

Ted Baker's at home

At the new London flagship store, Ted Baker applies passion and wit to wallpaper, fabrics — and lavatory seats, says David Spittles

WHO is the real Ted Baker? Shoppers visiting the designer's new store in Covent Garden can get a little closer to the man who likes to keep his identity firmly under wraps.

"The mystery is all part of the allure," says Ray Kelvin, a 47-year-old Londoner and the man behind the world-wide brand. The 9,000sq ft store, like the brand, reflects Kelvin's tastes, passions and quirky sense of humour. It's like no other store in London — a huge, loft-like interior of bare brick walls adorned with pieces from "Ted Baker's" (for which read Kelvin's) art collection. These include gangster portraits by Ray Richardson, papier-mâché heads by David Farner and accessories and one-off items of furniture acquired on trips around the world (tribal tinware from Senegal and beaded chairs from the Congo, for example).

A new homeware collection occupies the basement of the Floral Street store, called The World of Ted.

A village of mini-houses made of different materials provide the store's changing rooms.

Inside, a blackboard message (handwritten in chalk by "Ted") proclaims: "I designed that with you in mind. You look gorgeous."

Another message, above a rack of sexy dresses, reads: "Ted says you'll sparkle in this little black number."

It doesn't end there. In the interactive lift, you press a button and get a cheeky riposte: "No, no, don't ever push the red one". Or "Don't look now, but there is one too many in this room, and I think it's you."

Selling fast is a handmade wallpaper collection — 20 designs, including "faux crocodile" and "pecan wood effect" available in 175 colour options and costing up to £110 a roll.

"I first saw it in a New York boutique hotel," says Kelvin. "It was like art itself. I acquired the licence and here we are."

Another popular line is a bed



The real Ted Baker: "elusive" Ray Kelvin and finance director Lindsay Page test the chain's Endurance clothing range

“The secret of fashion is to lead, not follow — but not to lead too far”

headboard with a choice of photographic images — sheep, breakfast, surreal dreams. The plan is to expand the homeware collection, especially in new stores and concessions abroad (shops have recently opened in California, Miami and Paris), bringing the number of outlets to 700 and a turnover of £62 million.

Kelvin combines astute business brain with a rather cheeky-chappy charm. "The secret of fashion is to lead, not follow — but not to lead too far," he says.

He grew up in London in a rag-trade family, working for his grandfather until he opened his own shop, in Glasgow in 1988; he had spotted an opportunity for mod street fashion in the Scottish city.

"Glasgow has a similar vibe to London, with a superb sense of style and a lot of attitude," Kelvin says.

He clearly enjoys the cloaked recognition his alter ego has brought, but insists "it's not about one person" — teamwork is behind the success. "We are a vertically integrated company; we do everything in-house — from zips to toilet seats to graphics."

The refurbishment of the new flagship store was done in nine weeks without outside architects or interior designers. The work was masterminded instead by a special projects team at the company's headquarters in King's Cross.

The HQ shouts similar anonymity. It's called simply The Ugly Brown Building — 45,000sq ft of 1970s architecture where 130 staff keep the empire growing.

There is no in-your-face corporate logo — just a giant lobster placed across the entrance to make it unmissable.

You enter through the lobster's bottom, following a path of footprints and are greeted by a virtual reception. You have to speak to a plasma screen to be directed to the appropriate floor.

KELVIN clearly enjoys all this, and the newer London he has helped to create. He lives in a contemporary house in Clerkenwell, while the mega store in Floral Street is just around the corner from his first small London shop.

Opposite the store is his "mate" Paul Smith, and other neighbours include agnes b, Nicole Farhi and Joseph. Floral Street, says Kelvin, has become an alternative to Bond Street: relaxed fashion in unintimidating surroundings — right up Ted Baker's street.

