinely incomparable. Not only did the sales chap make a huge fuss of both Mylo and me, but to show us how good he thought a peacoat was, put it on himself and pranced up and down the store to make his point.

Online reiss.co.uk is easy to use and includes a blog, presumably written by the in-house design team, giving Reiss obsessives a satisfying insight to the brand's secrets. On the day I looked, the bloggers revealed that a Reiss Maddi dress, spotted on Beyoncé last year, had just gone online. The site's other plus is that, unlike with many retailers, the online store pretty much mirrors the offline offerings.

Verdict I suspect Reiss had it tough over the past 12 months as its 'better than average' positioning came under scrutiny from an increasingly value-focused shopper. But from the look of this season, rather than dumbing down, it has stuck to its knitting and, in my opinion, confirmed its position as one of Britain's best premium high-street brands. I put its success down to great tailoring, a focus on the details and an extraordinary taste level. Assuming the downturn will eventually become an upturn, I firmly believe that Reiss should be well set for the next 10 years. And as someone who bemoans the way Britain frequently lags behind the Yanks when it comes to retail, Reiss has, this week at least, made me feel proud to be British.

Do you agree with Mary? Have your say at telegraph.co.uk/maryportas

Illustration by Philip Bannister
Next week: Iceland