



Bashas' Window Rock store in Arizona reflects its location on the Navajo Nation.

More in Store

SUPERMARKETERS SEE DESIGN AS INDISPENSABLE TO A SUCCESSFUL OPERATION. **By Bob Ingram**



he Bible's Book of John says, "In the beginning was the word." The food retailing equivalent might be, "In the beginning was store design."

Retailers and wholesalers know from front-line experience the intrinsic value of store design in their marketing efforts.

"Good store design is essential, as it has a large effect on the overall customer experience," affirms Johnny Basha, VP of special projects for Bashas' Family of Stores, in Chandler, Ariz. "It's imperative that we exceed customer demands and expectations, and good store design is as indispensable to

that as customer service, price and quality."

Bashas' relies on both a design firm and an in-house design team, the design firm providing information on the latest trends, efficiencies and sustainability upgrades, while the internal team interprets consumer sensitivity to provide a fluid, positive customer experience.

"During our extensive store remodel plan, we have paid close attention to the focus on fresh, locally sourced and convenient food options," Basha says.

Key Takeaways

- ▶ A focus on fresh departments, technological innovations, innovative areas offering unique products and services, and intuitive layouts are among the elements currently being incorporated into new stores; accurately reflecting the concerns and aspirations of a store's surrounding demographics is also key.
- ▶ Some supermarkets rely primarily on in-house teams, others on outside design firms, and a few on a combination of both to generate and execute design ideas.
- ▶ Despite the encroachments of digital, in-person shopping isn't going away.

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—Anthony Smith, Associated Wholesale Grocers

“In that respect, we work hard to grow the variety of offerings in all perimeter departments.”

The retailer's latest design innovation is at its Bashas' Diné market, in Window Rock, Ariz., on the Navajo Nation. While the store's décor and signage have always reflected the Navajo language and culture, Basha explains, the recent remodel has revitalized that celebration of the local community.

“We worked especially hard to ensure that everything, from the basic store design and offerings to the local artisans' artwork displayed throughout the store, honors that vibrant culture of the Navajo people,” he says.

Basha envisions technological advancements in both building operations and customer support in the future of store design.

Creating an Experience

“Store layout and design are very high on the list for a successful operation,” agrees Anthony Smith, senior manager, design source group at Associated Wholesale Grocers (AWG), in Kansas City, Kan. “A sensible layout helps customers easily navigate the store, and without a cohesive design, attention may be distracted from the product displays.”

A good supermarket design is one that speaks appropriately to the store's surrounding demographic, as well as directing customers' focus to the products, Smith explains. “The use of basic design principles to accomplish this is the key,” he notes.

AWG does full-service interior design in-house for smaller projects that can be handled as “design/build,” and collaborates with architects and/or engineers on larger projects requiring full stamped drawings.

“Many retailers want to have an updated look and be on-trend,” Smith observes, “but we recommend a combination of trendy and timeless, since we know that remodels don't happen every year.”

With the high-tech nature of online shopping and the increasingly digital landscape, Smith feels that it's necessary to create an experience within a store, and in response to this need, retailers are including more interactive elements in their stores. “Ever-changing digital displays, cooking schools and even bars are being incorporated into new store layouts and designs,” he notes.

“What we know,” Smith concludes, “is that brick and mortar is not going away. Too many in the new generation of shoppers like the experience of shopping in person. With that, it will continue to be even more important to create an experience within a store through added services, departments or within the interior design itself.”

Festival Foods designs its own fixture plans for stores like this one in Holman, Wis.



Gelson's Markets collaborates with design firm Shook Kelley on stores such as this one in Silver Lake, Calif.

In-House Expertise

At De Pere, Wis.-based Festival Foods, Store Planning Director Aaron Aspenson asserts: "Store design is paramount to successful store operations. With an evolving and increasingly competitive grocery landscape, we are constantly looking for ways to innovate in order to exceed our guests' expectations."

Aspenson believes that a good store design drives sales, looks full and fresh without sacrificing on shrink, allows for efficient workflow, and provides an easy, enjoyable shopping experience.

"We design our fixture plans in-house," he says, "as we lean on the experts from each department to provide feedback and recommendations regarding their respective areas. We also gain efficiencies in speed and cost."

For the future of store design, Aspenson predicts designing to elevate fresh and prepared foods, ecommerce space allocation, more self-service, and efficient space planning in smaller footprints, as well as community gathering spaces and value-added services not available online. He also sees a continuing focus on lowering energy consumption and costs by way of new technology and equipment.

Filling a Tall Order

"Great store design is essential for success, asserts John Bagan, chief merchandising officer at Gelson's Markets, in Encino, Calif. "First and foremost, it provides the environment for our customers' in-person experience with our brand, products and employees. A store's design will either enhance or diminish customers' experiences with each of those essential elements of the visit."

In a food environment, according to Bagan, the perfect blend of form and function in great design is difficult to achieve, given the intense operational and production needs of the business.

"Our store designs need to provide an upscale, relaxing, interactive experience for our customers that celebrates food and allows for as much interaction between our customers and associates as possible," he says, "but they also need to be efficient, clean, safe and profitable. That's a tall order."

Since Gelson's doesn't have its own design experts, it combines its legacy knowledge and vision with a partner that can apply its own expertise to create successful designs. "Shook Kelley is our strategic partner for both branding and design efforts, and they have been fantastic," Bagan says of the design firm with offices in



Los Angeles and Charlotte, N.C.

Among new features, the grocer is "rolling out a new 'Sip & Shop' service that invites our customers to enjoy and drink and snack at the bar — and hand their shopping list over to us to be procured for them," Bagan says. "It has been very well received."

In the future, he believes that a smaller footprint and being closer to where customers live and work in an urban environment will be common features. "Our designs need to enable that vision," he emphasizes.

Home Away From Home

"A design reflects the mood and attitude of our owners," says Susan Budlong, marketing and communications manager at East Greenwich, R.I.-based Dave's Fresh Marketplace. "To us, the design is coming home. We want our customers to feel like they are shopping in a store that reflects their neighborhoods. Our customer service departments are the hub of the neighborhood, providing friendly faces and answers to questions."

Dave's wants young people to visit its stores with wonder, and the older generation to feel a touch of nostalgia, she says, and to these ends, the retailer works closely with the design team at Cheshire, Conn.-based wholesaler Bozzuto's, headed by Dave Falt, and Fairfield, Ohio-based CIP Retail to bring it all to life.

"The end of 2017 saw Dave's Fresh Marketplace completing the remodeling and upgrade to all new deli cases that have self-service and full-service options," she notes, adding: "Perishable is king. We will continue to update and invest in our stores to balance a comfortable, bright shopping experience with fresh, high-quality perishables." **PG**