

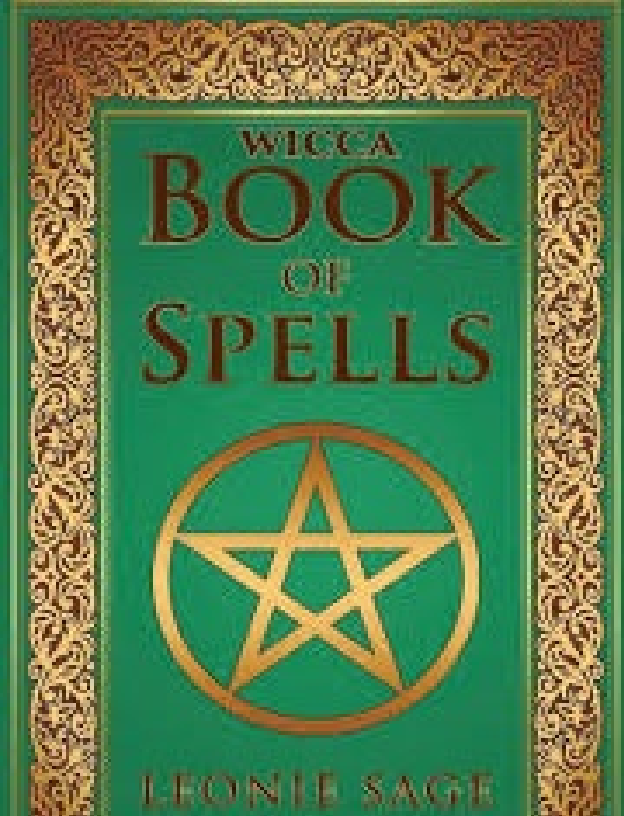
THE WHITE COMPANY
LONDON

Exploring The White Company Retail Brandscape

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What is glamour?

- *Glamer*: Scottish: “the supposed influence of a charm on the eye, causing it to see objects differently from what they really are” (OED)
- *glam-sight* – Scottish: an illusion or ‘moonshine’
- *glamr*, Icelandic: poetical name for the moon; mystical and mysterious psychic moods, supernatural elements
- *grimoire*, French: a book of spells
- Concept arrived in Hollywood in 1920s – attributed to stars of the silver screen



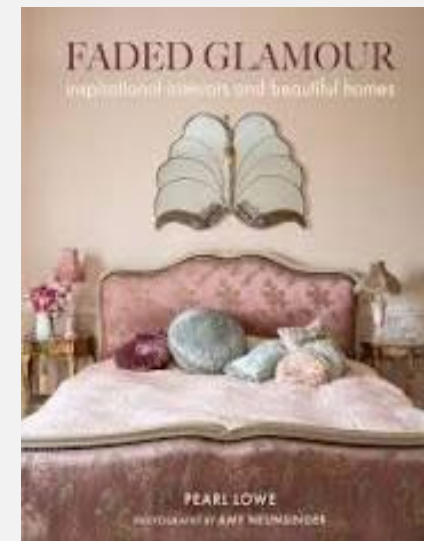
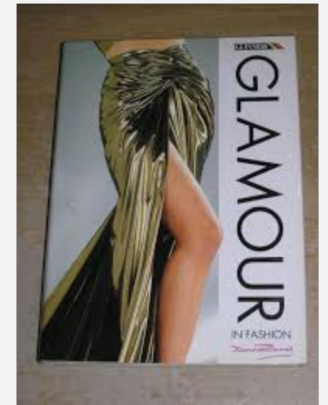
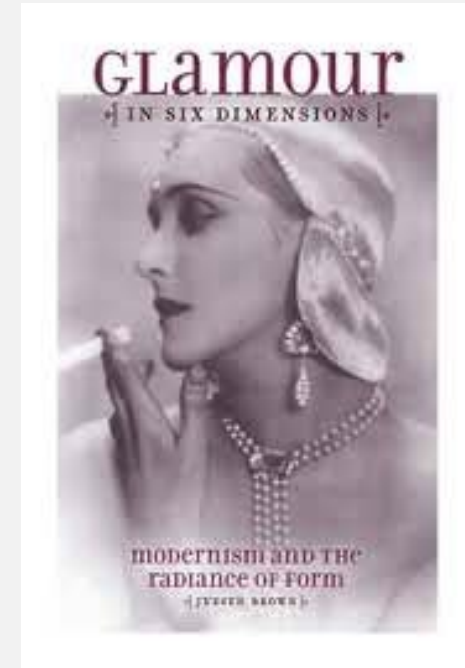
Glamour's Associations

