THE NEXT GENERATION FOOD HALL

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What Is Happening at the Intersection of Visionary Culinary Curation and Forward-Thinking Real Estate Development.

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The Food Market Culture Report published by Culinary Visions® in 2017 explored consumer attitudes toward experiential dining opportunities such as food halls, farmers markets and food truck festivals. At the time, 85% of consumers surveyed said they loved attending food-focused events and food festivals. Whether permanent or pop-up, market-style food experiences were captivating consumers throughout the U.S. and abroad.

Consumers were looking for new and enjoyable ways to incorporate socialization, shopping and eating into their busy lives. They were enthralled by the variety of foods and cuisines, as well as the opportunity to connect with the people producing them. The traditional shopping mall food court—with its predictable line-up of familiar choices—was beginning to feel decidedly yesterday as food halls emerged in reclaimed warehouses and other unexpected places.

62%
said they loved the collaborative energy at a food market.

60%
liked to roam around with a beverage and absorb the whole environment of the market.

57%
enjoyed going to the market because it was just as much a social occasion as a shopping trip.

What is striking about those findings today is how little they have to do with simply buying a meal. Consumers never fell in love with food halls because they wanted more places to stand in line for lunch. They were responding to variety, discovery, sociability, movement and energy. Food was essential, but it was the collective experience that made these places destinations.

FLOURISH OR FAIL

In the past decade, food halls have proliferated with widely varying levels of success. Some continue to thrive while others that opened with considerable enthusiasm have struggled or disappeared. It is tempting to interpret those closures as evidence that consumers have moved on from food halls.

Perhaps they haven't.

> **The food hall didn't fail.**
>
> **Some food hall business models failed to deliver what made consumers fall in love with them in the first place.**

EXPERIENCE CURATOR VS A LANDLORD

Developers who have been successful have been far more than landlords collecting tenants and managing a bottom line. They have become Experience Curators who understand their consumer audience and collaborate with vendors to make the overall experience relevant and a good value while enhancing the individual brands within it.

A LANDLORD
can assemble a collection of good restaurants.

AN EXPERIENCE CURATOR
considers how those businesses work together.

The distinction matters. Is there enough variety without redundancy? Is there a reason to wander a little before deciding what to eat? Do individual vendors benefit from being part of the whole? And perhaps most important, does being here feel different from simply choosing among six restaurants?

That symbiotic relationship among vendors is one reason some food halls still feel exciting while others feel like upscale food courts.

MORE THAN A CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Another summer concert series may fill the calendar, but it doesn't necessarily give a food hall a personality. Chef collaborations, tastings, cookbook signings, demonstrations, seasonal markets and other experiences have the advantage of drawing upon the personalities and talents already inside the food hall.

Programming should amplify a place that is already compelling rather than compensate for one that isn't.

A LIVING MARKETPLACE

The next generation of successful food halls may look less like collections of restaurants and more like living marketplaces—places where people shop, eat, discover, gather and linger. They may be part restaurant incubator, part retail marketplace, part gathering place and part neighborhood living room.

The winners will not necessarily be defined by how many vendors they can fit under one roof. They will be defined by whether those vendors collectively create something consumers could not experience by visiting each of them separately.

> That is the difference between filling a building and creating a destination.

FUTURE ISSUES



ISSUE 2 | COMING SOON
Food is the New Love Language



ISSUE 3 | COMING SOON
Cultural Contradictions Drive Food Trends

About Ahead of the Curve

Ahead of the Curve is Food for Thought from Culinary Visions® – a collection of observations about enduring food behaviors, how they continue to evolve and the subtleties that matter to food marketers and the food business today.

Contact info@culinaryvisions.org or 312-280-4757 to learn more about translating today's trends for your business.

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