

# shopping mall fever

*Westfield London looks like a winner*

**Imogen Matthews' visited the new shopping centre in November a few days after its official opening on October 30th. Here is what she found**

Despite the doom and gloom surrounding the economy, 2008 was a record year for new shopping centre developments. We may be teetering on the brink of recession, but this slew of new mammoth shopping centres, equivalent to eight Bluewaters, will continue right into 2009.

This year has seen enormous shopping malls opening in Liverpool, Bristol and Leicester, but they were dwarfed (in PR terms at least) by the fanfare surrounding Westfield, the lavish new shopping emporium at White City, London. The media build-up happened several weeks before the grand opening on October 30 by London Mayor, Boris Johnson. He was accompanied by

a host of celebrities, from X Factor singer Leona Lewis, to models Twiggy and Erin O'Connor for Marks & Spencer and Yasmin Le Bon who cut the ribbon at House of Fraser. All thoughts of recession were banished on the opening day as visitors thronging into the centre were treated to free champagne.

Westfield London, co-owned by the Australian Westfield Group and German



Commerzbank AG, is Europe's largest urban shopping centre covering a massive 1.6million square feet of space. One of the most striking features is the undulating glass roof, which has special glass panels designed to let in lots of natural light. Not only does it create a bright and airy feel, but it can also heat or cool the mall according to the outside weather conditions.

The £1.6bn Westfield development boasts over 265 retailers, many of which are luxury and designer brands housed in the prestigious Village area. Beauty is well represented and the list of tenants

includes Debenhams, House of Fraser, Boots, Jo Malone, MAC, L'Occitane, Neal's Yard Remedies, The Perfume Shop, Superdrug, Beauty Base, Rituals and Malika.

"Westfield is a unique position as it is the only destination where you can shop from high street brands to luxury under one roof," states Debbie Beaumont-Howell, Head of Buying, Beauty, House of Fraser. "It's been very carefully thought out and there are services and extra facilities for all kinds of shopper, including those who normally shop at the top end."

Retail research consultancy Verdict is optimistic about Westfield's chances of success, especially in the beauty area. "Health and beauty is one of most resilient sectors," maintains Carol Ratcliffe, Verdict Senior Retail Analyst. "It's hard emotionally to trade down. Small indulgences appeal to people, especially if they are cutting back. It's nice to have a pick me up which makes you feel better about the day." However, she warns that people's buying may be more considered as they become more aware of finances.

On a grey Monday morning, just four days after opening, I visited Westfield. Approaching the centre from the House of Fraser end, I noted that a significant number of luxury premium outlets, such as Prada, were yet to open. I wondered if I would find the rest of the mall in a similar state of unreadiness. Things were quite different in the main shopping area, and

particularly the Atrium, where the glossy weekly Grazia took centre stage with open plan offices in a Habitat-designed Perspex pod where shoppers could see a close-up of the team putting together the November 11th issue. Elemis and Bare Minerals were also on the site giving demonstrations which were wired up to allow people on the outside to hear.

The shopping area is anchored by five major retailers: House of Fraser, Debenhams, Marks & Spencer, Next and Waitrose. The layout is easy to navigate, once you get the hang of it. I was helped by concierges and touch screen directories, which work out the shortest route to your destination.

Not many shoppers were around at mid-morning and I began to wonder if the credit crunch was keeping people away. But by 1pm the place was heaving, especially in the pedestrian street of cafes and restaurants cooking food to order in front of customers.

On my way to Debenhams, I popped into Malika, the first standalone store in a major shopping centre for the eyebrow threading specialist. Retail designers Sheridan & Co created the sophisticated, calm environment with gorgeous dark aubergine and warm off-white walls and two fringed curtains, which subtly reference Malika's threading technique. Malika's trained threaders give customers a consultation before starting treatment, along with tips and advice on how to look after the brows. Each customer receives a loyalty card, entitling them to a free treatment after paying for six, a clever way of ensuring that they will come back to Westfield time and again.

It was evident that many of Westfield's retailers were working hard to attract and retain customers. "We've trained our consultants much more than normal with the aim of giving 100% customer service," said Laura Gove, Cosmetics Sales Manager, Debenhams, Westfield, London. "So far, beauty sales have been brilliant and I think that's got a lot to do with training."

Maureen Hinton, Lead Analyst for Verdict, visited Westfield with a friend on the Sunday after opening. "My friend bought some Clarins' products in



*The beauty bar in the Debenhams' store*



*Westfield London shopping centre is officially opened by Boris Johnson, Mayor of London and Frank Lowry, Chairman of The Westfield Group*

Debenhams and said what excellent service she'd been given. The consultant was especially nice and helpful."

Debenhams beauty hall covers 8150 sq ft and features several brands which are not on sale elsewhere in Westfield, including Elemis, Bare Minerals and The Beauty Bar, a seedbed for niche brands, including DuWop, Stila, Pop Beauty, Tweezerman, Eylure, Leighton Denny and Pure. "The idea is to give customers a choice across different brands and to introduce niche ones which are not big enough to have their own counter," explains Laura.

Niche skincare brands are also given their own section at the back of the beauty department and include Dr Lewinn's, Burt's Bees, L'Occitane, Dead Sea Magik, Bliss, Caudalie and St Tropez. "They also have their own promotional area which changes every two weeks," affirms Laura. "If the brands take off, they'll be given more space."

Upstairs on the third floor, is Debenhams' pamper zone, where women can have a blow dry, brow shape, makeover and manicure. It is likely to appeal to women wanting a makeover before heading out for the evening.

House of Fraser is located at the entrance to The Village, the premium arm of the mall, where consumers can find Jo

Malone, Dior, Gucci, Bill Amberg and a host of other luxe designer names.

"We're delighted to be the premium anchor department store and every shop fit is the very latest build," explains Debbie Beaumont-Howell. "The beauty brands have 4m floor to ceiling builds which is unique in the world of beauty."

The entrance to the 10,000 sq ft beauty hall features House of Fraser's Launch Pad, where new brands are given a prominent position front of house in their own pods. "The idea is that if you put a brand like Face Boutique in amongst a whole lot of other brands, it gets lost," explains Miranda Pitt, PR for House of Fraser. "It's a challenge to address what's new in niche as they can't compete with the big ones in terms of shop fit." Current Launch Pad brands include Face Boutique, INA Crystals, Clean, md skincare and Juliette has a Gun.

Destination Skin is a medspa concession in one corner of the store with four treatment rooms, offering the latest in injectables, laser treatments, skin peels and resurfacing and advance anti-ageing treatments. Beau Visage skin analysis machines are used to determine the age of the skin, sun damage and as a base for further recommendations. On sale are a number of serious doctor brands, including Lycogel, Pharmaceris, Skincenticals and Murad, which are recommended to customers as part of their treatment programme.

It is early days, but so far the outlook for Westfield is looking bright. "We're delighted we reached our plan for beauty sales in the first week. We're fortunate because consumers still buy lipstick and perfume in a recession," says Debbie.

Westfield's wide range of shops and facilities, coupled with excellent service and a fabulous environment, will give many people every reason to want to keep shopping.



*Debenhams' Pamper Zone located on the third floor*