



FOOD HALLS CANNOT
OPEN AS FAST AS FOOD
TRUCKS, BUT THEY
DO SHARE COMMON
THREADS IN AMPING UP
LOCAL FARE, FOCUSING
ON AUTHENTICITY AND
BEING THE CONCEPT OF
THE MOMENT.

By Amelia Levin



ARE

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THE NEW

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TRUCKS?

FOOD HALLS

FOR UP-AND-COMING CHEFS AND RESTAURATEURS LOOKING TO EXPAND OR TEST NEW CONCEPTS, FOOD HALLS OFFER A LOW BARRIER TO ENTRY, A BUILT-IN FACILITY AND BRANDING SUPPORT.

On top of all that, food hall locations tend to provide a customer-grabbing catch-all from surrounding business districts or urban areas with high traffic, especially during the lunch hour. Hmm, sound familiar? The food hall story mirrors the biography of food trucks in many ways, albeit on a much grander scale.

Food halls — much like the food truck phenomenon — continue to bedazzle not only the foodie patrons of today but also the designers, equipment suppliers and operators they attract.

Spurred by the early pioneers of the food hall concept, like Eataly in New York and, later, Latinicity and Revival Food Hall in Chicago, countless food halls continue to open around the country. Expect more this year. High-traffic barometers and a food-is-everything approach form the basis for the modern-day food hall success story.

“Food halls are becoming the new anchor tenants of malls, retail spaces and downtown districts because of the number of people they attract,” says Jack Gibbons, president of The Food Hall Co., which opened Legacy Hall in Plano, Texas. The 55,000-square-foot property features 22 stalls and 7 bars. Two years of planning and development went into Legacy Hall before the doors officially opened in December 2017.

Chicago continues to see new food hall concepts emerge. The lineup includes Forum 55, which opened in late 2017; Wells St. Market, set to open in 2018; and Lakeview Market, scheduled to open in the summer of 2018. Investors seem willing to continue to back these types of places. Wells St. Market, for example, is a project from Alvarez & Marsal Property Investments and Ameritus Real Estate Investment





EACH LOCAL CHEF AT LEGACY HALL IN PLANO, TEXAS, OPERATES AN OPEN-KITCHEN CONCEPT IN A MERE 400 SQUARE FEET, OR LESS. DESIGNERS ORGANIZED THE STALLS INTO QUADRANTS TO BALANCE HEAVY COOKING AND HVAC NEEDS.

FOOD HALLS



REVIVAL FOOD HALL OWNERS MADE A POINT TO CONSIDER HOW THE FACILITY COULD ACCOMMODATE BOTH WEEKDAY BUSINESS CROWDS AND WEEK-END BRUNCH-GOERS. AS A RESULT, FLATTOPS THAT COOK BURGERS ON A MONDAY MAY TRANSFORM INTO AN EGG STATION ON SUNDAY.

Management. Traditional business and industry (B&I) operators are also in the game, like Compass Group's Eurest division, which funded the transformation of a food court in a Chicago skyscraper into Forum 55.

"Food halls are absolutely becoming a growing segment, gaining popularity amongst operators and consumers," says Kevin Corsello, founder and CEO, Pork & Mindy's at Forum 55, and Elevate Food Hall in Minneapolis. "With so many restaurants opening and closing, food halls offer a low-risk investment, as they typically have a

consistent footprint and operators don't have to cover the largest expenses, like seating and bathrooms. They are an extremely cost-efficient way to gain exposure to new customers, especially for young companies like ourselves."

Some might also call these food halls the new food courts, helping breathe new life into lifestyle centers and corporate office buildings. Covering all dayparts, food halls tend to bring fresher, more fun and flavorful offerings and take consumers far beyond the basic burger or heat lamp pizza slices of food courts in years past. These concepts also — you guessed it — cater to younger Millennial and Gen Z crowds, although diners of all ages will line up to try them.

