

FOOD

Food and drink has not only become pivotal to retail-led destinations but has taken on a life of its own, with a new generation of emporiums and complexes redefining the way people view going out to eat and drink. **Mark Faithfull** reports



DINING OUT

on consumer change

Blame it on Eataly. Or maybe Borough Market. But food and drink has not only reinvented itself within malls and high streets, but has stepped beyond its retail hosts to create new, theatrical environments combining retail, dining and gourmet experiences. A spate of new schemes proposed for London are set to drive this phenomena further.

“Eating out is moving away from three-course meals to smaller plates or single, sharing plates”

For anyone not familiar with Eataly – a global chain of huge emporiums dedicated to Italian food – the company has redefined the gourmet space with a mix of Italian grocery, culinary and kitchenware, as well as a range of eat-in and take-out counters and dining areas, all set within an overtly Italian ambience.

Borough Market should need no introduction, having itself created a new genre of foodie and farmers’ markets, particularly in London where a new wave of schemes are opening, or attempting to open.

“Eating out is moving away from three-course meals to smaller plates or single, sharing plates, and that casualness and socialisation is adding to the proposition for food-led destinations,” says Ross Kirton, head of UK leisure agency at Colliers International.

“For all that food and beverage [F&B] has been less impacted by online, offers like Deliveroo mean that it has to be more theatrical and appealing. We have seen F&B brought centre-stage by the likes of Westfield, the Urban Food Fest at Selfridges and street food attractions such as Trinity Leeds, London Union market, and so on. That urban feel is becoming increasingly popular.”

Yet a promised Eataly food hall at Selfridges failed to materialise, although rumours abound that the operator continues to search





Street Feast, London

The growing popularity of street food

In the east of London, Canary Wharf Group is extending its F&B offer and, notably, London Union will soon open, bringing together a host of street food traders as Streetopia on a 10,000 sq ft Crossrail Place Roof Garden site.

Introducing an authentic street food experience, London Union will house a variety of cuisines in an informal atmosphere.

Last year, it acquired Street Feast, London's nomadic street food circus, which takes neglected spaces and transforms them into buzzing night markets.

Founders Henry Dimbleby (Leon) and Jonathan Downey (Street Feast) plan to develop and grow the model, and to create

as many as 20 more permanent street food markets within the next five years.

For Peter Courtney, director of Lunson Mitchenall, such new concepts "are redefining" the areas where they're located. "At Canary Wharf, it's not simply about complementing the retail, but creating a destination for tourists and businesspeople, as well as the increasing residential population."

He believes more such projects will follow, with the food trend for smaller plates, sharing and informality driving the industry on – and enabling established chains and independents to coexist and complement each other.

"It's disappointing that planners are struggling to get their heads around some

of these mixed-use projects," says Leanne Bradley, associate director of leisure at CBRE and another proponent of this new wave of F&B. "The lines between retail and food are becoming more and more blurred, and we do need planners who appreciate the economic vitality these sorts of projects can bring to an area."

Bradley believes the variety of large-scale schemes being put forward reflects a new vibrancy in the sector. "It's certainly something that has a predominantly urban feel," she adds. "London is obviously the main target because of its catchment, tourism and affluence, but that doesn't mean that other major cities couldn't look at their own alternatives. But the key is footfall."

