

# HIGH STREET TREAT

**H**otel Chocolat opened a store at Lakeside in Essex a couple of weeks ago and was besieged by shoppers from the moment the doors were flung wide.

In case you're wondering, this is a retailer that sells chocolate and almost nothing else, making it unusual among those operating in the field – most of its rivals normally opt to include sweets, cakes and suchlike.

It is also a relative newcomer to the high street, with just 12 stores at present, the majority of which are in the south of England. Co-founder and managing director Angus Thirlwell plans to expand the business this year and spread the chocolate gospel to a broader audience.

However, Thirlwell says keeping an air of exclusivity about the product and brand, which started life as a catalogue operation, is what makes Hotel Chocolat successful. The words are not empty – last year, the group had sales of £22 million and is on target to reach £35 million this year, a growth curve that would be the envy of almost any retailer you could name.

In part, this is down to an expansion strategy that involves opening 20 Hotel Chocolat outlets this year in a variety of locations, from shopping centres to cathedral cities. However, they will all look more or less the same – the store interiors are as much a part of the brand as the merchandise itself.

The retailer's store fit is the outcome of a relationship between Thirlwell and designer Terry Moore, founder of Terry Moore Design and formerly of



**Sugar rush: 20 Hotel Chocolat outlets are scheduled to open this year**

## SWEET LIKE CHOCOLATE

**Hotel Chocolat, Lakeside**  
**Size:** 800 sq ft (75 sq m)  
**Store design:** Terry Moore  
**Shopfitting:** Bridgford Interiors

consultancy Caulder Moore, who says: "The concept evolved from a loose idea about a hotel reception lobby. This meant we didn't focus on density of product and fixtures and there would be a massive cash desk. Because of that, it's easy to read.

"At the back we've designed fixtures that look like stainless steel fridges and that's where the lower-priced products are."

The stores have remarkably little centre-floor equipment. There are just two display tables and instead the retailer concentrates on placing merchandise on the walls.

Strong use is also made of graphics, which carry "chocolate secrets" such as the fact that "50

per cent of women surveyed said they would choose chocolate over sex". This may be so, but the use of black and white photography to illustrate the sentiment, set against the chocolate-brown walls, creates an upmarket feel.

This is not Cadburys country – the prices are aspirational, but still firmly within the reach of the majority of shoppers. Moore says: "The concerns we had about it looking too upmarket were unfounded."

The Lakeside store's floor is covered with limestone-coloured porcelain tiles and the ceiling has not been lowered, but the ducting channels and cabling are all sprayed in the same colour as the walls.

Moore claims there is an "honest" feel to the store's design. Nonetheless, this is a shop interior posited upon affordable luxury, rather than cut-price sweeties.