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Celebrating 200 years of shoemaking by Clarks



Nissen Richards Studio has created the permanent exhibition, graphic design, wayfinding, and shop design for Shoemakers Museum - a brand-new visitor destination celebrating 200 years of shoemaking by Clarks.

The new museum opened in October 2025 in Street, the village in Somerset where Clarks was first formed.

Designed by Purcell Architects, the new Shoemakers Museum blends history, craftsmanship and innovation to set a new benchmark for sustainable cultural buildings in the UK. Purcell's striking double-height contemporary extension houses the permanent exhibition and seamlessly connects to The Grange, a Grade II listed 16th-century manor house long associated with shoemaking.

Visitors will be able to explore the evolution of Clarks from a home grown Quaker business into a global fashion brand with iconic shoes, such as the Desert Boot. The museum is a celebration of shoemaking and street style, retail rituals and advertising design, working life and cultural identity - all rooted in one

extraordinary Somerset village.

Pippa Nissen, Director of Nissen Richards Studio, commented: "We wanted the craft of the story to live within the designs with the very process of shoemaking itself woven into every choice. In the colours, the materials, the forms and the smallest details, you can feel the hand of the maker. Through design, we had the privilege of speaking to shoemakers, and researching into this historically, uncovering the richness of the practice, and letting that knowledge shine through."

Alfred Gillett Trust is the project commissioner and the name of the charitable organisation set up to safeguard and preserve the collection, which cares for over 100,000 historical objects.

Nissen Richards Studio's Interpretation Specialist Echo Callaghan commented: "In this

exhibition, there was no shortage of extraordinary stories to tell. Working alongside the archivists, collections manager and curatorial team to bring the narrative of the exhibition to life was a valuable and eye-opening experience and we hope that visitors are infected by the passion and enthusiasm that they hold for this exciting collection."

Nissen Richards Studio responded to the brief to create a colourful, highly graphic, and vibrant exhibition environment through the imaginative communication of stories and immersive experiences which speak engagingly to many different audiences.

As visitors approach the museum, they are met by colourful banner wayfinding in the scheme's yellow-orange-blue principal colourway, taking people from the boundary to the main museum entrance.



Client: The Alfred Gillett Trust.
Permanent exhibition, graphic, wayfinding and shop design: Nissen Richards Studio.
Architecture: Purcell Architects.
Photography: Gareth Gardner.



Visitors arrive at Shoemakers Museum into a dramatic double-height space, with their journey starting in the Arrival area, where a large neon sign creates a truly wow moment before moving through three main exhibition spaces.

Welcome to Street focuses on the village itself, the Clark brothers and the importance of the people of Street to the history of Clarks. A full-wall depiction of Street and its rural context, which takes the form of a 3D-abstracted wall, spans both the ground and first floors of the exhibition space. An interactive element demonstrates how excess energy from the factories was once used to power the town's streetlights.

The Making Gallery explains the production processes of shoemaking. This is an AV-intensive space centred on two 'island' displays, with interactive displays all around the perimeter. It tells the story of hundreds of years of evolving shoemaking processes, from hand-sewn shoes to automation, and the eventual outsourcing of fabrication to Asia, as well as looking at the innovators and material developments which brought the process forward.

Visitors then move upstairs to the third section of the display, Selling and Buying, where the focus is about celebrating the product. Here, the design changes to reflect a more highly polished, public-facing environment.

The heart of this gallery is Clarks shoes through time, starting with marketing and advertising illustrated by point-of-sale pieces from the historical archive in a large wall-hung display, with a dark background that allows the archive items to stand out.

Two partial shop recreations from the 1950s and 80s follow, as well as a back-to-school area which features a number of child-friendly interactives from a till and dress-up area to a replicated shoe measuring kit.

Rosie Martin, Director of Shoemakers Museum, concluded: "Our team thoroughly enjoyed working with Nissen Richards Studio, from the early days of identifying the themes, stories, and objects, to designing the galleries and overseeing the museum fit out. The feedback from our first visitors is extremely gratifying and we look forward to sharing Shoemakers Museum with the world." 🌍

Nissen Richards Studio
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