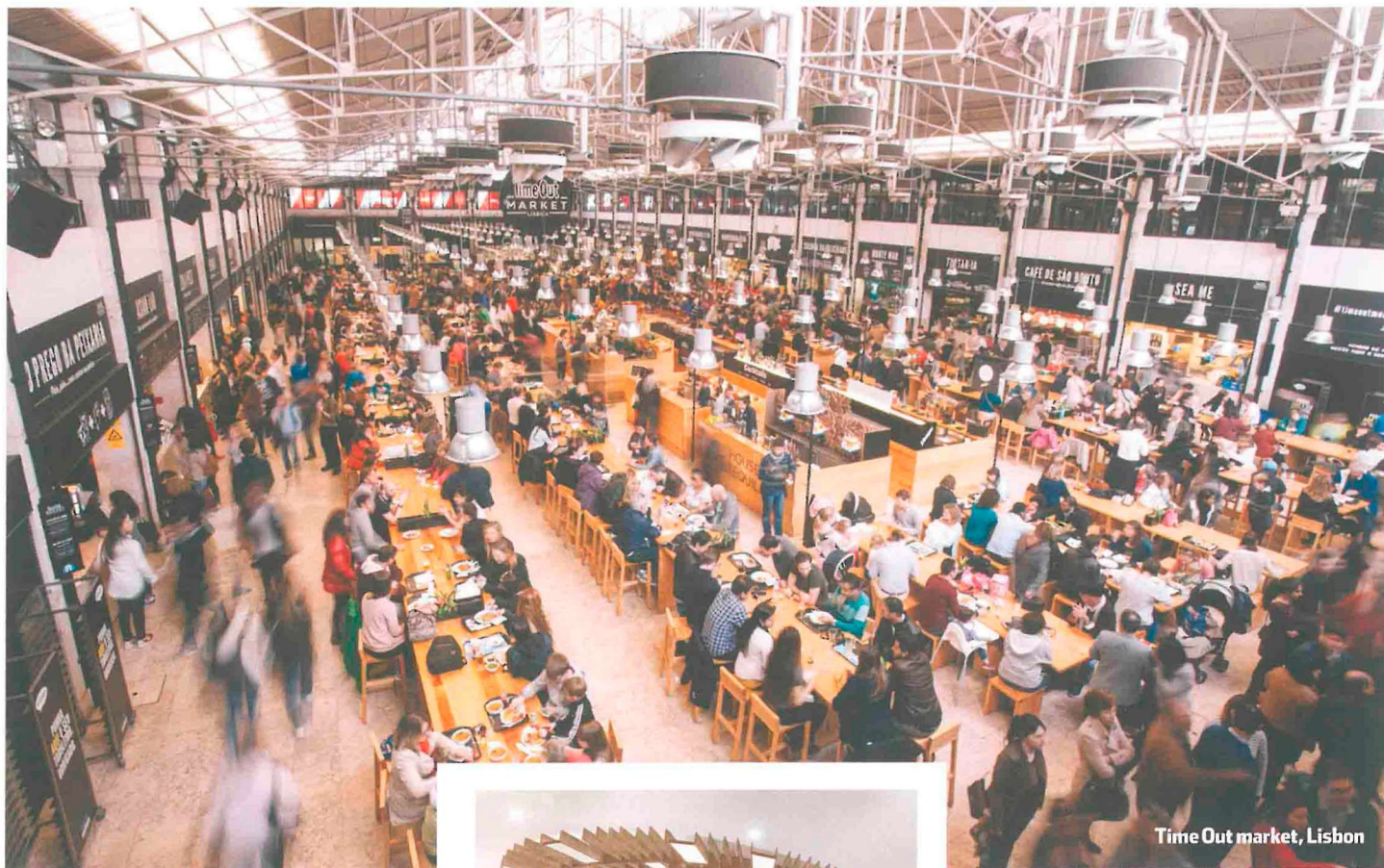


Eataly offers a mixture of Italian groceries, cuisine and kitchenware

for a London site. It will be hoping to have better luck than Time Out – the travel and entertainment publishing brand – which recently had plans declined for a 17-restaurant, four-bar site with 450 covers over four floors at a former stables in Shoreditch.

Time Out had announced the plans in October last year, intending to follow in the footsteps of the media organisation's first market, which opened in Lisbon in 2014 and has become the city's most popular tourist destination, attracting 3.1 million visitors last year. After receiving more than 70 written objections, the licensing subcommittee unanimously voted against the London project, although Time Out has said it will appeal against the decision.

A spokeswoman for Time Out – which has also announced plans to open a market in Miami next year – said: "We are disappointed that our licence application was rejected at



Time Out market, Lisbon

the first hearing with the Tower Hamlets licensing subcommittee. Since our initial application, we have worked diligently to listen to the local community and to take their suggestions on board.”

Jonathan Doughty, head of food service EMEA at advisor JLL, says he has “no doubt” Time Out will find a suitable location and that “it will probably land in the top 10 tourist sites in London, just like Eataly in New York”.

However, he remains concerned that both local authorities and landlords are failing to keep pace with the rapid evolution of the food service market.

Doughty stresses: “They need to think not just about what people want now, but what they will want in the future. Food service has thrived, but change is so rapid that treating it like retail is completely wrong. Food offers are becoming passé faster than ever.”

Other schemes have received the nod. An Italian-themed market recently opened in an old paper factory at Elephant & Castle in south London. Mercato Metropolitano has been

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Beyond the capital

London is by no means the only host city for different F&B approaches.

Land Securities has pioneered a street van strategy in Leeds, and M&G Real Estate and Intu have plans for an £11m redevelopment of Halle Square at Manchester Arndale. The 25,000 sq ft space will be rebranded as Halle Place and deliver a contemporary casual dining destination, including 10 restaurants next year and three ‘major space users’ (Primark, for example).

Each restaurant will offer al fresco seating in the mall area, encircling a suspended public art centrepiece in an open, double-height atrium area.

“The concept is to create a ‘best of’ for each food category within the space,” says Kannika Mall, asset manager at M&G Real Estate. “We’ll be delivering something right in the heart of the city, which really changes the F&B dynamic. It’s a more continental style and picks up on this move to urban dining.”

designed to look like the huge food halls of Turin and Milan, and is packed with regional Italian foods made by artisan producers on site.

Behind the project is Andrea Rasca, who is also involved with the Eataly market. He says: “On a social level, we need good and tasty food to share with our friends and family. That is what Mercato Metropolitano offers its customers.”

Beyond a range of casual dining and drinking offers, the market also encompasses a Sicilian supermarket with products straight from Italy, plus street food vans on rotation in the garden. It also houses a boxing gym, an urban garden, a barber, a cookery school, a communal working space and a cinema room from Backyard Cinema.

So are large-scale, informal, multi-facet food retail and F&B dining environments the next dominant generation of urban eateries? While they have certainly created a fresh genre, capturing the traditional provenance of the market but bringing it up to date for a new audience, more evolution is likely.

“We have ended up with these large, choice-filled, curated spaces because we haven’t had them before,” says Doughty.

“The next generation, I believe, will involve landlords building blank-canvas spaces and then allowing a constant rotation of operators to run them. We’re talking about something more akin to an entertainment venue, where different performers appear each night. So not a curated space, but a theatrical space.”