



Bobby & Co: Peeling Back the Layers of a Bournemouth Icon

Over the past four years, the landmark Bobby & Co building in the heart of Bournemouth has been undergoing a remarkable regeneration, transforming the former department store into a vibrant mixed-use development with localism and heritage at its core. Whitefox Chartered Surveyors, appointed as Project Managers and Cost Consultants, have played a central role in this transformation, working closely with their client, architect and construction teams to sensitively restore and modernise the historic site. We caught up with MD Darren Frias-Robles to learn more.

"The project began three years ago with a clear client vision: to revive the original Bobby & Co character while creating a development relevant for today's needs. The store, first established in May 1915, was once considered the 'heart of the town and community'. The mission was to retain its unique charm, authenticity, and historical features, whilst accommodating modern brands and uses.

"The design team embarked on a detailed process of exploration

and discovery, peeling back layers of panelling and walls to uncover original fixtures. Historical archives and old photographs were used to guide restoration efforts. Despite much of the original structure having been lost or altered, significant elements have been found and lovingly restored.

"One of the most exciting discoveries came during work on a main entrance vestibule, where the team uncovered an original brass shop front. Plans were immediately revised to incorporate this heritage feature. The brass work has now been restored and new leaded glass doors installed, along with reeded glass panelling – all now proudly on display for visitors entering the building.

"Although the original open lift structure had sadly been removed, its spirit lives on. Drawing inspiration from archival records, the team created a



dramatic vertical space that rises through the building, featuring brass accents, timber panelling, brass lettering, and lush greenery to evoke an Art Deco atmosphere.

"On the fourth floor, a steel Crittall glazed screen stretching across the building's frontage was found in a poor state, heavily rusted and corroded. Rather than replace it, the team brought in a specialist to painstakingly restore each section, retaining the integrity of this original architectural feature.

"Inside, a rich and textured Art Deco-inspired materials palette has been introduced, blending the past with present design aesthetics. Visitors can now enjoy living walls, polished concrete, marble-effect finishes, and

bespoke joinery crafted by local artisans. Ornate lighting and cabinetry complement these features, while the original Bobby & Co hardwood sign, engraved with gold leaf, sits proudly above the double entrance doors.

"Exploratory work also revealed fragments of original terrazzo flooring, much of which was unfortunately damaged. Nonetheless, these finds informed the selection of new decorative tiles, chosen to mirror the historical design.

"Crowning the building are three restored Cupolas, delicate domes that once flew flags during historic events, including the coronation of King George VI. These features, currently undergoing careful repair, enhance the building's external splendour and pay homage to its civic importance.

"One of the project's main challenges has been balancing construction within a live, public-facing building while coordinating with incoming tenants. With Bobby & Co situated in busy Bournemouth Square, timing and communication have been critical, especially during peak public events such as the Christmas market.

"As 2025 progresses, the fit-out phase is nearing completion, and tenants are beginning to move in. This spring has seen the opening of The Botanist Bar & Restaurant on the 4th floor, which has caused a real buzz and excitement in the town and boasts a stunning outdoor seating area with spectacular views over the gardens and town. The regeneration of Bobby & Co is well on its way to returning this historic gem to its rightful place as a vibrant hub in the heart of Bournemouth."



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