

A man in a trench coat and fedora enters the Crown building on Düsseldorf's Berliner Allee to escape the drizzle. He stops in his tracks, dazzled by the pâtisserie on his left serving homemade pralines and cakes, clearly debating whether to enter through the automatic doors into Zurheide and a land of plenty. His outfit, and the incredulous look on his face, make him seem out of place, as if he'd travelled here from the 1950s when supermarkets looked nothing like this. Then again, this is no ordinary supermarket.



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# Paradise aisles

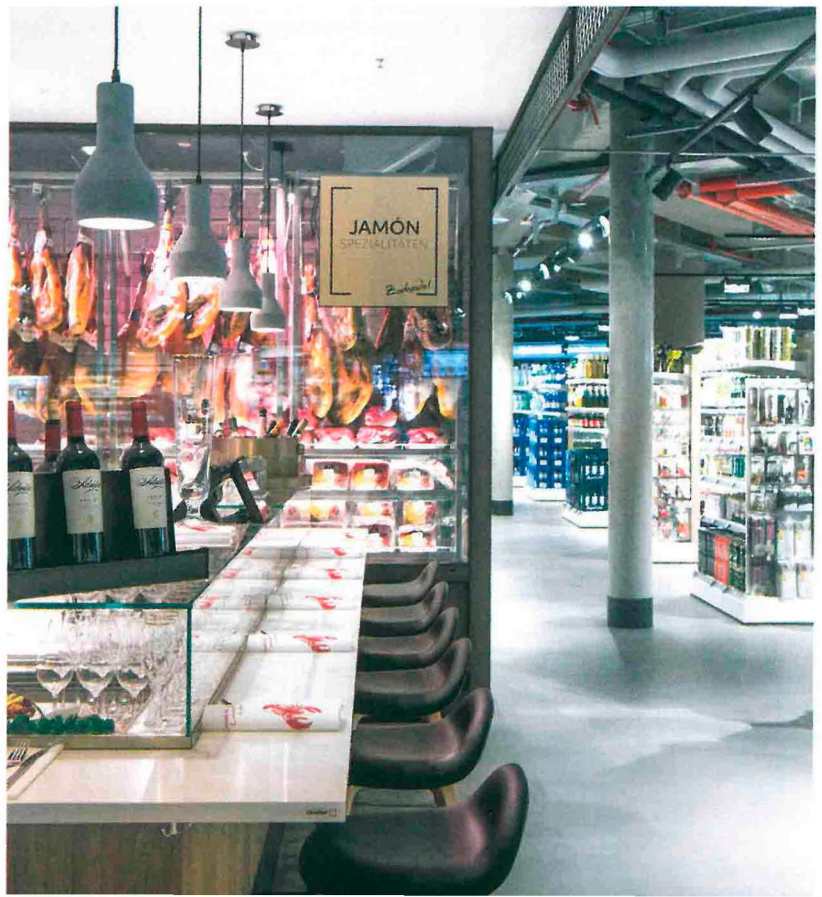
By turning the weekly shop into a pleasurable, plentiful and people-focused experience, German mini-chain Zurheide is foretelling the future of the supermarket.

By Marie-Sophie Schwarzer  
Photography David De Vleeschauwer

Launched in March just a stone's throw from the Königsallee, Düsseldorf's main shopping boulevard, this is the eighth branch of the high-end Zurheide supermarket group in Germany. It's a bold new venture, offering a glimpse into what the future of food retail might look like. Costing some €20m to plan and build, it spans 10,000 sq m spread over two floors and offers a range of 65,000 products.

Zurheide is committed to turning an everyday errand into an unrivalled experience. "A project like this only works in big cities like Düsseldorf," says Heinz Zurheide, the entrepreneur who founded the retailer Zurheide Feine Kost in 1977. "It's the only way for a business like mine to prevail over online players like Amazon. The internet can't beat the experience we offer here."