- Magic, enchantment, spell, witchery
- Delusive or alluring charm
- Magical, uncanny, extraordinary
- Otherworldly, ethereal, supernatural
- Moonshine and stardust
- Silver, mercury, glass, mirrors, crystal
- Gleaming, light-reflecting surfaces
- Feminine element
- Nostalgia for a bygone era
- Untouchable, cold, inhuman



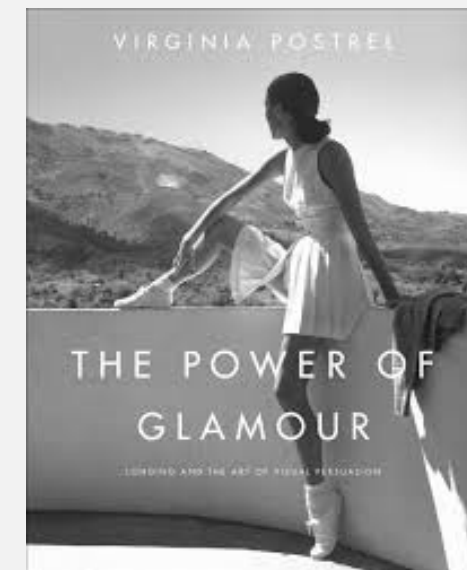
The Literature on Glamour

- Film Studies, Fashion, Design, Aesthetics, Women's Studies, Celebrity Culture
- **BUT** ignored in Branding, Marketing and Retailing literature. Why?
- Closest thing to naming glamour: luxury flagship stores allude to 'luxemospheres' (Joy et al 2014, Okonkwo 2010, Gibson 1996)



Defining Glamour

- “transformative power to change the apparently mundane and ordinary into visions of the sublime and extraordinary” (Thrift 2008)
- “the movement between material object and ethereal effect” (Brown 2009 p. 23).
- “emerges from narrative desire, from the beauty that overlays the ugliness of modern life” (Brown 2009, p. 9)
- “human longing and its cultural manifestation” (Postrel 2014, p. 221).
- Came to epitomise Hollywood’s “screen sirens” - Jean Harlow, Greta Garbo, Marlene Deitrich



Glamour in Retail Aesthetics

- From the imaginative realm to material culture in 19c
- Techniques of display and effects as well as showmanship and magic to give commercial goods a desirable aura (Gundle & Castelli 2006)
- Glamorous props, spectacle, architecture, lighting and display techniques created enchanting “dream worlds” (Williams 1991)
- Appealed to consumers’ longings for the transformation and enchantment that the buying of goods promised
- “Cathedrals of consumption” (Ritzer 2009)



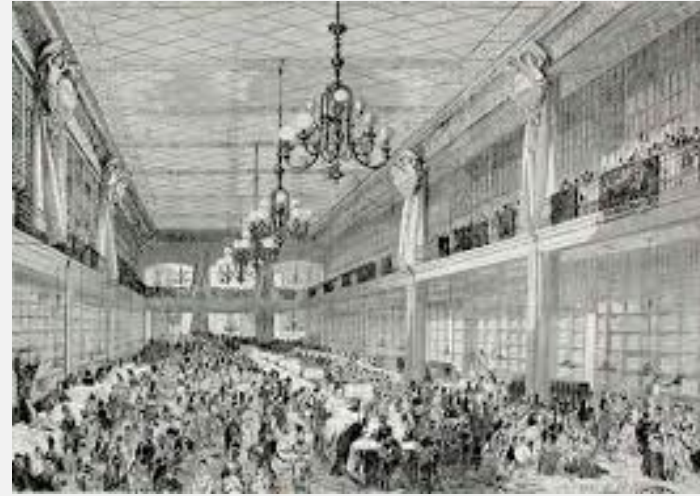
Contemporary Retail Brandscapes Literature

