

Right place, right time



Successful shopping is now all about placemaking – mixing and matching to inspire consumers to shop, eat, drink and socialise. **Mark Faithfull** discovers how companies are reinterpreting the rules for a new generation of destinations

When shoppers didn't buy across multiple channels, consumers didn't go to the mall to eat (unless it was served fast and in a bun), and visitors didn't shop and catch a movie, a US retail guru had an idea.

Leslie Wexner, founder of US fashion retailer The Limited and now head of a group encompassing Victoria's Secret and Express among others, chose his home town for an experiment – an open-air destination including shops, public squares, restaurants, entertainment and community activities (see box, page 16). And so in 1999, Easton Town Center in Columbus, Ohio, opened its doors and changed the way developers thought about shopping centres.

In truth it's taken rather longer than perhaps it should have for European developers to get the message and there is a suspicion in many cases that their hand was forced. The economic crisis, the internet, disappearing

shop chains and the emergence of a leisure and experience economy meant that a big box packed with shops would no longer do. At the same time, the economic viability of new projects became more compelling when a cinema and a collection of apartments could be bolted on.

"It's now very dynamic," says Fiona Hamilton, head of global brands Europe at BNP Paribas



Consumers want deeper emotional connections and more integrity

FIONA HAMILTON, BNP PARIBAS REAL ESTATE

Real Estate. "What do consumers really want? They want deeper emotional connections, more integrity, more of a social conscience. After all, we can all shop anywhere at any time."

She believes that shopping centres need to "give more than you expect" and also emphasises the need to provide a sense of place, offering Unibail-Rodamco's Mall of Scandinavia as an example. "It's a huge international mall and yet it still has that Scandinavian feel," she says. "There is no room to be complacent. A mall can't just stand still for 15 or 20 years."

"The key part is to create a better customer journey, not just within a shopping centre but from 500 yards outside, in the car parks, with the quality of the bathrooms, all the small things that make a big difference," says Martin Plocica, Hammerson's director for UK and Ireland shopping centres. "It has to be easy and we can't put barriers in the way. So, for example, it's not enough to have wi-fi, it needs to be good quality, reliable wi-fi."

Responding to demand

The way people think is changing, says Plocica, and developers need to react. He cites the addition of a dozen soft seating pods at Brent Cross, London, saying Hammerson was amazed at how extensively they are used and how much they increase dwell time.

On the larger components of placemaking, Plocica says that developers need to look at what is needed now – F&B, leisure – and ahead to the introduction of futuristic technologies such as driverless cars. Of the former, he points to Silverburn in Glasgow and describes the introduction of a cinema and 12 restaurants as “a world of difference”, saying the scheme has achieved an uplift of around 10%.

There is also a growing realisation among local authorities that retail alone is not a regenerative panacea, and those that are prepared to not only support but help finance retail-led, mixed-use schemes will dramatically improve the prospect of more new schemes being developed in the UK, according to developer Queensbury chief executive Paul Sargent.

Queensbury worked with the local council in Newport to open Friars Walk last year after a succession of delays and it recently won the mandate for Barnsley Markets, another scheme which has suffered a series of setbacks.

Collaboration matters

“There is no doubt that it is absolutely essential to work with local authorities as partners,” says Sargent, who believes that going forward the majority of UK developments will be delivered with a public/private partnership and that they will be mixed-use projects, bringing in much-needed residential housing, restaurants, offices, shops and public services. “We’ll see more community services as part of these projects,” he predicts. “People say there are no more libraries but we’re seeing many new proposals to make a



The introduction of a cinema and 12 restaurants revitalised Glasgow's Silverburn

library part of a development, acting as a local technology hub.”

It’s a view echoed by BCSC chief executive John Coyne, who says the decline of the high street has created an opportunity for developers, community organisations and local authorities to come together. “All the parties have worked in isolation for too long,” he says. “We need a new mindset. This is about reinvention.”

Indeed, Coyne points to the fact that with new development still running at historical lows, it will be the remodelling of what stands already

that will have the greatest impact. “It’s about taking what we have and sweating it more,” he concludes. “That might also be about negotiating to add things in phases, negotiating over air rights above schemes so residential, hotels and so on can be added to a mall.”

Evolving catchments

Of the UK and European schemes being developed now, few do not have placemaking at their heart, often focused on the evolving catchment of their location. For example, the creative ↘



Easton Town Center opened its doors in 1999



The birthplace of placemaking

Leslie Wexner, the son of Russian immigrants who had turned his clothing shop, The Limited, into fashion powerhouse L Brands, had an idea. Traditional enclosed malls were losing their lustre. People were visiting less often and for shorter periods of time, and so Wexner partnered with Manhattan-based Georgetown Co and assembled a team to build Easton Town Center in, of all places, Columbus, Ohio. That team included Istanbul emigre Yaromir Steiner, by then Miami-based and who had developed a boutique open-air shopping centre there called CocoWalk.

