

Top view of the view of London from above the 20 Fenchurch Street, one of three offers designed by the practice for 20 Fenchurch Street.



WORDS BY
CLARE DOWDY

BARS & RESTAURANTS **FOCUS**

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THE RISE of online sales coupled with rent hikes mean that many conventional brick-and-mortar retailers continue to struggle or are dropping away completely. Recent casualties include Phones4U, La Senza, Blockbuster and Albemarle & Bond.

Last year more than 5,800 high street shops closed, according to research carried out by the Local Data Company for PwC. That equates to 16 closures a day. But the latest Openings and Closures report said there were also 4,850 new openings in 2014. Rather than clothes and phone shops, however, it is other sectors

are thriving. 'Our town centres continue to evolve away from traditional shops and services to leisure – food and beverage, and entertainment,' says Matthew Hopkinson, director of the Local Data Company. Mike Jervis, insolvency partner and retail specialist at PwC, adds that: 'The strength of the restaurant and fast-food sectors is... a fillip for the high street.'

This trend is highlighted in our Bars and Restaurants Focus, which demonstrates that as the sector becomes increasingly crowded existing operators are upping their game and new entrants hope to

make a splash with ever-more specialised offers.

So a large chain of garden centres – hardly a sector synonymous with fabulous eating experiences – has introduced a top-notch cafe format in the hope, no doubt, that it will become a destination as much as its garden products; an old-fashioned whisky retailer has a new owner that hopes to reinvent brown spirits and inspire drinkers with a hidden bar; and a 300-year-old grocer's is making its restaurant debut in that epitome of modern dining, the airport.

Meanwhile many operators in the 'fast casual'

category and those with 'premium casual' venues are watching with alarm as their two worlds collide. The emerging sub-set is being labelled 'fast premium', and it seems to go against everything that restaurant designers hold dear.

These places are positioned to teach well-heeled diners that good food and speedy service comes at a price, with convenience being the buzz-word. Will it take off, or do traditional restaurateurs still believe that diners prepared to pay for the privilege should be allowed to linger?

1

FAST PREMIUM

Fast food no longer has to mean budget... We look at the new phenomenon of 'fast premium', a collision in design terms of fast casual and 'premium casual'

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN the term cash-rich time-poor manifests itself on the high street? The answer seems to be a crop of businesses keen to part deep-pocketed consumers with their money in the shortest amount of time possible.

Traditionally, highly priced offers have been associated with a long dwell time. Think of the hours whiled away in posh hair salons and over long, luxurious lunches.

But that trend is being bucked, now that the current Holy Grail of convenience has been added to the mix. Some people, these business owners believe, are just too busy to take things slowly. What they want is a quick, well-executed, good-quality fix.

Hence the rollout of Blow, a 'fast beauty' hair, nail and make-up salon aimed at women with hectic lives who like that just-applied look. The concept, launched by venture capitalist Dharmash Mistry and Grazia's founder editor Fiona McIntosh, and designed by Caulder Moore, >



promises to buff and coif women in a matter of minutes. This macro trend, believes Mistry, will be based on 'increasingly time-poor, busy consumers who juggle many things' and the 'reinvention of high streets and consumer expectations of convenience'.

The restaurant sector has also spotted the appeal of this approach. The first brand to really embrace it was Five Guys in the USA, which now has a handful of outlets in London. Its restaurants serve good-quality burgers – though no novelty in that as American and European towns are littered with similar concepts, including Byron by Michael Boyd Associates.

But two diners at Five Guys can expect to spend just 15 minutes buying and eating a burger and chips washed down with a Coke, and will pay a total of £28 for the privilege – that's three times as much as McDonald's charges for the same express experience. 'When you analyse their pricing and speed of service it's a freakish model, but it is very successful,' says Jon Blakeney, group managing director of London design agency I-AM.

I-AM sees this trend as the bold collision of 'fast casual' dining with its relatively low price point, like Mexican food offer Chilango, which was designed by I-AM, and 'premium casual' with its stripped-back environment. Pizza Eastis an example of this, which was set up by Soho House's Nick Jones, and the second of which was created by Martin Brudnizki Design Studio. 'Fast premium comprises the convergence of the two,' says Blakeney. 'But this is a new paradigm and the implications are huge. It's quite cultish.'

Such speedy offers as Five Guys benefit from fast and furious service with a smile, and an interior design concept that lends itself to a quick turn-around. These places need to be durable, with lots of hard surfaces. That means floors that can be mopped, tiled walls, booth-style and fixed seating, so that staff don't waste precious time realigning the chairs after customers have left.

Fast-premium formats rely on being positioned in busy locations. 'These are very expensive sites with a huge footfall, so you need to build a quick machine,' says Pete Champion, director of 3D design at I-AM. 'They don't

Below Inside Ethos in London's West End, designed by I-AM



need advertising or marketing because high visibility of locations and huge numbers of customers.'