- The world a retail brand creates
- Phenomenological and lived experiences, material and symbolic meanings
- Luxury brand strategies of Louis Vuitton, Dior and Chanel “transmit an ideology of the beautiful” (Dion & Arnould 2011)
- Louis Vuitton flagship store HK: light (luminosity), glass, highly-polished, reflective materials evoke mystery and “a dream-like atmosphere”.
- Consumers “dazzled” by “shimmering facades that transform store spaces into ethereal evocations of luxury” (Joy et al. 2014 p. 352, p. 361).



White by Design

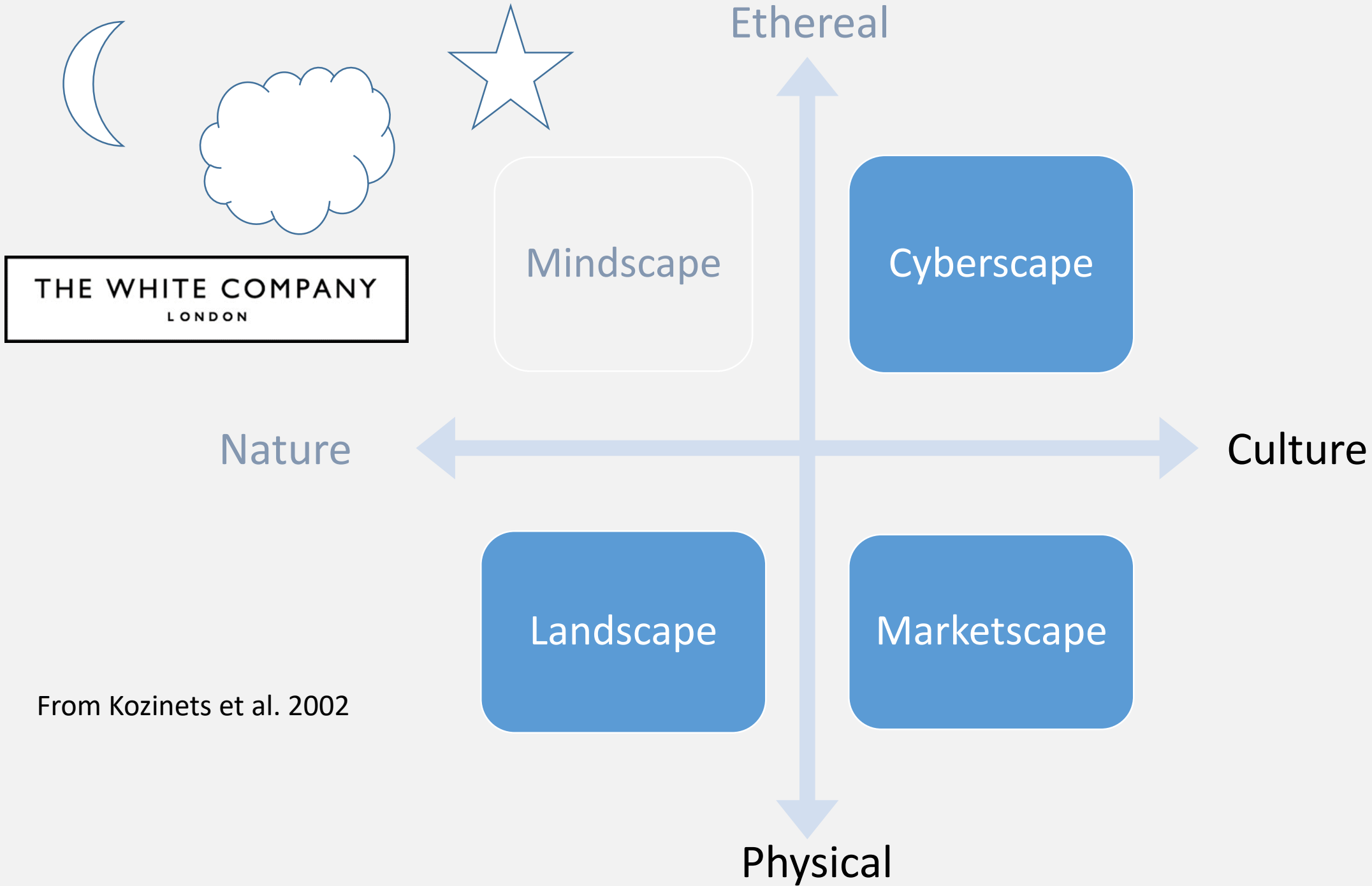
- White in early department stores (Zola, *Au Bonheur des Dames*)
- “surrounded on all sides by comfort, a fantasy of a return to the womb, which has become a womb of merchandise” (Williams, 1991)
- Syrie Maugham - white glamour in interiors: white furniture, glass, mirrors, chandeliers, silver, mercury glass
- Mackintosh, Le Corbusier; modernist & minimalist movements
- Baudrillard – bourgeois lack of colour
- White space in ads - prestige (Pracejus, Olsen & O’Guinn 2006)



