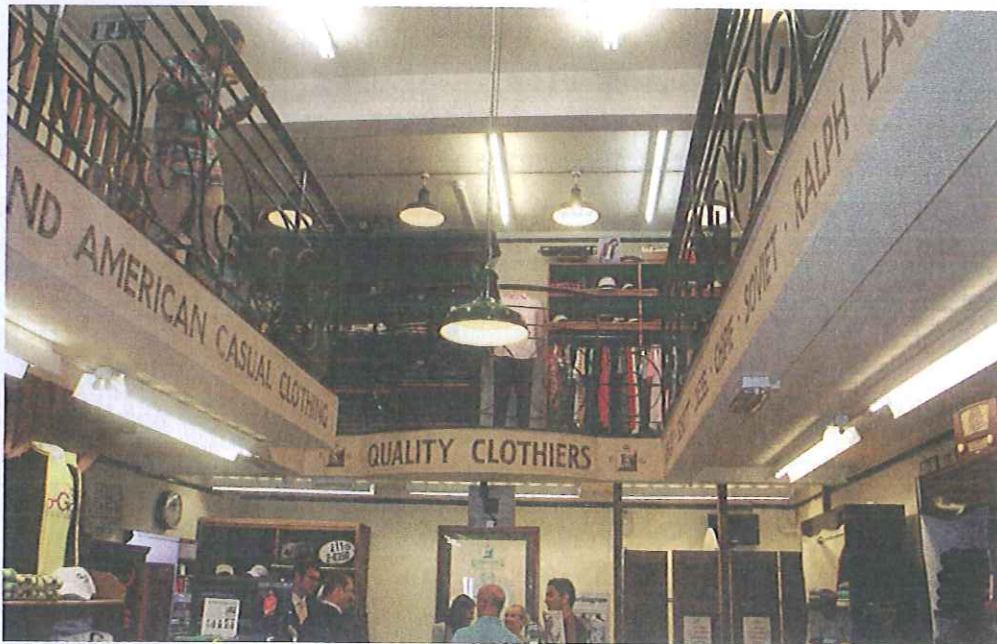


716

# Richmond Classics, Bournemouth



## OUR EXPERT



**John Ryan**  
Group stores editor

With a background in fashion buying, including a 10-year stint at C&A in the UK and Germany, John Ryan writes about visual merchandising, store design and the business of launching new shops. As a journalist, he has covered the sector for more than a decade

**S**ometimes old friends have the capacity to surprise – coming up with something new and making you stop and think about your relationship to them. When this happens, you tend to reassess the whole person, not just the part that has proved attention-grabbing.

Something of the kind also applies in retail and Richmond Classics, an independent on Bournemouth's aptly named Richmond Hill, has taken possession of a large first floor space that was adjacent to the existing store. In so doing, not only has it gone from a shade over 4,000 sq ft to about 8,000 sq ft, but the geography of the store has permitted the creation of an almost autonomous fashion "pharmacy" where, according to owner Keith McNicol, you can find a cure for your "fashion illness".

In fairness, the "pharmacy" part of Richmond Classics has been in existence since 2001 but on a much smaller scale and as part of the original shop, which has traded for 22 years. The new section, which opened at the end of last year,

shows what can be done with a little imagination. And in expanding into the new space, much of the original store has had to be remerchandised and a new women's shop has been created.

McNicol says that since its inception, Richmond Classics has been evolving and that it continues to do so. In the autumn, at the rear of the pharmacy, a new "university of fashion" is set to open – an area selling collegiate sweatshirts and jogging bottoms. It's about giving shoppers a reason to return to the shop.

### Key looks and merchandise mix

The space in this shop is divided roughly 70/30 between menswear and womenswear. Womenswear, says McNicol, is more difficult to sell than menswear as there tends to be a concentration on disposability and, consequently, on lower prices. Practically, this means price points in the women's shop are lower than in the men's areas.

