

# A DIVERSE PALATE

New gastronomy concepts for shopping centers are becoming more important. The days of fast-food chains dominating shopping centers are over.

## >> RESTAURANTS & CAFÉS

Food and drink is central to the concept of a third place. The catering aspects of shopping centers are now going beyond the traditional food courts by creating culinary destinations that encourage social interaction. There is certainly a trend of rising quality in shopping center dining, but increases in the volume of places to dine is not a universal trend. There were higher proportions of restaurants and cafés in the new Western European schemes (16%) than in those in the East (10%). In Poland for example, the biggest food court areas are limited to 10-12 units with additional cafés and restaurants spread throughout the center. But the divide is narrowing. The in-town Palladium Shopping Center in Prague, for example, has an above average gastronomy selection. It is also clear that catering facilities in shopping centers are popular with CEE shoppers and help drive footfall. Romania and Bulgaria are also exceptions, with food courts often acting as an anchor and serving as more of a lifestyle element akin to the Latin culture of Southern Europe. This then suggests an additional North/South axis to consider, with the climates and culture dictating greater popularity of catering within the Southern markets.

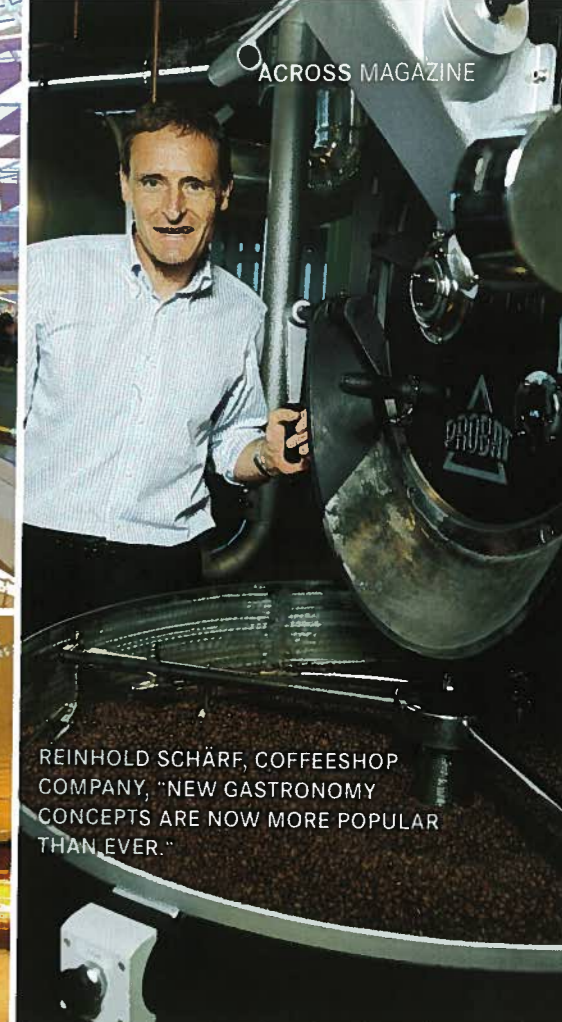
Source: Jones Lang LaSalle

Westfield London is not only the capital's most exciting fashion, lifestyle, and leisure development, it has also succeeded in permanently changing the image of the traditional "food court" and shopping center dining. Its culinary offering is uniquely varied and exciting and delivered in a way never previously seen in a UK shopping center. At Westfield the food is as important as the shopping. Food itself provides theater, fun, and a reason to visit. A testament to this determination to make eating and drinking integral elements of the overall experience are nearly 50 international food names, new concepts from established brands, UK firsts among them. Carefully selected restaurants, brasseries, bars, and cafés offering 25 different types of cuisine cater to all tastes and occasions, whether it's a casual bite to eat at the end of a long day or fine dining to celebrate a special occasion. Beneath its spectacular, undulating glass roof, Westfield London has several distinct food areas: Southern Terrace is a vibrant open-air boulevard facing the south, where restaurants are open from 8 am to midnight, ensuring that they are destinations in their own right. Independently located from the rest of Westfield, Southern Terrace has 24-hour accessibility and its own security and parking. Southern Terrace comprises a mix of indoor and al fresco dining with

the option of open but sheltered upper level terrace seating.

## INTERNATIONAL COOKING

An eclectic mix of international cooking styles and ingredients is represented here, including such exciting names as the groundbreaking Swiss vegetarian concept, tibits; Allegra McEvedy's Leon; Jamie Barber's new Kitchen Italia; the award-winning Wahaca, and gourmand's paradise, Esca. Meanwhile, The Balcony, a stunning first floor area positioned above The Atrium, comprises 13 niche culinary counters with a mixture of cuisines from around the world. Open cooking facilities create a true sense of theater, with the emphasis on authentic, flavorful food delivered fast and fresh. Options here include Vietnamese noodles by Pho, duck burger and foie gras served in minutes from Pascal Ausignac and Vincent Labeyrie at the new Croque Gascon, dim sum and clay pot rice dishes from Bamboo Basket, and afternoon tea from Caffé Concerto – no ordinary food court! Open from 9 am to 9 pm and capable of seating over 1,000 people, The Balcony delivers a customer experience and ambience synonymous with the buzz and energy of London. Raising the bar even higher, environmentally friendly china crockery, complemented by high quality glassware and stainless steel cutlery, are being utilized for the first time within this type of dining environment.



## A MOVE TOWARD LIGHT CUISINE

Westgate's gastronomical selection is one of a kind in Europe right now. But there is an obvious trend toward increasingly unusual dining concepts in shopping centers. The days of the dominant fast-food presence are over. Health, organic food, light Asian cuisine, and quiet areas to retreat from the hectic shopping stress are what's hot. The concepts are essential to restaurants' success. No-name joints don't have a chance any more. Quality is more important than ever for the consumers. Restaurants with a wide variety are in demand. It doesn't matter whether the guest wants to hang out for a while or just needs a coffee break. It is not a question of either/or, but of both.

"New gastronomy concepts in shopping centers are now more popular than ever," states Reinhold Schärf, Head of the international Coffeeshop Company. Schärf should know; the coffee expert has shops in over 13 countries – predominantly in shopping centers. The idea is that a relaxed, easy-going, tradition Viennese coffeehouse atmosphere offers the perfect place to hang

out. "Rest and relaxation areas are part of the experience of a modern shopping center," Schärf states. The branch mix is crucial to the gastro zone. After all, restaurants, cafés, and juice and champagne bars should extend the customers' stay at the center. Particularly important is "When you are internationally active, the concept has to be adjusted to the respective eating habits of the different cultures," says the Coffeeshop Head. "In Egypt, for example, coffee-to-go is almost non-existent."

## SECOND MOST IMPORTANT TENANT GROUP

Aside from the fact that shopping center gastronomy lengthens the customers' stay, it has also become the darling of shopping center management. The reason is obvious; according to a European study conducted by the consulting company Jones Lang LaSalle, restaurants and cafés are the second most important tenant group, occupying 12% of the floor space. Only textiles and shoes utilise more square meters of retail space with 48%. International developers allot approximately 10% of the total area in large entertainment centers to gastronomy. ♦