Retail 'Mindscapes'

- Kozinets et al. 2002: 4 retail brandscapes: mindscape, cyberscape, marketscape and landscape
- Sherry's 2000: retail 'mindscapes' are "the wellspring of the imagination ... the enlightened cultivation of inner space ... a natural, ethereal marketplace" (p. 330).





From Kozinets et al. 2002

Mindscales

- Nature/Ethereality axes: encourages introspection, fantasy, imagination; often spiritual or ritualistic aspects; therapeutic, self-transformation, transcendental, holistic.
- Speaks to “soulful materialism” (McNiff 1995); a quasi-sacred space: “transcendental, holistic and centering” (Mitroff & Denton 1999)
- “spirituality is inextricably connected with caring, hope, kindness, love, and optimism.” (M & D, p.89)
- “No organisation can survive for long without spirituality and a soul.” (M & D, p.91)



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Founded in 1994 by Chrissie Rucker.

“I like everything to feel calm and peaceful ... what using white does is bring that calmness, peacefulness, serenity”. *CR*

Offers “everyday luxury” and “perfect simplicity” - “to celebrate the simple daily pleasures of home, friendships and family” - *TWC website*

High quality products that are designed “to be loved and used everyday ... and become an intimate part of our lives”. *TWC website*

CSR – the White Heart Foundation – supports vulnerable women and children – eg Refuge

“There is nothing more important than family – thank you for being such an important part of ours” *CR, Nov 2020*