I-AM's design for Ethos in London's West End applies many of these rules. The premium buffet is vegetarian by stealth – the menu excludes meat but doesn't crow about it. Customers load up a plate from teak drum pods whose marble tops display the food like jewellery. The plate is then weighed and payment calculated accordingly.

Such concepts obviously work well on busy streets and in transport hubs, and airports have had their own 'bar' version for some time. A new offer is Fortnum & Mason's The Bar at Heathrow Terminal Five. The menu – including delights such as parfait of Foie Gras with toasted brioche for £20 – is served in a suitably upmarket environment, designed by Universal Design Studio. 'The bar is shaded along its length by a stunning freestanding canopy structure which references English silverware,' explain the heads of the studio Jay Osgerby and Ed Barber. 'The canopy is self-supporting and uses nickel plated steel.' Other materials used include custom-made nickel, pressed

Below At I-AM's Ethos diners select their food from marble-topped teak drums



ceramic tile, polished pewter, velvet, leather and glass.

Blakeney predicts that despite the run-away success of Five Guys, 'the cheap fast restaurants won't change, but the premium ones might speed up. Unlocking the retail that fast has to be cheap could revolutionise restaurants. The industry is very aware of what Five Guys has done. It could be a dynamic shift.'

Whether other restaurant operators dare to follow Five Guys remains to be seen. But that's one format that seems to be unstoppable: it has more than 1,000 locations in the USA and another 1,500 units in development.

But not everyone is convinced that customers will speed-eat pricey burgers ad infinitum. International design agency Frog is working on concepts and strategies for several restaurant and hospitality clients. Hans Neubert, Frog's chief creative officer, believes that fast premium is a commoditisation of luxury and premium. 'As a concept it's only temporary, because consumers are aware of the health issues of fast food. What's now premium will be fast food in the future.'

Right The Sky Pod, part of The Sky Garden, so called because there are public gardens up there, has unrivalled views over London. To help make the Sky Pod an evening go-to destination, water-reflex lighting is projected on to the angled ceiling over the bar

2

20 FENCHURCH STREET

Under the glass dome atop 20 Fenchurch Street is three floors of food and drink offers, all different but all designed by o!creative

AS THE ARCHITECT of the so-called Walkie-Talkie building, Rafael Viñoly has garnered his fair share of adverse publicity. But there is another design story to tell of the 37-storey building at London's 20 Fenchurch Street.

The small interior design agency o!creative has completed not one but the three venues on three floors under the glass dome at the top of the building, collectively known as the Sky Garden – on time and on budget for the operator Rhubarb. And because of the unusual nature of the building, its remit went far beyond furniture and fabric choices.

The team, led by directors Sue Heaps and Derrick Plover, are behind the Sky Garden's offer of the Sky Pod Bar on Level 35, the Darwin Brasserie on the floor above, and the Fenchurch, a seafood bar and grill on the building's top floor, Level 37.

To describe the project as logistically challenging is an understatement. o!creative had to contend with a space that had been conceived as a single restaurant with just one kitchen and one toilet block. It had to cater for both a daytime and a night-time audience, and there were non-combustibility issues on Level 35. >



On top of all that, the build had been delayed by – among other things – bad weather and when O1 creative took over the space, a crane was still there and it was surrounded by what Heaps describes as ‘a forest of scaffolding’. In fact, the day the flooring company arrived to lay the floor, ‘they had to be turned away; the floor was flooded because the roof wasn’t completed,’ says Pover.

The designers’ first job was to figure out where to position the plant rooms for the air-conditioning, and to try to find somewhere for the toilets in the highly glazed site. ‘There was nowhere for them to go,’ says Heaps, because of the building’s three sides of glazing, the kitchens and the plant. O1 creative came up with the idea of taking an area that had been allocated as ‘landlord’s space’. ‘We couldn’t penetrate the floor for the drainage,’ she adds, so instead they raised the level of the floor.

Once the design concept had been signed off, it was a question of getting the materials up. No mean feat when all the office floors below were being fitted out at the same time. ‘One of the big challenges was securing the lift space,’ to achieve this, explains Heaps.



As for those two distinct daytime and nighttime audiences, the space had to cater to the free-access sightseers who might have a coffee in the Sky Pod after spending time on the viewing platforms, and the evening guests who come up for a cocktail and a swanky dinner.

So the design team specified Philippe Starck’s polypropylene Bubble sofa, which is as hard as it is hard-wearing. Hard finishes were needed across the whole of Level 35, because there are fewer sprinklers on that level. ‘We had to discount 90 per cent of the materials that we would have liked to use,’ says Pover. Heaps adds that they were considering ‘beautiful timber finishes’ for the bar on Level 35. ‘Instead, we used a lot of glass, metals and mosaic tiling.’

