

STORES

Hypermarkets, Italian style

The drive towards market-led supermarket interiors is well-established, but to see the best that's out there, one must head to Milan. **John Ryan** reports

Food halls are the supermarket mood of the moment, with all involved in that side of retail trying to create something that is a cross between a covered market and one of those rather grand places that we like to recall from our youth – if you happen to be a certain age and were familiar with being taken to the Sainsbury's food hall in Cambridge, for instance, where men in white coats provided over-the-counter service of provisions and comestibles.

Yet while the modern food-hall-meets-market has elements of both, it is considerably more than either, and those at the cutting edge have hauled in technology to assist in the business of creating an environment that looks like a slice of yesteryear but which is easier to shop.

It would be tempting at this point to instance some of the better examples in the UK. But for a glimpse of what is possible, UK retailers could do worse than hopping on a plane and heading over to Milan.

Here, two shopping centres, Il Centro and the newly opened City Life, are host to an Iper market-cum-food-hall and a Carrefour Market respectively.

Iper, Il Centro

Iper is a hypermarket tacked onto one end of Il Centro, a large shopping centre to the north-west of Milan. Opened in 2016, Il Centro is a slick, two-floor, mid-market operation with every retailer from Primark to Zara having good-looking representation.

Yet things change as the shopper approaches the eastern end of the development, which is where Iper is located.

A canopied café fronts the store; beyond, the initial view is of a very traditional, if spectacularly merchandised, indoor market, with a lot of wood employed to promote that feeling and to remove the whole interior from the standard idea of a hypermarket.

Each of the many market counters has a display that serves to advertise what it's about, with parmesan cheeses stacked overhead on suspended shelves in the mid-shop and a

complete mid-shop gondola, fashioned from black metal, dedicated to dried fruit.

As is currently the fashion, the ceiling has been blacked out and track spots serve to highlight specific merchandise areas. Tech, in terms of weighing and measuring, is everywhere, but it passes almost unnoticed as it is used as an accessory to the products and at no point is it allowed to dominate.

The market part of Iper eventually comes to an end, and after this things are a little more hypermarket-like, with aisles and ambient products.

Iper in fact uses its market area, which occupies around half of the available space, to attract shoppers into a more standard environment, but it works well and shopping this one is a real experience.

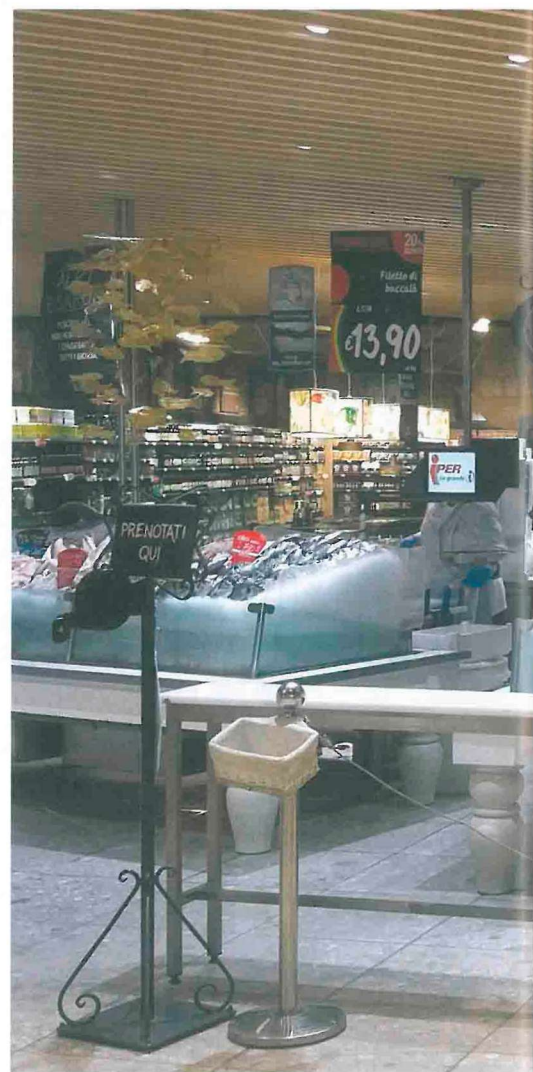
Carrefour Market, City Life

Unlike the market area in Iper, the Carrefour Market in City Life, which opened in November, is predominantly a market, with the other goods and services playing second fiddle.

The initial impression is 'fresh', and the visual merchandising is of the kind that is engaging but which is not Whole Foods Market over-perfect.

Instead the baskets on a low piece of mid-floor equipment have fruit and vegetables arranged with no particular logic; it's just a matter of what looks good, and in this respect

The initial impression is 'fresh', and the visual merchandising is of the kind that is engaging but which is not Whole Foods Market over-perfect



it does feel like a market. Shiny, chromed digital scales allow shoppers to weigh the produce they have chosen. But it is the products that are the star.

When the shopper heads for one of the many serve-over counters, in order to avoid the business of waiting in a particular area a small touchscreen allows a ticket to be collected for anything from the bakery to the butcher – meaning the shopper can head off and shop something else while waiting.

Technology is present throughout, but not in a manner that intrudes, and the overriding impression is one of healthy, fresh food.

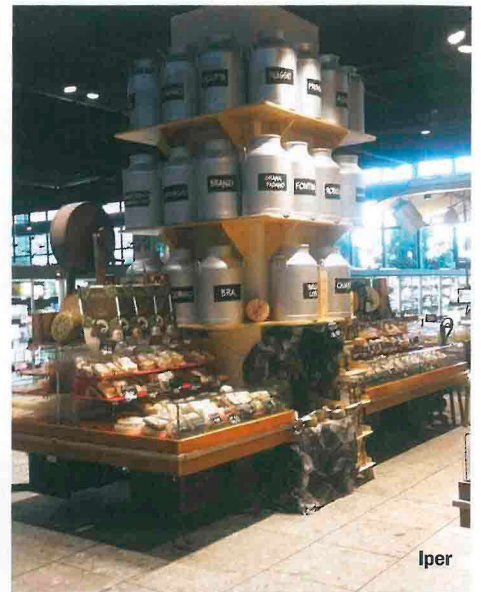
When the food shopping is complete, a bar/pizzeria forms part of the offer, complete with menus that may be on screens but which have the feel of a well-organised, traditional café.

There are a large number of screens overhead bearing promotional messages, but these do not jar with the market ambience overall.

The store exterior occupies much of the City Life outdoor area and its windows are filled with screens detailing the goods within, but they still allow a view of the interior market.

This is food retailing using tech, but with a human face. **RW**

For more pictures of these Italian stores, go to Retail-Week.com/Stores



Carrefour Market

Carrefour Market

Carrefour Market

Iper

Iper

Iper