To make customers “feel wonderfully welcome at every touchpoint.” *TWC mission*



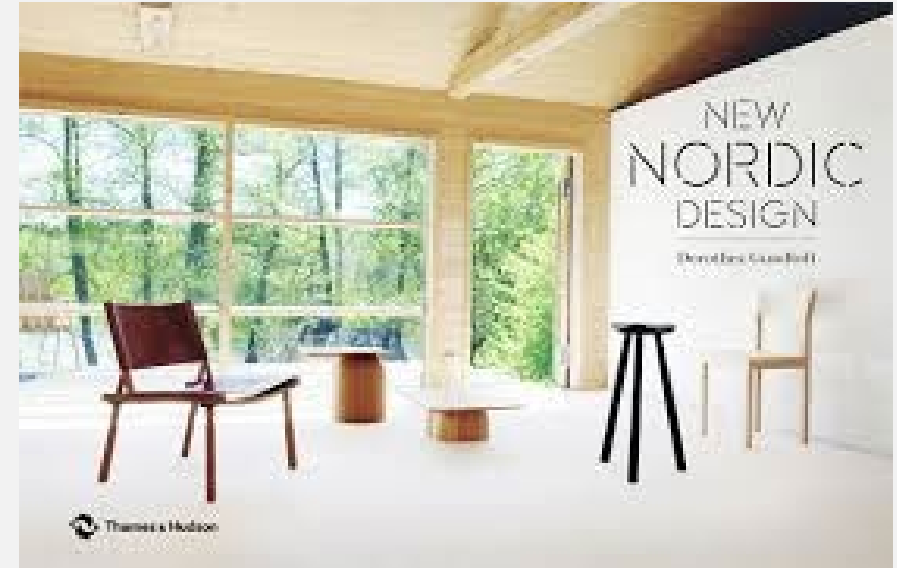
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- Multi-method Study: qualitative; in-depth interviews with consumers, visual ethnography, visual analysis, text analysis, field study in 4 UK stores, media coverage, blogs, reviews, ads, social media
- TWC is a 'feminine', nurturing, idealised lifestyle brand with a predominantly white palate
- We argue it combines nature and simplicity with glamour and enchantment



TWC Aesthetic

- Combines white glamour aesthetic elements with Nordic Design elements
- This results in a unique and contemporary aesthetic
- Luminous, light-reflecting surfaces and light-refracting, sparkly objects have from ancient times been associated with supernatural powers and heavenly energies (Moseley 2002).



Nordic Aesthetic

- White walls and pale timber to make the most of available light
- Mirrors, glass and other surfaces to reflect light from exterior elements – snow, ice, water – and further enhance light inside
- Signifies values of purity, simplicity and honest functionality, preserves tradition and craftsmanship, egalitarian principles, good design and affordable luxury, nostalgia
- Beautiful everyday objects that are accessible and functional
- “Subtle distinction” rather than “demonstrative luxury” – high cultural value (Skou & Munch 2016)



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The White Company Store, Bromley, Kent



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“Soulful
materialism” of
its Retail Stores?

‘Wellbeing’
‘mindful moments’



The White Company Store,
Bath



TWC Retail Brandscape



TWC's Glamour aesthetic

- Cool palate with gleaming, metallic elements
- Luxury fabrics: silk, cashmere, luxe, velvet, pure Irish linen
- “Fantasy of whiteness” (Pitcher 2014)
- Marble, limed wood, mother of pearl, silver, crystal, glass, mercury glass, mirrors
- Gifts “for the ever-glamorous” (*TWC Christmas 2017 catalogue*)
- An aesthetic of “domestic perfection sweeping through middle-class homes like a drift of Siberian goose down” (*Interview with CR by Elizabeth Grice, The Telegraph, 2015*)



Four Emergent Themes

- Comfort & Cosiness (Nordic Aesthetic)
- Simplicity & Reassurance (Nordic Aesthetic)
- Soulful Materialism (White Glamour Aesthetic)
- Glamour (White Glamour Aesthetic)

Comfort & Cosiness – (Nordic aesthetic)

“It’s like wrapping yourself in a big hug ... my retreat from the harsh realities of the real world! ... It’s a way of coping; soothing, comforting reassurance. If you really take it back, it’s actually the equivalent of your mother’s breast! Being comforted and reassured. Like being wrapped in a fluffy cloud! ... “ *Interview with C*

“I associate TWC a lot with cosiness – the home interiors it’s all very cosy and makes you feel like. ... White is a cosy colour – white pillows, a little bit of fur, fabrics usually are really soft. I remember I found a jumper in TWC once and it was the softest thing I had ever touched. I really like white interiors in rooms – so for example I like when the furniture is white, a white couch, white pillows, everything looks bigger and cleaner and having lived in a lot of student type accommodation where everything is just like thrown together and like the walls never are really white. So like it just makes me feel like oh this is so fancy and cosy. ... Clean, functional too. ... Clean, spacious, open, innocent” – *Interview with E*