George Chen, creator, co-founder, and executive chef for China Live in San Francisco, describes today's food halls as the antithesis of yesterday's food courts, where cheap, fast food dominated. Food halls, he believes, elevate cuisine instead of cheapening it.

"Developers know that consumers — especially Millennials — are more about the overall experience than simply about buying commoditized products and services," says Chen. "Food halls show people where the food comes from and how it's made. At China Live, we're showing real Chinese cooking in so many ways that really entice people and offer a better understanding of a popular and great cuisine."

Newer versions of food halls swap out old-school fast-food chains for new concepts that position top chefs and restaurants at the forefront. Some allow consumers to purchase food at different stalls or stations, while other halls, like Latinicity, follow a more classic cafeteria-style method of service, allowing patrons to pick out different foods at different stations and pay for them at a central cashier station.

Naturally, food halls introduce a unique set of equipment and design considerations, often forcing stall operators to whittle down their menu and work with limited space and ventilation.

CONCEPT COLLABORATION

Not just anyone can set up shop in a food hall, point blank. In some cases, the food hall operator will reach out to existing independent restaurants, food trucks or other up-and-coming businesses to create a dynamic portfolio. In other cases, the operator might call on local chefs to develop menus for stalls unique to that food hall. Finally, some food halls, like Eataly and Latinicity, use a team of chefs to create multiple points for food offerings under one roof.

“Since food halls are relatively new, operational expertise is critical for success as it is a lot more complicated than operating just a restaurant,” says Chen. “Established developers who try to just fit a bunch of disparate concepts will likely fail.”

In many cases, operators pare down the menu to just a couple popular items to maintain speed of service, throughput and profitability.

FOOD HALL TAKEAWAYS FOR E&S PROFESSIONALS

- Seek basic, flexible equipment like flattops, convection or rapid-speed ovens and possibly combi ovens.
- If using specialty equipment like smokers, make this the primary equipment piece and make sure ventilation is adequate. Consider adjacencies and positioning near operators with similar HVAC needs.
- Work with operators to tailor their menus to just one or two items to improve speed of service and throughput.
- Build out each station with enough prep space and undercounter refrigeration — shared kitchen space in food halls may be small, cramped and busy or even nonexistent.
- Consider dual-performing pieces like refrigerated prep lines that can hold hot or cold items in the flip of a switch.

CONSTRUCTION CONSIDERATIONS

What makes a facility right for a food hall? Is it the nature of the physical space, location, proximity to public transportation or a combination of all the above?

“Physical planning is critical,” says Chen. “It must showcase cuisine in

authentic, real ways in designed surroundings that capture the emotion of the customer. In my opinion, the space has to be an Instagrammable kind of place.”

The building for Revival Food Hall was chosen in part because of its easy-access entry points on each of the building’s four sides. All doors feed in



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and out of Chicago's busy office district. Latinicity backs up to one of the city's elevated train stations. And in Denver, the food hall at Zeppelin Station rests at the foot of a light rail station; designers even built in a bar modeled after European rail stations for patrons to grab a drink before the ride.

Many food halls capitalize on additional restaurants or other outlets attached to the main food hall as a way to drive even more traffic throughout the day and night. China Live features a separate fine-dining restaurant, Eight Tables, in addition to the main food hall. At Legacy Hall, The Box Garden will open this spring as a connected music venue and entertainment space with bars and restaurants made entirely out of shipping containers that span 18,000 square feet. The food hall also includes an attached brewery.

The decision to position the Legacy Hall brewery on the third floor of the building, given its heavy beer-making equipment, posed obvious challenges. Engineers had to ensure the ceilings could handle the weight, and then all the equipment and furnishings had to ascend to the third floor via a crane. Legacy Hall's owners felt it was worth the hassle to keep the food hall — the highest-traffic portion of the business — positioned near the entry to the facility. The brewery then complements the main revenue driver.

FAST FLOW

Most food halls capitalize on the workweek lunch rush first, followed by breakfast and happy hour/early evening.

