It's good when neighbours get together to help out in the local community. That's exactly what Swedish retail giants H&M and Ikea are doing, creating an 'ideas factory' for local designers and creatives in London.

Based across from each other at the newly-invigorated, Ikea-owned Livat shopping centre in Hammersmith, the pair are aiming “to seek out, mentor and promote designers and small-scale manufacturers” locally, The Guardian newspaper reported.

Called Atelier 100, producers and artists are invited to apply for grants to develop their ideas for sale in their stores. All kinds of projects will be considered, from beauty and fashion to jewellery, art and music.

The first joint retail venture between the pair will open in May and they’re launching an open call today (Thursday) for creatives and producers based within 100km of the store to help stock its shelves.

Successful applicants will receive up to £10,000 to help scale up their ideas into commercially viable products, and training and mentoring from Ikea and H&M insiders as well as other experts.

The only limitation is that any end product must be small enough for shoppers to carry away from the Hammersmith store. The look and feel of the store is also likely to change to reflect the interests and ideas developed by those involved, they noted.

“We want to be open to ideas,” Camilla Henriksson, the global brand innovation manager for H&M, told The Guardian. She said the two retailers wanted to “come closer to the customers” and to local people with ideas to ensure they continued to provide what people want.
Marcus Engman, the chief creative officer at Ikea’s parent Ingka Group, added that the Hammersmith outlet was a year-long pilot project. “If it works, further venues will be developed in other cities around the world in future,” he said.

The first 20 applicants for Atelier100, who have until 18 April to put themselves forward, and will be able to begin selling their existing products in Hammersmith from next month. It is hoped that new items developed with help from the project will go on sale from October.

By Nigel Taylor

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