

Culinary CURIOSITY

Many grocery stores and supermarkets are emphasizing the concept of "fresh" food by changing traditional in-store layouts and customer journeys, like Main & Vine in Gig Harbor, Wash.

LISA ELLEDGE, GIG HARBOR, WASH.



Groceries and supermarkets are exciting customers with in-store demonstrations, while also promoting fresh food and take-home options in marketplace-inspired environs.

By Carly Hagedon, Managing Editor

SOME CONSUMERS MAY CONSIDER GROCERY SHOPPING A DULL TASK: WALKING INDECISIVELY THROUGH aisles, dodging other customers and their carts, and then hurrying to stand in sometimes-long checkout lines. In recent years, however, grocery and supermarket retailers have upped their games amid diverse competition, aiming to make the necessary task more exciting by turning their locations into must-visit destinations.

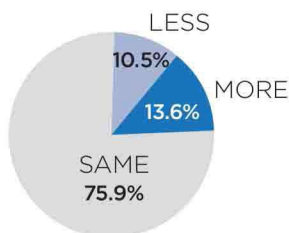


ABOVE LEFT Centra's new concept in Limerick, Ireland, features a range of groceries and foods to-go. Its sub-brand, The Good Kitchen, has transformed this once-typical convenience store into a food destination.



90-DAY PLANNED SPEND ON GROCERIES IN THE U.S.*

Consumers were asked: "Over the next 90 days, do you plan on spending more, the same or less on [groceries] than you would normally spend at this time of the year?"



*These percentages have been rounded to the nearest decimal.

Source: NRF, Prosper Insights & Analytics, Monthly Consumer Survey, May 2016

TRUE TO FORM

Though localization has been a mainstay trend for several years (and not only restricted to groceries), a similar trend of authenticity is becoming just as instinctual to designers.

"There are so many different retailers getting into the food game," says Jessica London, vp of store development, Supervalu (Eden, Minn.). "They're trying to remain distinct within the markets and communities they serve."

Original building features in Kroger's (Cincinnati) Main & Vine concept in Gig Harbor, Wash., enhanced its feeling of authenticity by paying homage to the initial structure. "One of the design principles was if [the client goes] into an existing environment, they leave it the way it is," says Brandon Avery, creative managing director, FRCH Design Worldwide (Cincinnati).

He explains that 100-plus-year-old wood ceiling beams in the expansive, 27,000-square-foot location were uncovered and left intact during the renovation. "We just built our place within that space without doing a lot of architectural reconstruction; that's part of the honesty and authenticity of who they are as a brand," he says.

Adding to the sense of authenticity, Main & Vine carries many locally sourced products, which are displayed alongside national brands, says Nicole Roberts, experiential graphic design, FRCH Design Worldwide. "In terms of visual merchandising and storytelling, they both hold equal weight to the consumer."

THE FRESHEST IN TOWN

When Centra – Ireland's leading convenience store – wanted to refresh its outdated concept, design firm Household (London) began work on its Limerick, Ireland, location. Instead of remaining a quick stop for small goods, Centra is now a newsagent, as well as a destination for on-the-go food and groceries. And while not a traditional grocery, Centra exemplifies a burgeoning "fresh" trend across food retailing in general.

Intended to project a Scandinavian deli ambience, Centra's design is contemporary and modern, featuring a range of in-store digital messaging. Household developed a retail sub-brand called "The Good Kitchen," which features healthy food to-go, and also includes a café barista, packaged food, deli counters and a seating area. "We brought the brand to life and fulfilled Centra's proposition of 'Good Food, Now,'" says Sarah Page, creative director and co-founder, Household. "The store used to be similar to a corner shop with a focus on commodity – that's completely changed."

