

# Haute and Hot

## Fashion and food are increasingly pairing

By Debbie Kalisky

### Food and fashion categories

are increasingly blurring as luxury and department retailers seek to whet shoppers' appetites for spending.

The blending of fashion and food within a singular retailer can be traced back to European department stores in the mid-19th century. The department store was meant to attract an emerging urbanized middle class. Armed with disposable income, these consumers came to display their status via the acquisition of modern fashion styles and imported items. As curated food products were integrated into the merchandise assortment of department stores, these large sections became known as food halls. These food halls became the aspirational alternative to public markets and street vendors.

The term *food hall* is often used in the U.S. to refer to a collection of independent local restaurateurs with quick-service counters. But in the classic British term, a food hall is a large section of a depart-

ment store where unprepared food is sold by the artisan cheesemaker, butcher, fishmonger, baker, etc., alongside gourmet prepared foods, or a retail section where epicurean nonperishable food items can be purchased. Iconic examples of grand European food halls include Harrods and Fortnum & Mason in London, Galeries Lafayette and Le Bon Marché in Paris, and KaDeWe in Berlin.

Food halls, both old and new, within department stores continue to have durable appeal that lure and entice visitors. Modern interpretations of food concepts within retail settings are flourishing, with food perceived as far more than a necessity for sustenance.

### Feeding the trend

The food hall has become a hot phenomenon globally, notably in North America. Saks Fifth Avenue will be the first major American department store this year to open a full-service food hall inspired by the

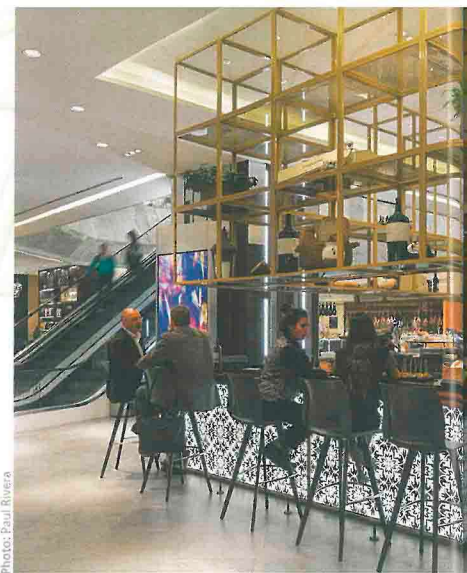


Photo: Paul Rivera

Learn more about the hot new fusion of food and fashion at GlobalShop. Debbie Kalisky will be joined by GH+A Principal Paola Marques and Markopolous Award Winner Michael Cape, president of Cape Marketing Services, for the "Food Is Fashion" session Thursday, March 24.

traditional European model, yet with a bold contemporary aesthetic. Driving forces behind the popularity of the food hall are also prompting retailers to seek alliances with food brands or to expand their offerings with in-store restaurants:

- Baby Boomers and Millennials have become diligent in scrutinizing food sourcing for ethical reasons.
- Food plays a leading role in the pursuit of healthy living and wellness.
- The sharing of culinary discoveries through social media, popularly known as food porn, has become widespread.
- Celebrity chefs—having risen to prominence through cooking shows, reality TV cooking competitions, and chef-branded restaurants—have popularized gastronomy.

We live in a society where the word *gourmet* is no longer the domain of the affluent, but has become a buzzword of the masses.



Photo: A-Frame Studio

Ève Café at Simons' new store in West Vancouver encourages shoppers to relax with a coffee, tea, or craft soda.





Far left: The food hall at El Palacio de Hierro's new store in Mexico City's Polanco area presents a curated collection of food vendors representing contemporary Mexican cuisine. Left: Ralph's Coffee at Ralph Lauren's Polo flagship on NYC's Fifth Avenue features branded roasts from organically grown beans.

## Cooking up concepts

The convergence of food and fashion has given rise to a new retail niche. Within the fashion retail category, luxury retailers have led the way by opening restaurants and cafés that reflect their brand in the interior design, specialty menu items, plate presentation, and customer-service model. Burberry's London flagship features Thomas's within the gifting department on the lower level, while Armani continues to open ristoranti around the world. True to form, Roberto Cavalli, known as The Leopard King due to his signature use of animal prints in his collections, features animal-print chocolate eggs on his menu, whereas Ralph Lauren remains on-brand and serves up Classic American cuisine and specialty cocktails, be it in New York or in Paris. Other brands integrating restaurants include Bulgari, Chanel, and Versace.

Cognizant that e-commerce is the long-term reality, retailers are using innovative approaches to lure shoppers away from computer screens by offering opportunities for enhanced social engagement, such as a memorable meal, coffee, or specialty cocktail with friends. Thanks to food offerings, the store becomes a retail adventure, and the brand perception goes beyond the product itself to an abstract, emotional experience.

The recently opened Restoration Hardware store in Chicago is a concept store built around a signature restaurant. The previously open interior central courtyard housing the restaurant is now covered with a permanent glass roof, making

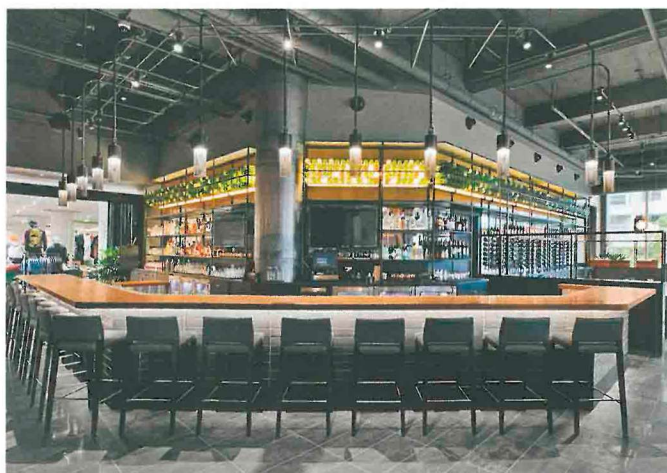
it a four-season destination. Gary Friedman, chairman and chief executive of Restoration Hardware Holdings, told the *Chicago Tribune*, "RH is trying to blur the lines between home and hospitality and residential and retail." As an additional boon, the dwell-to-sell notion is at work.

Smaller specialty retailers also have boarded the food train. Sneaker and street-wear apparel retailer Kith NYC has a cereal and ice cream bar at the front of its Brooklyn store. Custom cereal combinations are named after collaborators and friends of the owner to capture a playful spirit. According to owner Ronnie Fieg, "Some kids can't afford to buy an article of clothing every other week or every month, so they can leave with a taste." The idea is to make Kith a place where teenage customers hang out, rather than just browse the merchandise for a few minutes and then leave. It expands the

Kith brand into the community as a convenient neighborhood stop with an express window to grab breakfast on the way to work or school prior to regular store hours.

In response to increased urban density, micro-living, and single-person households, retail spaces will continue to evolve into "meet spaces." The focus will shift from selling products toward selling brand-curated lifestyles and reinforcing a sense of belonging. Countering retail overload, brands will move from pure product stories to collaborating on lifestyle stories, including the fusion of fashion, food, and community. Recreational browsing, shopping, and socializing with friends and family for a high-quality food experience will remain a primary social activity.

*Debbie Kalisky is director of retail development for design firm GH+A.*



Downtown Vancouver's new Nordstrom store features three eateries, including Bistro Verde with a full bar. In a nod to local sensibilities, all seafood on the menu is deemed ocean-friendly by Vancouver Aquarium's OceanWise program.