



“Museums are managers of consciousness. They give us an interpretation of history, of how to view the world and locate ourselves in it.”

Hans Haacke,
Artist



INSIDE :

if FOCUS : MUSEUMS & GALLERIES **if** LIGHTING **if** SUSTAINABILITY **if** COMMUNITY

if WANDERLUST **if** SPOTLIGHT : OUTDOOR FURNITURE



SHOEMAKERS MUSEUM, STREET, UK

nissen richards studio, london
lead designer: ar. pippa nissen, director
architecture: purcell architects, london



Design brief and aim

To create a permanent exhibition, graphic design, wayfinding, and shop design.

How this was accomplished

Shoemakers Museum is a brand-new destination in Somerset, built to celebrate 200 years of shoemaking by Clarks. It is located in Street, the British village where the company was formed. Nissen Richards Studio was also the museum's interpretation specialist, creating the exhibition's text in collaboration with the curatorial team. The project itself was initiated by the Alfred Gillett Trust in 2022 to build a tourist destination whose opening coincides with the bicentenary of Clarks.

The museum also aims to narrate the story of Clarks' founders, Cyrus Clark and James Clark,

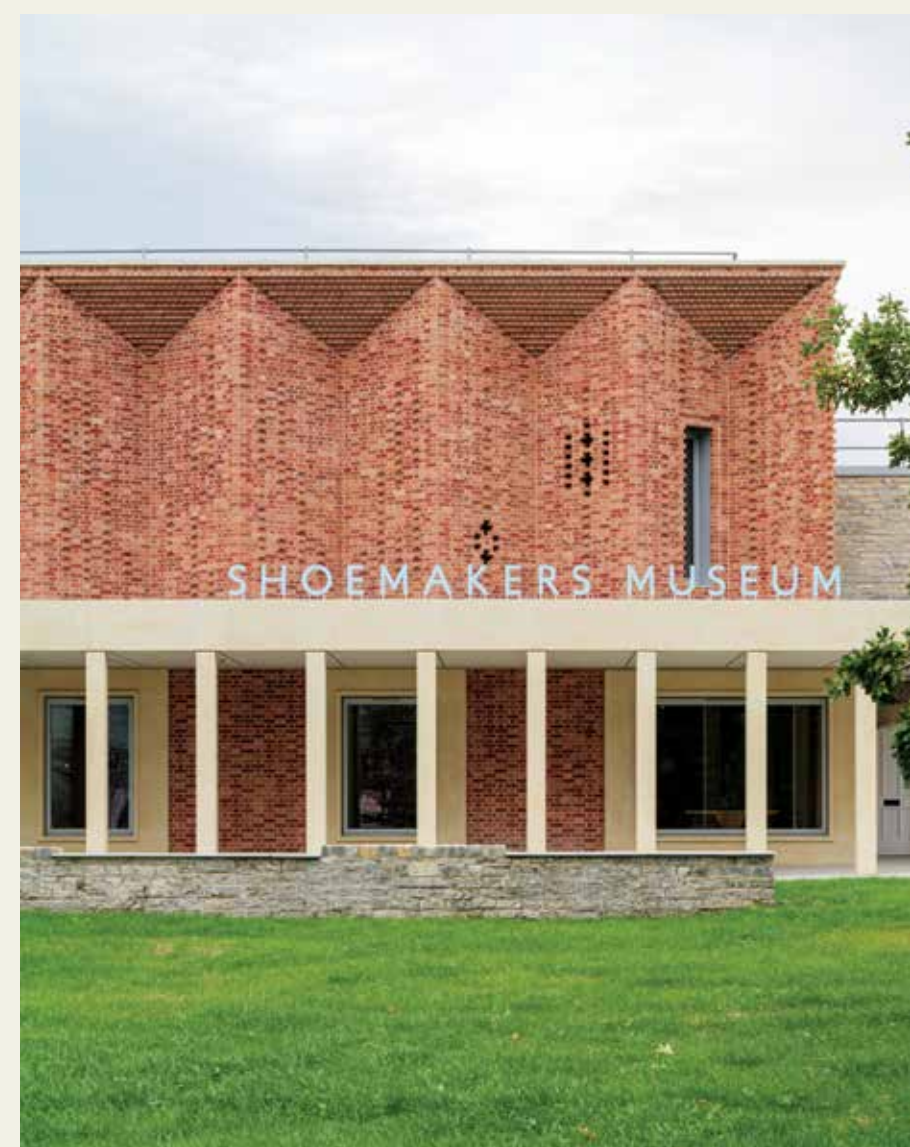
and the evolving relationship between the brand, the village, and its people. Shoemakers Museum displays the industrial history of shoemaking, showcasing the company's archive artefacts for the first time, along with its manufacturing and global retail strategy. Visitors see the journey from a homegrown Quaker business to a fashion brand as the museum depicts shoemaking and street style, retail rituals and advertising design, working life, and cultural identity.