Among the aisles are three restaurants and five bars, creating the atmosphere and appeal of a bustling food hall. When MONOCLE visits, the premium-beef bar is packed with chatting patrons, all huddled around a lava-rock grill; one aisle over is the *jamón* bar serving slices of Spanish







- (1) Towers of lobster soup
- (2) Selling freshly baked bread
- (3) The 'jamón' bar
- (4) Dairy aisles
- (5) The premium-beef bar
- (6) German gin
- (7) Catch of the day



ham; and round the corner are Italian chefs in pressed uniforms making pasta. Champagne corks pop, while the smell of warm bread wafts from the bakery.

Heinz Zurheide travelled the globe for inspiration and worked with Swiss retail-design agency Interstore and shopfitting company Schweitzer to make his vision a reality. "We visited stores in Canada, the US, Italy and France," he says. Seated in the café, he points to a tray of cinnamon buns being served by a waiter. "I first discovered these in New York and had to recreate them. But I made them even better," says the founder. He sees this as his final project before he hands over to his two sons, Rüdiger and Marco, who are already involved in managing the family business.

The Zurheides want this new space to offer everything to everyone; you can buy a bottle of champagne for €1,000 but there is also one for €19.99. "Perhaps it's because I'm a child of the Ruhr," says Heinz, referring to the area of western Germany where all his eight shops are located. "I want to welcome everyone into the shop, not only those who have





lots of money.” It’s all about selling the right mix: Twix next to truffles. Hence the gourmet-food purveyor’s partnership with the Edeka Group, Germany’s largest supermarket corporation and Zurheide’s umbrella company, which provides the majority of the shop’s products.

“You dive into this world of products and in that moment you forget about everything else. That’s what a true shopping experience should be like,” says Ruth Toechterle, managing director of Interstore, as she snakes through the aisles. Everything has been custom-designed by the Swiss company for this shop. The slightly curved shelving units and Ansoerg lighting intuitively guide the way through the store. There’s no need for shouting signs that point you in the direction of the coffee and toiletries; the idea is to explore and discover (although friendly illustrated maps are available).

“It was important to create new worlds within the store,” says Luca Viglianti, Interstore’s sharply dressed art director. “Such a large space can quickly become boring. We created tension through the use of materials and moveable display units. Everything tells a story: the brass pots on the wall, the murals behind the fish counter, the plush bar furnishings.”

Anyone who was present last year at EuroShop, the retail industry’s leading trade show, will recognise many elements here. The electronic shelf labels, the sleek freezer cabinets, the lighting system illuminating the produce, and the breadth of bars and kitchens where customers can sample the food and see how it’s made.

Zurheide values provenance and there’s a large organic section, yet the

**Zurheide in numbers:**  
 Size: 10,000 sq m  
 Products: 65,000  
 Checkouts: 16  
 Restaurants: 3  
 Bars: 5  
 Branches in Düsseldorf: 2  
 Branches in other German cities: 6  
*(in Gladbeck, Oberhausen, Essen and Bottrop)*

