

## Stores

# Going Dutch

Last year, Hudson's Bay Co. launched its first Dutch department store in Amsterdam, followed by a rapid rollout into a highly competitive market

By Mark Faithfull



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HUDSON'S BAY CO.

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The food and home accessories department features an open ceiling and an abundance of natural light.

*September 28, 2018*

Hudson's Bay has done nothing by halves in The Netherlands. Hot on the heels of the grand opening of its Amsterdam flagship store in September 2018, a further 10 Hudson's Bay stores opened at high-profile sites in 10 Dutch cities across the course of the next month.



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The stores—from iconic Canadian retailer Hudson's Bay Co.—represented a design collaboration with the company's in-house global design team and Baltimore-based firm CallisonRTKL. Each store has been designed to provide highly customized and localized fashion, services and brands complementing the Dutch culture and the Dutch design landscape.

The depth and width of the HBC program, which includes many locations formerly occupied by Dutch department store brand V&D, is a first for the department store industry and was a surprise move when former CEO Jerry Storch first announced the company's intentions, as he pledged: "We believe that in the Dutch retail market there is unmet demand in both the premium department store and off-price segments. The Hudson's Bay and Saks OFF 5TH banners, tailored for the Dutch market, will introduce our all-channel retail model to The Netherlands with a combination of exciting retail destinations and a best in class e-commerce presence. We will use our proven playbook based on our success with fantastic department stores combined with local management expertise to create innovative retail destinations."

Having traded in The Netherlands since fall 2017, Hudson's Bay Co. now has 13 department stores in operation in the country, including two Saks OFF 5TH stores. Another two locations have been announced for 2018, bringing the total number of announced sites to 15, and two more leases have been signed, with plans to open up to 20 stores in The Netherlands.

Competitors in the Dutch marketplace include luxury retailer de Bijenkorf and lower-priced brands, such as Hema, H&M and Primark. Having traded for several months, Hudson's Bay Marketing and Purchasing Director Edo Beukema has confirmed that the retailer is planning to introduce cheaper clothing lines.

This is to answer perceptions that the group is high-priced, but Beukema stressed that the retailer has no intention of pulling out of The Netherlands as some have been hinting.



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In November last year, Executive Chairman Richard Baker retook the CEO job after Jerry Storch stepped down from the helm, with CVS Health veteran Helena Foulkes appointed as his successor in February.

Storch was a passionate advocate of store-based retail and was widely viewed as the driving force behind the launch into The Netherlands, which, like Germany, has seen its ailing department store sector suffer badly from online and fast-fashion rivals.

Hudson's Bay opened its first store at 21-49 Rokin in the Centrum district of Amsterdam, which is adjacent to Dam Square in the heart of the Rode Loper, a municipal masterplan area for Central Amsterdam. The store is a collection of two new and two historic buildings: 17, 21 and 49 Rokin, and Meathall on Nes Plein. The four buildings have all been treated differently and provide a house for women (49 Rokin), men (21), children (17) and home (Meathall).

Following on, the Rotterdam location opened, then Almere, Amsterdam, Breda, Den Bosch, The Hague, Leiden Maastricht, Rotterdam, Tilburg and Zwolle.

Leigh Dennis, senior vice president at CallisonRTKL, adds of the strategy: "Around the world, we've seen department stores follow the retail category in adapting and responding to the changing needs of shoppers. The design of Hudson's Bay in The Netherlands will play a pivotal role in resetting department stores as a leading place and a leading platform for highly curated, highly diverse and highly customized products, services and experiences, creating a new paradigm for the virtual and physical retail worlds."



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To execute this notion, CallisonRTKL, in partnership with HBC Global Design, reimagined each of the department store locations in collaboration with Hudson's Bay merchants and local Dutch fashion and merchandising experts. The overall strategy includes contemporary interiors with a premium feel, exposed ceilings and an elemental color and materials palette within a diverse portfolio of rejuvenated buildings. Visual merchandising and product presentation has deliberately created a sense of space and calm, with the light and airy feeling reinforced through large picture windows and simple, clean lines.

The project also involved an extensive and complicated logistics program to deliver the furniture and fixtures, says Geoff van Wijk, principal at Areen Procurement. The company was contracted to provide a full range of furniture and freestanding items for the rollout. "Hudson's Bay was looking for a hospitality look and we were appointed for product fulfillment of all the standalone furniture, which has come to some 3,000 pieces across the first 13 stores," van Wijk recalls.

Richard Hamori, head of global design for Hudson's Bay, adds: "Hudson's Bay has proven it's an agile, responsive and dynamic brand. We helped to bring that spirit to life in its Dutch stores by creating a mix of spaces and experiences that we're confident will resonate with shoppers now and will be adaptable for the future."