

Best Use of Excess Supermarket Space

dining in the aisles

Paper or plastic? How about a table for two? In-store dining spaces are a hot solution for supermarkets exploring ways to hold onto shoppers who no longer want to cook. "Supermarkets are realizing what America doesn't want to do—cook, which is what they're dependent on," says Harry Balzer, vice president of the NPD Group, a market-research company that has been tracking consumer-eating habits since 1976. "They're tapping into the growing casual dining segment, something other than the daily needs of food."

The trend hasn't trickled down to every chain, but according to the Food Marketing Institute, it has started to gain momentum: 32.5 percent of new supermarkets in 2001 included a "department with food served fast food/restaurant style."

Indeed, New Yorkers can dine inside upscale market Eli's Manhattan at Taste, a self-service café by day and sit-down dinner spot at night, revamped last year by New York City-based David Schefer Design and Richard Lewis Architects. Draeger's, an upscale supermarket in San Mateo, California, boasts high-end restaurant counterpart Viognier. And Tastings, atop a Wegman's (a 65-store supermarket chain in New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey), opened last year in Rochester, New York.

"A restaurant will be one of the solutions food markets need," explains Kevin Kelley, whose Los Angeles-based firm, Shook Kelley, specializes in restaurant and grocery store clients. His answer for supermarket restaurants in terms of design is an upscale café setting with various food stations, such as Kitchen, which he recently added to multiple Genuardi's Family Markets in the Philadelphia area.



To stay current, most designers say grocers are expanding into hospitality largely as a way to add credibility and other options for customers. "It started with cooking schools and now it's moving to cafés and restaurants," Kelley says, offering, one caveat: "But the restaurant has to be on target with what the brand stands for. High end, which can be a natural instinct, can be deadly." Which is why in redesigning Eli's Taste, Eve-Lynn Schoen-stein, principal of David Schefer Design, used a simple, warm color palette to create a casual, but sophisticated look. After a stint as a high-end café called Eli's, it now consists of a prominent bar, food display, open kitchen, café-style seating, and a smaller, sunken, more formal dining area lined with banquettes. "[At first], the restaurant occupied residual space left over," Schoen-stein says. "It wasn't clear at the time the wide appeal the restaurant would have."

Plus, while the trend is gaining, it has a history of some success: High-end Minnesota-based chain Byerly's opened the first Byerly's Minnesota Grille in Golden Valley in 1968. The success of seven locations forced the company recently to rev up the restaurants' look. The job fell to local designer Bob Gorski and an in-house team. "It's the goal for our company to stay on and ahead of the trend," says John Pazahanick, vice president of store development and real estate for Lund Food Holdings, Inc., Byerly's parent company. "It's what we have built our reputation on." So follow the leader.—SS

Right: The café-inspired Kitchen inside Genuardi's Family Market. Right, bottom: The new dining room of Taste inside Eli's Manhattan. Opposite page, bottom, left to right: Casual dining in Byerly's Minnesota Grille; an exterior shot of Eli's.

