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A FUTURE-PROOF UPGRADE

Text: Suzanne Miao Photography: © Ruy Teixeira

Earlier this year, iconic London store Selfridges set the scene for international customer growth with a new services space designed by Waldo Works over a 16-month period of planning and restoration

Turquoise tiles in the refreshment room carry through the colour theme of the glass panelling in the Main Hall



Clockwise from top left

A sculptural pendant light by renowned artist-designer Bec Britain is suspended above custom-made sofas in the Main Hall • Azucena sofas are upholstered in a classic dark blue velvet, sitting alongside generous tub chairs in leather • In the larger of the two main Tax Halls, walls are covered in hand-painted glass panels of botanicals and exotic plants

Following a 16-month period of planning and careful restoration, Selfridges opened a new customer services space earlier this year, catering to the needs of tax-free shopping customers. The store's international business has grown consistently over previous years, and the new space aims to accommodate future growth as well. Relocated from the lower-ground floor to the fourth floor, the customer services area is now more than three times the size of its previous setting, spreading out over 16,000 sq-ft.

A multi-million pound investment designed by architects Waldo Works, the space houses the new Tax Refund Lounge, two Tax-Free Halls, and several VIP areas accommodating the requirements of high net-worth individuals, VIPs and visiting shopping tour groups. It also offers the benefits of a Quiet Room, two Library areas, a refreshment room and a Mac Bar where customers are able to go online to further shop from selfridges.com, check-in online, view emails and so on.

The addition of a Faith Room is a first, offering space for customers of any faith to go and quietly worship or meditate. Also new is the Theatre Desk, operated by *Time Out*, from which customers can book anything from a show to a whole day or evening out.

A dedicated Mac Bar and integrated entertainment screens in high glass and oak bevel provide entertainment in the Main Hall





Above
In the West Hall, the floor in small format marble tiles creates a contemporary take on the great Palm House at Kew Gardens

Facing page
Floors are laid out in a black and white geometric marble pattern

Set above the iconic Queen of Time clock atop the store's central historic canopy entrance, the new Customer Services signals Selfridges' commitment to developing new shopping and service spaces, as well as preserving and restoring the grandeur and original features of the iconic Neo-Classical building which houses the flagship store.

The brief given to Waldo Works was to instil a heightened sense of cool luxury within the new department. The refurbishment work has reinstated the architectural infrastructure and, within this, created a series of wide-open halls which amplify the grand scale of the space.

In the Main Hall, visitors are greeted at a

large marble and oak reception and concierge desk, and guided to various seating areas. Other customers are taken to a VIP area or led to the refreshment room or Quiet Room; concierge service is efficient and carefully orchestrated to attend to the needs of different cultures, individuals or groups.

It is a dignified classical room with the feel of a generous hotel lobby. Centrally, above custom-made sofas, hangs a sculptural pendant light by renowned artist-designer Bec Britain. The Azucena sofas are upholstered in a classic dark blue velvet, sitting alongside generous tub chairs in leather. A dedicated Mac Bar and integrated entertainment screens in high glass and oak bevel provide entertainment during the short waiting time.

The West Hall is the larger of the two main Tax Halls, where walls are covered in hand-painted glass panels of botanicals and exotic plants, while the floor in small format marble tiles creates a contemporary take on the great Palm House at Kew Gardens. Centrally, a huge oak, brass and leather desk with bespoke lighting and comfortable upholstered chairs greets the customer who has been ushered through from the Main Hall.

Around the perimeter, behind the glass wall, are further oak panelled desk niches, again with bespoke lighting with hand-painted signage allowing the customers to easily identify the member of staff who will attend to their every need.

Over in the corniced, marbled East Hall, specifically designed slatted timber and painted screens create semi private areas. In the middle of the room, a hand-painted glass, 11m-long leather topped bar allows for a quicker standing approach for customers to process their transaction.

In the early 1900s, when Selfridges first opened, the era was marked by a 'golden age' of travel and a growing opulence influenced the way public and private buildings were designed. Waldo Works drew inspiration from that era and references from elegant waiting rooms and early airline interiors were used throughout, including bold design cues evoking exotic travel.

The overall style was also inspired by the fashionable Palm Court restaurant, famously Selfridges' first-ever restaurant, renowned for its lush tropical decor and partly destroyed in a fire during the 1940s. The new architectural treatment opens up windows, reinstates the historical mouldings and columns, and creates a series of 'Selfridges' rooms, each with their own particular character. Floors are in a black and white geometric marble pattern, while wall panelling includes hand-painted, exotic garden scenes printed on large glass panes. ●



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