A softening of the space is achieved through the Rhu barb’s seasonal styling. So in winter Starck’s Bubble sofas are covered with faux fur rugs and in spring there are pots of daisies and colourful throws. There are also plans to improve the acoustics by adding drapes at the windows, which will add to the softening effect. The result of the project is three different areas that not only feel very different but that belie the efforts that went into their creation.

Opposite page The Farnborough seafood bar and grill at the very top of the building

This page The Darwin Brasserie



3

CASE STUDIES

We look at three unique new bar/food offers, each with their own agenda and a design solution to suit

Below The intimate whisky bar features timber floors, raw brick and a copper bar



BILLED AS LONDON'S oldest specialist whisky retailer, Milroy's of Soho has been repositioned by its new owner with two bars. In the basement is a 55-seater cocktail bar called The Vault with a private room adjacent, and on the ground floor is a 12-seater whisky bar, Milroy's Bar.

The 51-year-old establishment has been reconfigured by its new owner, 28-year-old Martyn 'Simo' Simpson, who set up Coal Vaults cocktail bar and restaurant in Wardour Street in Soho. The refit was done by his construction company Griffin Construction. 'All the changes were cosmetic, to my own design, and with me on the tools,' he says.

**Milroy's
of Soho
by Martyn
'Simo'
Simpson**

The Vault is the conversion of a 56 sq m tasting room into a speakeasy-style cocktail bar with original wood panelling and brickwork, a concrete and latex floor and custom-made furniture, including bar stools in timber and metal, retrofitted whisky-barrel tables and benches, and a concrete bar. To get into The Vault customers must locate a 'hidden' door at the back of the shop. 'I just wanted a place to escape the streets of London,' says Simpson.

Meanwhile Milroy's Bar is a 37 sq m space with original brick walls, timber flooring, and a display unit along the length of the bar, which is made of copper.



THE STARWOOD-OPERATED Le Méridien Abu Dhabi hotel has nine restaurant and bar offerings, including its signature eatery, The Latest Recipe, which reopened this year. Located in the Emirate's Tourist Club Area, it was created by design agency Silverfox Studios as a contemporary all-day dining experience. Key to the environment are 'live action' stations where the latest culinary trends from around the world are showcased. 'The design is informal, colourful, upscale, though importantly casual-fun,' says Silverfox partner and co-design director Patrick Waring.

The restaurant includes multiple interactive cooking stations where guests can and are encouraged to engage with chefs in creating their own menu. 'Silverfox has created multiple dining experiences for guests through creative planning, level change, indoor/outdoor areas, a partially separated bar area and even dining both in and behind the kitchen areas,' says partner and co-designer Suan Heng. 'This enables returning guests to enjoy an unexpected experience each time they visit.'

So for example the Patisserie has banquettes covered

The Latest Recipe, Abu Dhabi, by Silverfox Studios

in richly coloured fabric, mosaic flooring and granite counters. A 'green wall' of vegetation is interspersed in the ceiling. Meanwhile guests are shielded from the interactive cooking display areas by subtle low-level glass partitions.

Key to the kitchens' success is the lighting design. In order to draw attention to the exposed show kitchens, lighting consultancy Project Lighting Design in Singapore introduced barrisol-clad artificial skylights. 'We used DMX controlled RGB lighting to create dynamic sky effects that suggest moving clouds, sunsets and such like,' says Peggy Tan of PLD. The lighting consultancy was also briefed by Silverfox to avoid the use of conventional-looking downlights, and to avoid glare.

'To achieve this we chose to use Precision Lighting spotlights, which were made in beautifully machined brushed aluminium finish, and came with excellent glare control,' explains Tan. They are housed in thick metal channels framing the skylights and are expressed as integral elements of the skylights. 'We like how the lights lend a theatrical touch to key show kitchen and dining spaces,' she adds.



THE CAFE and restaurant offers at garden centres can be uninspiring. 'They are very out-dated, tired, unappealing spaces,' says Kam Young, co-founder of design agency Kiwi & Pom. Young and fellow co-founder Emma Young discovered this in their research into the sector for their client Wyvedale Garden Centres. 'Garden centres in general are playing catch-up with the high-street offer,' says Emma Young, with customers' expectations largely not being met.

Wyvedale, which has more than 100 outlets with restaurant offers, wanted to breathe new life into them. London-based Kiwi & Pom created a pop-up cafe style, with a new brand: Coffee Ground. The aim was to create

**Wyvedale
Garden
Centres'
Coffee
Ground
by Kiwi & Pom**

an environment with an artisanal feel referencing many gardeners growing their own produce.

The design's centrepiece is a free-standing, oversized shed-like structure of galvanised steel and timber cladding. The idea is that the shed draws the eye and operates as a preparation area. On a functional level, it is modular so that it can be constructed to suit different-sized areas.

Tabletops are either zinc or rough-sawn oak and the chairs are Lloyd Loom and rattan. Kiwi + Pom also designed moveable shelving units to carry terracotta pots of herbs.

Four Coffee Ground cafes have already opened, and by the end of the year there will be a further 10.