There is, however, a very wide range. McNicol highlights the toys, imported from the US, housed in a glass case and

A cure for your fashion ills: hospital paraphernalia is used in the shopfit, as well as old vending machines which display jeans



*This stalwart young fashion indie has doubled in size by adding a pharmacy-styled department which dispenses a healthy dose of fun to its customers*



## Essentials

**Address** 9-11 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth  
**Size** 8,000 sq ft  
**Trading** For 22 years (founded in 1988)  
**Owner** Keith McNicol  
**Price range** £4 to more than £1,000  
**New space** The fashion pharmacy  
**Outstanding design features** The pills wallpaper and the use of hospital paraphernalia as display units

which start at £4, which are intended to act as an introduction to Richmond Classics for very young shoppers. He makes the point, however, that “if people can afford everything in my shop, then I’m not doing my job properly. There have to be some aspirational pieces.”

For men there are commodity pieces, such as the polo shirts from Lyle & Scott and Fred Perry at £44.99 and £49.99 respectively, but there are suits at £750 and even jackets that hover around the £1,000 mark.

Diesel gets a fair showing, and perhaps less well-known are the top-end PRPS and King Krash jeans ranges from the US.

On the women’s side, the top prices are provided by Ugg and Juicy Couture merchandise, which McNicol says are for the “converted”, but after that the more price-conscious nature of the offer kicks in from brands such as Siren and Holster.

**Score 8/10**

## Visual merchandising

It’s one of McNicol’s big claims that he doesn’t do things by the book and this is immediately apparent in the choice of display fixtures.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the pharmacy section, where McNicol has raided items from hospitals being closed down to vending machine suppliers with old machines they need to get off their hands. The latter have had their glass fronts removed and are used as fixtures for showing off laid jeans.

Elsewhere in the pharmacy are hospital-style signs which indicate the remedies that are on hand and pieces of equipment, such as a chrome hospital trolley that was used to wheel a person around prior to going under the surgeon’s knife. There’s even an internally illuminated pill trolley now being used as a cash desk.

Worth noting too are such fripperies as the internally lit eye-test box that, on closer examination, spells out the name of some of the brands that are, or have been, on sale in the store.

**Score 9/10**

## Service

If you’re going to sell brands where the items really are investment pieces, then the staff have to know their stuff. Ishmael, a member of staff, gallops through the benefits of a pair of PRPS jeans, citing the fact that the organic cotton is grown in Zimbabwe, is shipped to Japan, where it is then turned out in very small quantities on old “Levi’s 501

looms”. This is the kind of knowledge that may not actually add to the number of reasons that you might have for buying a pair of expensive jeans but it does what good service should do: reassures.

Even though it’s early on a Wednesday morning, the staff are busy and are clearly fired up by being part of Richmond Classics: the way it should be.

**Score 8/10**

## Store appeal

There is much to comment on in this store and it is obvious that this is a series of spaces that have been connected at different dates. In many stores, particularly older department stores, this would be a disadvantage but McNicol makes this potential pitfall a benefit by creating clear zones for different customers. And as the pharmacy is the newest part of the store, and occupies about 50% of the space, this is the most noteworthy area.

The pharmacy is a strong example of what might be termed reach-me-down chic, with stripped-back ceilings where the electrical cables are on view and the reinforced steel joists that have been painted silver and made a feature. Then there are the fitting rooms, each of which has a curtain, with a red light above it that comes on, via a motion sensor, when you step in to try something on. As the entrance to each of these is in full view of the floor with curtains for doors, the effect is of the triage area in a hospital A&E.

It is hard to ignore the wallpaper too – endless brightly coloured pills with words such as “addict” and “fashion” on them. Questionable perhaps, in view of our pill-popping culture, but absolutely fit for purpose as far as complementing the rest of the floor is concerned.

**Score 7/10**

## Would I buy?

It would be rude not to. If variety is the spice of life, then this store is not only worth a visit but it is probable that you will find yourself reaching for your wallet or purse. As McNicol puts it: “Our customers range from maybe 10, right up to 50.”

**Score 8/10**

## VERDICT

This is an indie that shows how fashion can still be fun and which really sets itself apart from its competition by taking a nonconformist stance.

42/50