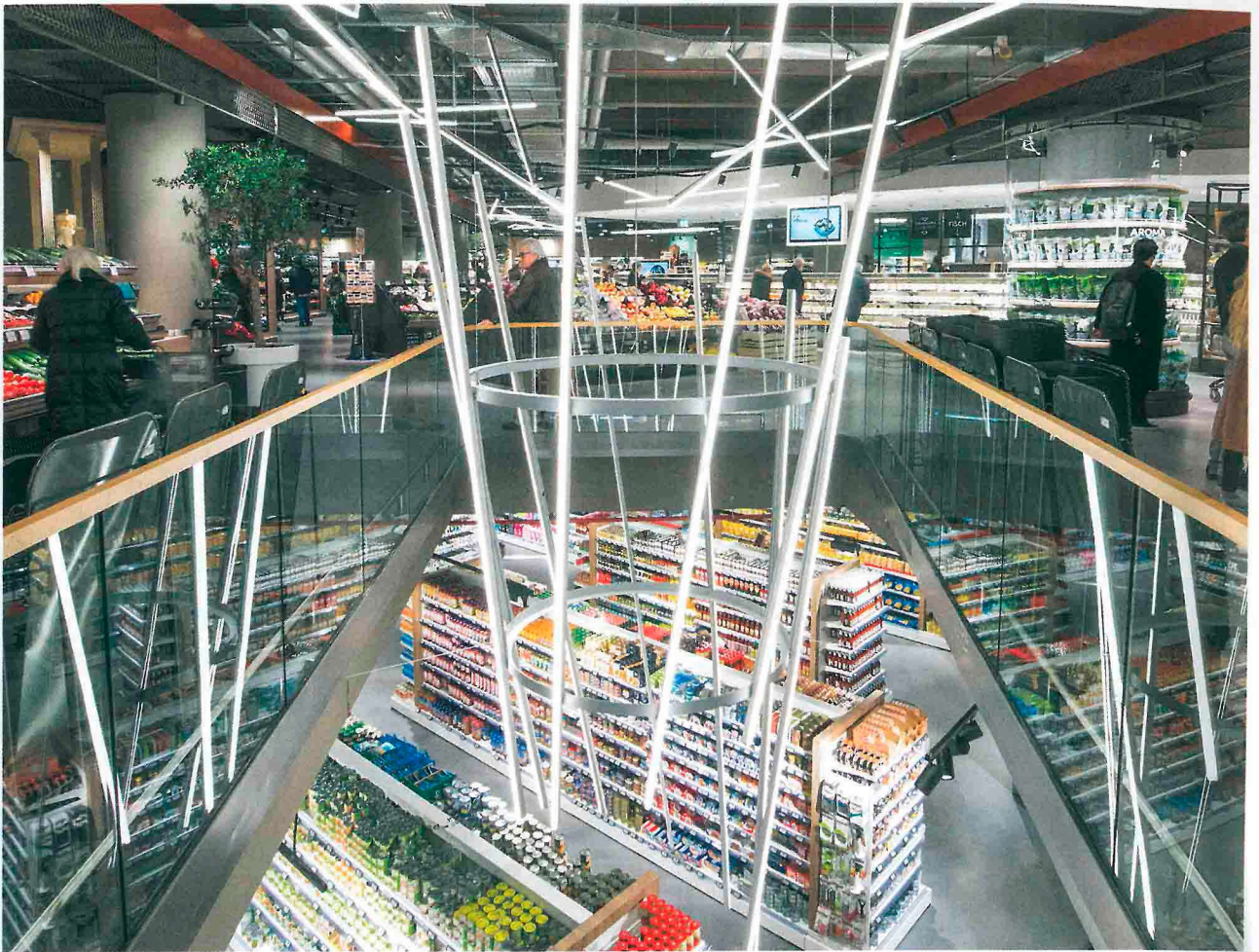
issue of sustainability hasn’t been fully addressed. Whereas some supermarkets are moving towards packaging-free sections and offer loose cereals that customers can put into their own glass jars, there’s little evidence of that here.

According to Rüdiger Zurheide, the German mass-market isn’t ready for an extensive zero-waste offering just yet. That said, the store was built to evolve and will be adjusted to match consumer behaviour in the years to come. “The retail market is in constant flux but I believe this concept has what it takes to succeed in the future,” says Rüdiger, who has his eyes on opening a second, smaller store in the neighbouring town of Essen.

Rüdiger’s father is confident that this new supermarket will surpass the €40m profit that the company’s other branch in Düsseldorf makes per year. The latter opened nine years ago and is much smaller. “As entrepreneurs we have the opportunity to bring life to the inner cities and to inspire people,” says Heinz. “I want people to come to Zurheide instead of ordering Deliveroo.” — (M)







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- (1) Shop exterior
- (2) From left: Luca Viglianti, Heinz Zurheide and Ruth Toechterle
- (3) Restaurant Setzkasten
- (4) There are 65,000 products on display
- (5) Interiors are bright and spacious