"You figure people have 45 minutes or less to get something to eat during their lunch hour, and then they'll want to linger longer after work, so we had to think about how the food hall would transition from day to night," says Bruce Finkelman, co-owner of Revival Food Hall.

Chen and his team also focused on flow. "We even took down an adjacent building because the flow in the space didn't work as just a simple box structure," he says.

Each restaurant's position, sometimes called a station or stall, within a food hall must include efficiencies in design, Gibbons says. "You have to think about the limited range of motions, fixed amount of storage and cooler space, and understand the menu and then build the kitchen around that," he says.

Some food halls avoid a lot of shared space and opt to have each station run as its own concept to avoid potential bottlenecks, crowding and other confusion. "We like to have control over every station, bar and space so we don't have those problems," Chen says. "In that case, we operate more like Eataly than Gotham West Market."

The idea is to look for synergies — or create them — among operators through central ventilation, trash pickup and maintenance, shared office/prep space and other systems. The goal is to accommodate the needs of many, regardless if each stall or station is a separately run business or just a separate concept under the same umbrella.

EQUIPMENT SELECTION

At both China Live and Legacy Hall, each station is built as an open kitchen and meant for food theater, says Gibbons. "You want to see the cooking happening everywhere." Therefore, design and equipment selection at each station or stall remains critical.

At Legacy Hall, each local chef or startup business has 400 square feet or less of space. Given those tight quarters, design, flow and efficiencies are everything. Naturally, equipment selection might need to be pared down or at least chosen with flexibility — and certainly durability — in mind.

"We did incorporate live wood cooking, so we had to install special ventilation and look at the impact of 20 stalls cooking at one time and how that impacts the whole building," Gibbons says.

Designers organized the stalls into quadrants, balancing operators' heavy cooking and HVAC needs with bars or other low-level HVAC operations to

keep the airflow even throughout the space. The team also added more daily deliveries for food and wood to accommodate the shortage of storage space. All the prep work happens at each individual stall, which all include their own prep tables and sinks.

Stations tend to focus on one or two main pieces of equipment. At Revival, Smoque uses one powerhouse smoker for its barbecue items; Union Squared uses a couple of double-deck, durable pizza ovens for its Detroit-style pizza, and Fat Shallot had to nix its fryers to make room for a better flattop and less ventilation.

Equipment selections can also pave the way for food halls to capitalize on multiple dayparts and different types of revenue streams. For example, a morning coffee program can double as a bar later at night. That means considering flexible equipment, rotating storage or shelving components, and other plug-and-play adaptations.

At Revival, weekend brunch service forced some vendors to develop their menus around the equipment they had in place. Flattops normally used for burgers and sandwiches, for instance, might transform into an egg station.

Technology plays a key role in execution. Most food halls use a one-size-fits-all centrally operated ordering, POS and data-mining program. That means each stall uses the same system to take and process orders or record them on plastic cards, much like a credit card, provided to customers who want to shop around before paying all at once.

Legacy Hall worked with a third-party delivery program in Texas to process online orders. "It's great for both of us because they can pick up multiple orders at a time," says Gibbons. "In our business and in our thinking, third-party vendors and the ease of people being able to order from home is the way of the future."

As the food hall trend continues to sweep through the nation, it's all hands on deck. And those hands need to work together to produce what remains a complex, multitiered type of project.

FOOD HALLS

CASE STUDY: B&I SERVERY GOES FOOD HALL

THE TRANSFORMATION FROM CAFETERIA TO FORUM 55.

By Amelia Levin





In a marked departure from the typical B&I servery of the past decade, Eurest transformed its former cafeteria on the concourse level of the 50-story Mid-Continental Plaza into a 7,000-square-foot, chef-driven food hall showcasing popular independent concepts from around the city. Open to the public, Forum 55 not only draws office workers from the building but also those from nearby hotels, locals, and visitors perusing Millennium Park and the Art Institute of Chicago across the street.