Wexner was determined to build not a mall but a destination, anchoring the centre with restaurants rather than department

stores, and creating spaces for outdoor seating, where people could enjoy dinner or drinks. It would also include a cinema, an arcade and a live comedy club.

And so in 1999 Easton Town Center opened its doors and is now a 1,300-acre site with more than 12 million sq ft of development, including offices, residential, hotels, dining and entertainment. The 90-acre Town Center features 180 retail, dining and entertainment units and is the only place in Ohio where shoppers will find Louis Vuitton, Burberry and American Girl Place, plus the flagship stores for Columbus-based Victoria's Secret and Express. Easton's AMC Theatre is the largest cinema in the state.



You have to create as many reasons as possible for people to visit

MARTIN BREEDEN, INTU

and media industries have been prominent among those looking to take office space at the huge, mixed-use Battersea Power Station site in southwest London, says boss Rob Tincknell.

Once complete in 2020, the 1.25 million sq ft of office space on the 42-acre site will sit adjacent to apartments, shops, retail and leisure, and Tincknell says that the lifestyle nature of the scheme and its location by the River Thames is proving particularly appealing. As a result the retail and leisure offer will reflect the type of workers on site, including independent F&B operators sourced from across London and chosen for the hip vibe they bring to Battersea. "For media businesses, quality of life for their staff is very important as staff turnover can be a real problem," says Tincknell.

Yet placemaking is also about the little things, says Intu development director Martin Breeden, who cites schemes in Spain and Nottingham as examples of creating a sense of place through the small details. At Intu Asturias in Spain, Intu took inspiration from the area's heritage, introducing palm trees and locally iconic 'bears and birds' made from recycled flip-flops in the public realm squares. "They put a smile on people's faces and made people a little happier," he

What is placemaking?

"Placemaking is what we've always talked about, a single space for everyone's needs," says Brian Bickell, chief executive at Shaftesbury, perhaps best known for its Seven Dials development in Covent Garden, London. "It's about creating villages where people live, work and spend their leisure time. At Seven Dials we also have a big working population who we need to support Monday to Friday, from breakfast through to the evening."

Charles Owen, portfolio executive at Shaftesbury, adds: "Often it's the little things, flowers outside a shop, street furniture, it adds up to the bigger picture. But it needs to be sympathetic to the area. And uses evolve; take Neal's Yard [above], which became synonymous with ethical retail but is now a casual dining development. Perhaps 15 or 20 years from now it will have changed again."

Both stress the need to "respect history" and the importance of taking a "genuine, authentic approach rather than being 'sold a story'". As Owen reflects: "It's too easy to come up with a brand name and think that's it, but people are very discerning."

Evolution is a key component of placemaking,

recalls. "And footfall is up as a result." Similarly, at Nottingham's Victoria Centre, Intu refurbished the famous, water-powered Ematt Clock after contacting the Rowland Ematt Society. Long a place families would visit, it now forms the centrepiece of a casual dining area and reinforces the connection with the past and location.

"It might seem eclectic but really you have to create as many reasons as possible for people



John Burton, development director at Westfield believes. "In general, malls are in a constant state of evolution, with very sizeable changes across a lot of elements, including the design, events, entertainment, all based around understanding the consumer," he says.

"It would be easy to build Westfield London and see it as a standing investment, but that's not the business we're in. So instead it's about looking at refreshment and more opportunities perhaps after five, 10 and 15 years," he says. "We need to find ways to create the scale to justify investment and part of that investment is in digital, which is why in our case we have Westfield Labs to deliver innovation."

Burton cites the extension of Westfield London (see below) and the upcoming Westfield Milan as examples of evolving thinking and adds: "It is about being consumer-centric. The retailers are re-evaluating what their stores are for and what they want from a shop. For shopping centres I certainly see their role as placemaking."

to visit, which in turn attracts new retailers," he says. "At the beginning, getting the investment for such things was hard but once you can show results in terms of footfall, new retailers and increased rents, the story becomes much easier."

Such schemes are evidence that mixing and matching uses within a dedicated area can inspire consumers and draw them away from the screen and into shopping and dining locations.

The redevelopment of Westfield London will add 665,000 sq ft of high-quality retail, residential and mixed-use space