Discussing the challenges, Ar. Pippa Nissen, Director, Nissen Richards Studio, says, "The challenge was to create a truly interactive museum for all age groups, but particularly for families and young people visiting on school trips, as well as for local audiences. As Nissen Richards Studio was also commissioned



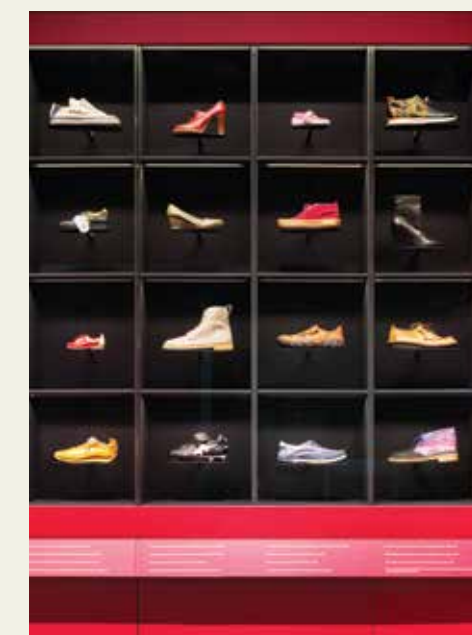
to create the project's branding and wayfinding, as well as the exhibition text, we ensured that everything was integrated and that complex stories were communicated in the clearest and most accessible way possible for all age groups. Above all, we needed to deliver content that was fun and exciting and that would provoke conversation and further interest on the part of visitors."

The museum building is constructed from locally quarried stone with references to Clarks' design language, including a double-height extension that houses the museum. It is also connected to The Grange, a Grade II-listed 16th-century manor house, long associated with shoemaking. As interpretation specialists and text writers, Nissen Richards Studio created a family-friendly narrative that explores shoemaking from a manufacturing and innovation angle. Instead of choosing flat color, they drew inspiration from the history of promotional graphic design and retail branding that Clarks had promoted for its products.



As visitors approach the museum, they see colorful banners in the scheme's yellow–orange–blue principal colorway leading them to the entrance. Along with using bright colors in the exhibition design, the wayfinding displays a series of shoe silhouette icons as a major graphic feature.

Ar. Nissen adds, "To create a really vibrant and exciting entrance area, we used LED neon outlines of shoes for the entrance wall. As a studio, we are also great believers in collaborating with experts. This was also expressed here through the creation of bespoke stitched shoe outlines used for the front section of the museum's welcome desk, designed together with the London Embroidery Studio."



The museum's secondary entrances take people to the café and earning spaces.

The firm created a colourful, vibrant, and graphic permanent exhibition environment through imaginative communication and immersive experiences enjoyed by children and the elderly. Visitors enter the double-height arrival area, proceeding through the three main exhibition spaces: Welcome to Street, Making Gallery, and Buying and Selling. The arrival area has a wall display with neon shoe outlines and a bespoke vegan leather-clad desk with shoe outlines.

Ar. Nissen clarifies, "In this instance, the objects on display did not have great age but were nevertheless often unique 20th-century examples of footwear and therefore needed to be protected with as rigorous conservation installation methodologies as we would apply to much older objects when it came to showcases and environmental controls. To ensure nothing felt too separate from the visitor, a preserved object often sat directly next to an interactive, so that people could both look and interact at the same time. There was plenty to touch in all locations, ensuring key objects felt protected but never precious."

The firm designed the museum's flow and navigation, collaborating with the curatorial team to ensure smooth movement. This was achieved by planning large and small spaces for good wheelchair access throughout the museum, along with enough room to accommodate visitor groups, such as school groups, with natural gathering points.

Speaking about the takeaway, Ar. Nissen responds, "When we returned to the site to take the project photography, one of the very first school groups to see the exhibition was already on site – a class of primary school children. We therefore had a unique opportunity to see the new exhibition in use. The children were literally screaming with delight as they went round, trying things out, pulling out drawers, using interactives at their own eye level, just as we had expressly designed for them to do, and touching everything they could."

We also learnt not to be afraid of bright colors on this project, as we often used muted tones for sophisticated, art-loving audiences. Here, we could break free from that, and the potential fun for audiences, who would be surrounded by bold and bright colors, also became very enjoyable for the design team."