“We wanted to offer downtown workers and visitors more delicious and convenient options for lunch,” says Jim Kallas, Eurest division president. “This is an opportunity to partner with some great restaurants in the city, offering them a central location in downtown Chicago.” To recruit vendors, Eurest reached out to some independents in the city and was approached directly by others.

“Surprisingly minimal changes were needed to redesign the space,” Kallas says. “A lot of changes were more cosmetic in nature, such as Edison bulbs throughout to give it a soft glow. Designers also brightened up the space with white subway tiling, a lighter-colored ceiling and bright wood floors.”

With 10 different vendors, patrons can choose between ramen, sushi and poke bowls from Friends Ramen; barbecue from Pork & Mindy’s; grass-fed burgers and sandwiches layered with craft meats from Butcher & Larder Grill; tacos from Mercadito Taqueria; pizzas and pierogis from Flo & Santos; and more. A mixture of high-top and traditional seating make up the 270

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seats throughout the space. Silver, red and black chairs add pops of color to the space.

During the a.m. rush, the Prelude station offers build-your-own omelets, breakfast sandwiches, hash and sides as well as locally roasted coffee from Sparrow.

Forum 55 also houses The Apron Exchange, a business incubator for minority-owned start-ups; a rotating pop-up restaurant concept; a marketplace; and what Eurest claims to be one of Chicago's largest salad bars, called The Community Garden. The 24-foot-by-7-foot serving island features fresh produce, composed salads, soups, hummus and more made with seasonal foods sourced directly from Midwestern farmers. The salad bar's wood and stone accents help create a natural, earthy appearance.

At the Monroe Street Market, patrons can choose among grab-and-go items like fresh pastries and donuts in the morning, sandwiches and salads in the afternoon, and all-day snacks, again featuring locally sourced foods. There are also items from restaurant partners, like pickles from Local Foods and barbecue sauce from Pork & Mindy's.

In a concept unique to Forum 55, a pop-up restaurant stall showcases a different global menu each week. Eurest Regional Executive Chef Joel Cooper creates items like build-your-own masala rice bowls, bibimbap, superfood-packed Earth bowls, pasta and noodle creations.

Patrons use a high-tech ordering system to place their orders online or at various kiosks located throughout the space, which sends the order to the individual stations. By opting in via text messaging, customers can sit with friends until their food is ready, rather than stand in line.

"Not only does this system cut down on crowding around the various stalls, it also allows busy office workers, who may only have a half an hour to eat, more free time to relax and socialize," says Kallas. "In fact, through the online ordering system, customers can order up to three days in advance for their food."



LOCATED INSIDE A CHICAGO SKYSCRAPER, FORUM 55 TRANSFORMED THE FORMER CAFETERIA SPACE INTO A UNIQUE FOOD HALL THAT DRAWS BOTH OFFICE WORKERS FROM THE BUILDING AND LOCALS. THE OPERATION FEATURES 10 DIFFERENT VENDORS, INCLUDING PORK AND MINDY'S, WHICH FEATURES CELEBRITY CHEF JEFF MAURO'S SLOW-SMOKED MEATS.



VENDOR ADVICE

TWO FOOD HALL VETERANS OUTLINE KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESS.

By Amelia Levin

Andrew Gruel, chef and CEO of fast-casual seafood concept Slapfish, vegan-friendly Butterleaf and Jidori-chicken focused Two Birds, faced some unique challenges when first expanding into a food hall. In similar fashion, Kevin Corsello, founder and CEO of Pork & Mindy's at Forum 55, learned a lot from his experience entering the food hall arena. They offer some sage advice that operators and their support teams should take into consideration when deciding whether to enter into a food hall agreement.

Consider the location. Many food halls operate in high-traffic business districts meant to draw busy workweek crowds. This serves as a double-edged sword: great during the week but not so much on the weekends. "When you see the population drop off suddenly, the food hall concepts are being cannibalized because you have a dozen concepts trying to fight for \$16 worth of business," says Gruel. He also stresses the importance of studying the demographics in the proposed area to ensure they line up with your concept.

