

luxury with Lucia

Book of delights

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Find the wonders of people's worlds

I love the concept of wonder. Never mind Dr Johnson's bon mot about a man being tired of London – a man who has lost his capacity for wonder must be very, very tired of life. Or, as Albert Einstein put it more poetically: "He who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead; his eyes are closed."

So Selfridges' notion of building a Wonder Room seems to me a rather, well, wondrous idea. Inspired by a desire to reignite the thrill and sense of astonishment that greeted the first department stores; to build on the notion of retailing as a branch of theatre or entertainment (described so well by Lindy Woodhead in her account of the life and times of Gordon Selfridge), the Wonder Room is meant to make us stop and think.

It was inspired by the old notion of a *Wunderkammer*, or cabinet of curiosities, and intended to be full of rare and precious things – "home," as Alannah Weston, creative director of Selfridges, puts it, "to the finest jewellers, watchmakers and winemakers in the world, but also a place to discover wonders of another kind: a book on clouds, a transparent chessboard... things that you had no idea you were searching for until you found them".

So, to celebrate its opening, Selfridges has published its own Book of Wonder, which it calls "a cyclopaedic and illustrated volume of arcane and commonplace wonders". It is a delight.

To kick-start the book, back in March it posted a notice on www.selfridges.com asking the public to answer a question: "What are the wonders of your world?" They wanted to discover what "wonder" means to people today; which things "enthral, inspire and move us".

For 60 days the question remained there, prompting hundreds of replies. The best are collected in this charming little book – a near-perfect stocking present.

People's notion of wonder varies, from Weston's own view that it is a perfectly boiled egg; to "grass, freshly cut" (Stacey Kilpatrick of London); gravity (from Amy White, a student from Bournemouth) and a seven-year-old London boy's view that it is "trainers

and money".

Michael Keep, a communications manager from London, thinks that wonder lies in "a ballerina executing 32 perfect *fouettés* as Odile in *Swan Lake*", while for Anne Deniau of Paris it is Roland Barthes's *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*, "a dazzling primer for every moment you are in love". Violets, Villa d'Este on Lake Como, Nelson Mandela ("Can a person be a wonder of the world?" ask the proposers, Bruce Weber and Nan Bush) and on to Japanese toys and manners – people's ideas are full of fun, ingenuity and insight.

Many people sent in enchanting illustrations, and dotted through the book are lots of gloriously inconsequential pieces of ancient history and general knowledge.

I learnt quite a lot from Selfridges' *Book of Wonder*. I hadn't known, for instance, that the word "theatre" has the same Greek root as "wonder". Nor did I know that the list of the Seven Wonders of the World, said to have been devised by the historian Herodotus, came to us via a poem from the 2nd century BC by Antipater of Sidon, and that in fact he named only six, forgetting to include the lighthouse at Alexandria.

As for me, my wonder has to be elephants in the wild.

If you happen to be wondering about the Wonder Room itself, it is a-dazzle with some extraordinary jewels (a rare piece from Cartier's beautiful *Inde Mystérieuse* Collection, as well as the No 5 necklace that Nicole Kidman wore in the Baz Luhrmann ad made for Chanel No 5) and more esoteric objects such as cigars by J. J. Fox, who used to hand-roll them for Winston Churchill; Amnesty International's disc called *Instant Karma*, which has re-recordings of some of John Lennon's back catalogues (£30); and some Omega watches used in the 1948 London Olympics.

Go and see, and wonder.

Shopping, Seduction & Mr Selfridge, by Lindy Woodhead, is published by Profile Books, £7.99. *A Book of Wonder* is published by Selfridges & Co, £34, available only from the Wonder Room, Selfridges, Oxford Street, London W1.

