

Tom Bartlett Walks Through the Design of Smythson's Flagship

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Ruy Teixeira

The Library at Smythson's

by Samantha Tse

Published: December 24, 2012

Go to top ↑ "Smythson is such an iconic British brand," says architect **Tom Bartlett**, as he welcomed **ARTINFO UK** into the newly revamped flagship store that he and his team at **Waldo Works** designed.

"It's one of those that has a proper back-story," he continues as we walk through the Georgian building. "Hermes has its saddle; Smythson has its paper and diaries. It has a real history to it."

This year marks the 125th anniversary of **Smythson of Bond Street**, which was founded in 1887 and has catered to members of the Royal Family and celebrities.

Bartlett worked with the company's board of directors, including Creative Consultant, Samantha Cameron, to give the store a new concept that encompassed all of the brand's components, from diary and paper, to leather goods, and their bespoke department.

"What is wonderful is that it's turned into a sort of department store," said Bartlett. "It's not just paper; what we wanted to do was open the store up, take it back to its original size and create mini-departments."

Bartlett drew from the company's rich history for the interiors of the store, but reinterpreted the 3,300 feet space with the contemporary consumer in mind.

"One of the first things we try to do when working with heritage materials is to bring that sense of heritage and oldness to a project while keeping it a real contemporary form," explained Bartlett.

The flagship store kept much of its original neo-Georgian features, and one of the most arresting details is the front entrance are the arcade-style windows. Even when the store is closed, onlookers can still enjoy peeping into the shop. Bartlett took the idea of using the lost houses of Park Lane that were torn down in the 1920s as the base for the grand Gallery, which is the first room that customers walk into.

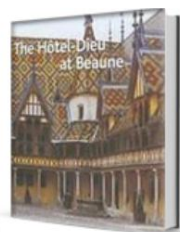
"This is the first room and it has all the color collections in it," said Bartlett. "So if you start with the floor, it's an oak floor with a kind of carpet, a herringbone marble. So that's the kind of Robert Adam halls, so it's a link back to the neo-classical architecture."

Inside the Gallery, the curvature of the ceiling capitals juxtaposes the solid grey and white herringbone marble floors. In order to highlight Smythson's use of color, Bartlett muted the store's interior palette. The brand's seasonal collection with the current colourway is aptly showcased.

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"We were looking at an absence of color throughout the store because their products are very colorful and very graphic," said Bartlett.

As customers walk through the store, their eyes are drawn to the "diary wall", which acts as a central focal point where a selection of brightly-colored Smythson diaries are displayed on a wall unit beside the gold stamping station where names can be embossed into the leather volumes.

"Smythson sells organization and better than anyone else. So trying to do this totem to organization, trying to work out how all the diary sizes, all the different ways they can choose and hopefully it's the sample that will help you to make the selection from," said Bartlett.

The Bond Street store's depth was cleverly divided into different sections, each having its own unique aesthetic that ties in the story of the product it represents with the company's history.

"The products need their own sort of space and you need to understand that we're in different rooms," explained Bartlett. "Throughout the store, the language changes. We looked through all the archives of Smythson's with their archivist and looked at various pieces and tried to find these specific things. They're all dotted around the stores and are related to each product that sit in each department."

The travel room has Smythson blue walls reminiscent of old maps and the Round Room, where the handbags are displayed, has rounded fixtures and furniture to give it a bit of femininity.

"We wanted to create a library feel but with this very light but feminine palette, which is one thing Samantha Cameron was quite keen on. Making sure it's very monochromatic, which all of it is, with jeweled boxes of color," said Bartlett of the Round Room.

In the previous incarnation of the store, the bespoke service was hidden and more of a behind the scenes operation. Bartlett opened up the area to make it more accessible for customers.

"Bespoke is the old school thing that they do. Before, [the space] was very much to do with desks and sitting down and it was a little bit formal. We wanted to make it a sort of pleasure, but also kind of cater to people who want to sit and really look at this stuff," said Bartlett of the Blue Room, which sports vintage military furniture with shallow drawers and a large work surface.

"There are drawers so you can see all the different iterations of how you can do your stationary, whoever it may be. The sales person uses this as a studio table, basically, showing things. It's much more approachable."

While the virtual customer is fast on the rise, Bartlett believes that the physical store just as important when relaying the brand's overall image and message.

"The user in the virtual space in terms of retail – they're picking from a menu. They're moving around as they want to and it's slightly more technical," said Bartlett.

"But the physical space is very important for brands to bring everything together to create an image and a look that's holistic to their product. The customer has to experience everything and that's power for retail. So the physical space has become more important because it's come to define who you really are."

Smythson of Bond Street, 40 New Bond Street, London, W1S 2DE

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