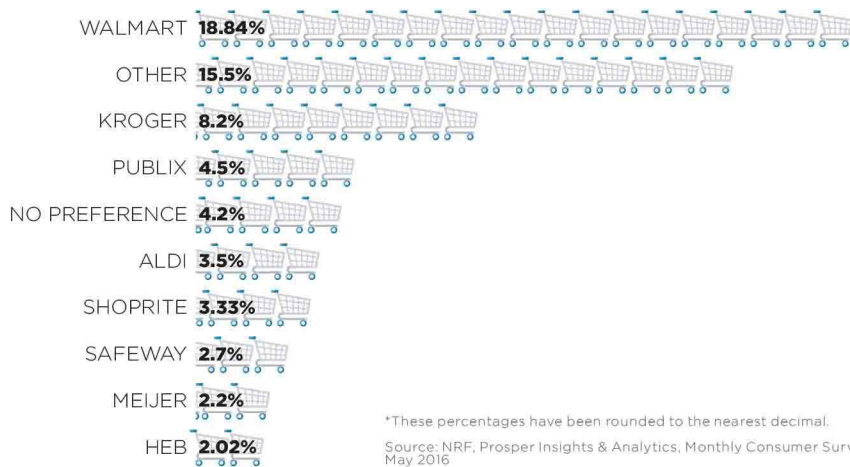
In Main & Vine, fresh food is integral to its concept. Shoppers are welcomed first by a prepared food section. Toward the store's center is the produce department as well as live cooking demonstrations; dry goods are at the perimeter, opposite of a traditional grocery layout.

"[Main & Vine] considers their demographic 'naturally curious,'" explains Roberts, and that customers are not driven to buy only organic products, although the



ABOVE RIGHT *Fresh Food Market in Sheikh Zayed City, Egypt, aimed to elevate product and reduce the noticeable presence of fixtures.*

GROCERY STORES SHOPPED AT MOST OFTEN IN THE U.S. (FIRST CHOICE)*



*These percentages have been rounded to the nearest decimal.
Source: NRF, Prosper Insights & Analytics, Monthly Consumer Survey, May 2016

WEEKLY HOUSEHOLD GROCERY EXPENSES

HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN:

\$140.14

HOUSEHOLDS WITHOUT CHILDREN:

\$87.96

Source: Food Marketing Institute, "U.S. Grocery Shopper Trends, 2015"

fresh and organic aspect of Main & Vine is strong. The design teams wanted to convey a "cultural wanderlust" for its customers by installing the produce and in-store demonstrations at the center, forging a communal experience where patrons can interact and immerse themselves in the experience, according to Roberts.

FOOD AS FASHION

"Restaurants and quick-service restaurants (QSR) are such an influence on grocery," says London. "Easy meal solutions are in high demand. Hot-and-ready foods, heat-and-eat meals, and fresh, pre-portioned ingredients with recipes that simplify cooking are the types of solutions customers are looking for. I'm looking toward QSR and asking, 'How can we bring

more of that environment into grocery?'"

And whenever you can stimulate customers' five senses, you should. That may mean installing a window in the bakery, so customers can watch cakes being finished – something that makes them feel like they're behind-the-scenes – or a restaurant experience near the entrance, enticing customers' stomachs. And while not every grocery can support an eatery or restaurant experience, a seating area could still be impactful.

Take design firm Interstore Design's (Zürich) Fresh Food Market concept in New Cairo and Sheikh Zayed City, Egypt. The stores, influenced by European marketplaces, are unlike most other groceries in the Middle East (so much so that outside TV spots have even been filmed there), with eye-catching typography on signage and a clean, minimalist interior, according to Bernhard Heiden, creative director, Interstore Design.

And like Main & Vine and Centra, there are designated areas for customers to linger. "It's not a supermarket where you're going for your daily or weekly food," he says. "It is also a place to be, buy different [or] new products and to sit and eat with friends, because it's a very social place."

Patrons can buy premade food items or browse a variety of international delicacies (sushi is apparently a big hit). Heiden explains that unlike some supermarkets, fixtures and counters were limited to showcase and elevate product.

"It's a big trend, and it's coming very slowly," he says. "Food is the fashion [of] tomorrow." ▀