Simplicity & Reassurance – (Nordic aesthetic)

- “...they’re not venturing too far; they’re sticking to what they know, so people know what they’re going to get when they come here.”
(Interview with S)
- “You can go into anyone’s house, and it makes any home look stylish. You have all the basics, and then you can build your style from it; it fits a lot of people with different styles; it will fit in with it somewhere”
(Interview with G)
- “It’s quite safe. If you don’t really know what you’re doing and just want to decorate your home all nice and white things, then it’s an easy thing to do – you can just buy everything here. ... Safe from making some kind of faux pas in terms of design ... everything’s going to match beautifully, and look beautiful ... but it’s not – you’re not taking any risks, put it that way. *(Interview with K)*

Soulful Materialism – (White Glamour aesthetic)

- “It’s really pleasant. And all the beautiful smells – all the lovely - whether it’s clothes or their throws or their household items, or the candles or the room sprays – or, you know, just some really luxurious products, I suppose, which just – that sort of feel good ... really pleasant, I suppose it appeals to the senses, the smells, the music, so I suppose it’s the senses yes. Staff are always really pleasant – really good customer service, always attentive, pleasant, helpful – they greet you when you go in. ... It’s the luxury, isn’t it? Sort of luxurious. It’s completely – so many of the products are so expensive – it’s completely unattainable, it’s like escapism, isn’t it? Completely devoid of your actual life, actual reality! [laughs] I suppose it’s escapism, into this sort of luxurious world of cashmeres, and beautiful scents, and fluffy big towels and beautiful bedding and throws, it’s just luxury.” – *Interview with C*
- “There’s a pureness to it and the pureness kind of equals quality; the whiteness, the softness – all of the textures look very soft and inviting. ... I like the music – its quite like Sunday vibes – quite relaxing and chilled out ... you know when you’re going to TWC that you’re getting this kind of luxurious, glamorous, twinkly, magical atmosphere.” – *Interview with S*
- “You have a nice experience when you go in. ... It’s inviting from the outside. Good lighting, neatly presented, I think maybe it just looks cosy and sort of – the way they do the bedlinen and homeware – it’s an easy trail of the eye – It’s very neat and presentable. Yeah, I think maybe the smell - think maybe going past – it’s the smell going past – and the lighting – good lighting, and inviting.” *Interview with G*

Glamour – (White Glamour aesthetic)

- “Glittery and sparkly It’s glamorous because of the colours, because there is a lot of black and white, that’s like old Hollywood glamour isn’t it? And because there is nothing bright, because bright is kind of associated with – I don’t know – tackiness. (*Interview with S*)
- “The evening wear is very glamorous. I have some nice silk shirts.” (*Interview with C*)
- “I have my eye on a lovely pinky beige velvet T-shirt at the moment – because it’s velvet it’s quite glamorous.” (*Interview with F*)
- “I think it’s quite magical. But I think the magic is – for me the magic is directly related to – like the luxury of it all.” (*Interview with S*)
- “A little bit of glam is so needed this Christmas” (*Instagram post, Nov 2020 – “Sparkle wreath”*)
- “Magical” glow of mercury candle holders; “glistening”, “sparkly”, “glittery” – (Christmas catalogue 2020)



Final Thoughts

TWC brandscape aesthetic combines Nordic Style (natural, simple, pure) with White Glamour (enchanted, magical, transformative) to create a unique aesthetic

An uplifting shopping experience – a harmonious and cocooning haven *and* an idealised and enchanting brandscape

Offers a middle class version of “The Wonderful Everyday” (IKEA) – finding enchantment through buying things

“I’m always amazed at the difference a tiny flickering flame of a scented candle can make. It somehow magically makes a space feel warm and welcoming.” – CR, TWC website, Nov 2020
<https://www.thewhitecompany.com/uk/inspire/christie-tips-magical-christmas>

