



**Light touch:** M&S uses lighting designed by LAPD at its store in Pollock, Glasgow (pictured), where energy saving is a priority



# GREEN LIGHT

Store lighting has always been a fraught topic for retailers, but is the arrival of green awareness dictating a new precedent? **John Ryan** reports on how M&S is adapting for the new mood

**T**ime was when lighting a shop meant exactly that. Efforts would be concentrated on making sure that every part of an interior was illuminated and ensuring that there were no dark corners that shoppers would find too dingy or intimidating to visit.

This was fine insofar as it meant that you would always be able to see where you were in a space, what was on offer and how it was presented. But it also meant keeping a high level of ambient light, with inevitable consequences as far as energy consumption and heat were concerned.

Things have moved on, however, and the prevailing mood is one where lighting a store is less about how bright things are and rather more to do with how energy can be saved. Liam Kelly, chief executive of Irish lighting company NuaLight, has just signed a deal to provide digital lighting for the fridges and freezers in 150 Marks & Spencer stores as part of the retailer's much publicised Plan A initiative. "Our whole company is about developing environmentally friendly light fixtures," he says.

Digital lighting, for those unfamiliar with the term, involves using semiconductors – which use less energy and produce virtually no heat when in use – to help produce a light source. Furthermore, one of the properties of a semiconductor is that it tends to function

better at low temperatures than other materials.

"When you put a light bulb in a refrigerator, if it gives off any heat, you have to get rid of that," says Kelly. There is, however, the matter of cost. The initial investment involved in installing digital lighting in a store is higher than that for conventional sources. But, as Kelly points out, digital lights are intended to work for 70,000 or more hours – about 9 years – without needing to be replaced. This is much longer than the fluorescent lights that are still widely in use and which also contain mercury, creating disposal problems.

NuaLight's programme is already under way at M&S. It started last year and should result in the retailer having lights in its freezers and refrigerators that require less maintenance and have a longer life.

The same kind of thinking informs the work of Hertfordshire lighting consultancy LAPD, which has been working with M&S since 2003. LAPD director Jonathan Morrish says: "When we're looking at a light design, we have to look at every single aspect. With M&S, we started from a position of wanting to reduce the number of lights that are used in a store as a way of saving on energy consumption."

Morrish says there have been very significant advances in increasing the amount of light that can be produced from a specific wattage. This has been achieved by paying attention to the way in which the light is reflected within a lighting fixture, the nature

of the light source itself and the glass that is used to contain the arrangement.

M&S uses lighting designed by LAPD at its Bournemouth eco-store, which opened in autumn last year, and the Pollock store in Glasgow, where energy saving has been a priority. Morrish says that the mantra for lighting designers and manufacturers, such as Philips, when working in a retail context, has to be to reduce wastage and increase efficiency. "But it's a matter of keeping your eye on what's happening," he adds.

For both Kelly and Morrish, the present move towards renewing the way in which stores are lit has proved to be good for business. For retailers, in theory at least, there is the carrot of cost savings for those prepared to take the long view. This is fine if capital expenditure is built into a retailer's budgetary DNA. But, in these cash-strapped times, getting a financial director to sign on the dotted line might prove problematic, even when the monetary case seems self-evident.

When it comes to lighting a store, there is a balance to be struck between the short-term nature of retailing and the longer-term requirement to reduce carbon footprints. Kelly says that 50 retailers across the continent are carrying out trials using digital lighting at the moment. M&S continues to lead the way in the UK – and possibly Europe – but the question is whether others will prove willing to pick up the illuminated torch and run with it. **RW**