

Interior brief

A clothing chain revitalised by a street culture theme

Stirling Cooper asked David Quigley Architects to sharpen up the image of one of its shop interiors, with a concept which could then be implemented in other branches. The design made use of basic industrial materials to help convey an urban theme

BY MARCUS FIELD. PHOTOGRAPHS BY PETER COOK



DAVID BANKS

Above, left to right: John Davies, Nicola Walls and David Quigley

Client's requirements

BODYBEST WOMEN'S CLOTHING

Stirling Cooper, a small chain of shops selling low- to medium-price women's clothes, was established in London in the 1960s. In 1992 it was purchased by Bodybest, a company which manufactured about 80 per cent of its merchandise. With the introduction of Bella Freud's designer label to the collection, it was looking for a new, revitalised image to replace the tired black and chrome look of its stores.

Having seen David Quigley Architects' work for Issue, the chain of middle-market women's wear shops, Stirling Cooper managing director Paul Dass asked the architect to design a new interior for a test shop in Kingston-upon-Thames – a concept which could then be implemented in Stirling Cooper's new and existing stores. Following the success of Kingston, three other shops were to be fitted out, including the flagship store in Oxford Street.

There was no written brief, rather a series of meetings between the architect and client management, fashion designer and PR company. A budget of £50 per m² was given.

Architect's response

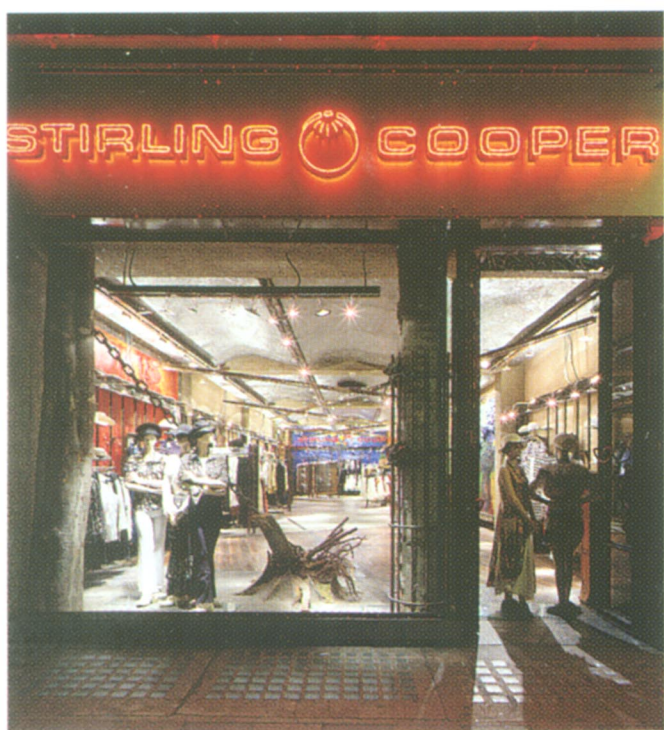
DAVID QUIGLEY

David Quigley Architects

Stirling Cooper was born in the 1960s and is described by our client as providing quality, medium-priced merchandise for 'streetwise' London girls. They had seen a shop that we had completed for one of their competitors and felt the interior had a quality they would like to capture. During early meetings we saw many of Stirling Cooper's promotional images and became interested by the props and locations that were used – mostly outside in dense urban situations, from the East End to Knightsbridge.

We were looking for a theme, so began by looking at the street culture targeted by Stirling Cooper. We looked at the fabric of the street itself, intrigued by the way exposure to weather changed the character of materials to give a patina of age. We became fascinated by the idea of taking the character and mood of outside and transferring it inside, focusing particularly on covered urban spaces: bus stops, railway bridges, arcades, porches, awnings – things which transcend interior/exterior definition.

This had to be a room in which to sell merchandise. It had to be intriguing, welcoming and provide an opportunity for people to hang around – in the way that young



Above: streetscape becomes interior at Stirling Cooper's Oxford Street store, seen from the changing rooms (top) and from the street

CREDITS

STIRLING COOPER SHOP, OXFORD STREET, LONDON
CLIENT Stirling Cooper PLC
ARCHITECT David Quigley Architects

DESIGN TEAM

David Quigley, John Davies, Nicola Walls
QUANTITY SURVEYOR

Turner Fletcher Mills

MAIN CONTRACTOR

Tudor Shopfitters

SUPPLIERS

metalwork specialist

Metalart, interior planting

Urban Roots, muralist

James Bain Smith

SUBCONTRACTORS

mechanical works Air

Circulation & Design,

electrical works AB

Electrical, signage MBC

Signs, steelworkers Arlec

people hang around street corners, public spaces and street cafés. We began considering it as a street café, hijacked and converted into a shop. If we could get people to linger, they might browse and buy.

The floor became a kind of street map with paving slabs symbolising an urban grid, intersected by parallel timber boards suggesting main boulevards and strips of mild steel indicating tramlines. We used elements of the street, like advertisement billboards. But, rather than projecting a sales message, we used them as picture frames to display commissioned artwork.

Artist James Bain-Smith was commissioned to paint abstract urban images at a billboard scale. These were given elevated focus to integrate their visual status within the space – just as a street is composed of urban pieces, from buildings to bus stops and lamp posts. Each contributes to the streetscape. This integration of art, interior, street, and merchandise display attempted to layer and reinforce the urban experience.

We spent a considerable amount of time developing the merchandising system, which uses the most simple and widely available angle iron as its basic component. The angle-iron vocabulary is developed to make the window frames, doors, lighting track, changing rooms and cash desk. The material is simply cut, welded and bolted. Welds, saw

cuts, bolts and floor fixings are left exposed. Reclaimed timbers have been used for floors, selected for economy and for their aged patina. Sheets of mild steel are bolted together for the ceiling and slightly compressed between fixed angles to give an arched form, then finished by a burnisher to give a mottled tin-can look. The columns and beams are finished in a pebble-dash render which gives the appearance of an exposed concrete wall which has been thoroughly beaten by the wind and rain.

All the metalwork inside the shop has been allowed to decay and rust – a process accelerated by the use of acid, then arrested by sealing. The rusting/decaying process has resulted in the character of hard, cold shiny steel becoming warm, mature and malleable. The changing rooms are made with reference to Parisian street toilets.

Any new design venture is embarked upon without a clear knowledge of an end result. This project began with a range of ideas and notions which emanated from the client and which we then interpreted. It was an experiment to combine narrative and cognitive notions, developing an 'urban interior' which explored the connections between the street, the interior and high-street fashions. Basic tenets of the design – the theme and modular components – can now be implemented as more shops are opened or refitted. □