Kevin Corsello, founder and CEO of Pork & Mindy's at Forum 55, also heavily considered location before venturing into the food hall business. "We seek high-traffic, corporate neighborhoods such as the Chicago Loop and downtown Minneapolis," he says. "These areas are full of employees seeking convenient, quality options for breakfast and lunch. We also want to see other high-quality, chef-driven concepts become a part of the food hall, as we have a certain brand standard to uphold."

Pare down the menu. When Gruel first opened Butterleaf, his vegetable-friendly restaurant, in a food hall in Irvine, Calif., he admits he started with too many items. "I would stick to one or two items on the menu so you can have just one or two primary cooking vessels and maintain really high volume, speed of service and quick throughput in a short period of time," he says.

Corsello says Pork & Mindy's did not alter the menu for its food hall locations but rather chose to stick to a few, already popular smoked and barbecue items. At the same time, the team continually tests possible future items. "We use our flagship Wicker Park neighborhood restaurant in Chicago to experiment with new menu items, as we have already built a loyal customer base," he says. "Our executive chef and Food Network star Jeff Mauro spearheads our menu development, so as you can imagine, our standards are very high. Once the new items receive approval from our customers and team, we roll them out in our food hall locations."



Ask about marketing support. What is the food hall offering in terms of marketing and publicity support? Without enough support, it's easy for brands to get lost in the crowd of concepts under one roof.

Still, some brand awareness is already built in with the food hall. "While some food halls bring a smaller footprint, they still generate awareness and introduce the brand to an entirely new group of customers, who may never have heard of us without visiting the food hall," says Corsello.

Inquire about rent structures and facility maintenance. Some landlords offer rent on a sales percentage basis, rather than just a flat fee for all, which can hurt concepts with inconsistent weekly sales. Also, ask if the landlord offers cleaning and equipment maintenance services. These added costs may not be ones that an up-and-coming food hall brand can handle.



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NEW FOOD HALLS

A LOOK AT A HANDFUL OF NEW FOOD HALLS ALREADY SEEING MUCH SUCCESS.

By Amelia Levin

ZEPPELIN STATION, DENVER

Opened in December 2017, Zeppelin Station spans a 100,000-square-foot, LEED Gold-certified building in Denver's artsy-industrial RiNo district. It includes shared office space as well as a culinary concourse with various street food vendors, multiple bar concepts and a full-service anchor restaurant. Chef-driven vendors include Aloha Poke; Fior Gelato; Vinh Xuong Bakery; Au Feau, serving Montreal-style bagels and Canadian poutine; Namkeen, serving Indian street snacks; Injoi Korean Kitchen; and more. The space also includes a pull-up bar inspired by European rail stations for those looking to catch a quick drink before catching the train. To reduce indoor water demand, the building features water-efficient flow and flush fixtures. Additionally, 70 percent of total energy costs will be offset through the purchase of green power for a minimum of the first two years of operation to reduce the building's carbon footprint.

AVENTURA MALL TREATS FOOD HALL, MIAMI

Opened in late 2017 by real estate development firm Turnberry Associates, Treats Food Hall resides on the third level of Aventura Mall's 315,000-square-foot expansion wing. It features a collection of nearly a dozen local and national eateries, including Miami's first Figs by Todd English, Danny Meyer's Shake Shack, Luke's Lobster, GOGO Fresh salads, ZUUK Mediterranean Kitchen, Poké 305 and



more. Illuminated primarily by natural light, the bright and energetic space includes a mix of communal seating, shared bar tables and intimate banquettes as well as an outdoor patio.

CHINA LIVE, SAN FRANCISCO

Restaurateur George Chen partnered with notable design firm AvroKo to open a 30,000-square-foot, multiple-floor food hall in San Francisco's Chinatown last year. The expansive space includes multiple street food stations with food inspired by the cuisines of China and Thailand. Four counters surround the walk-in-only seating space, each dedicated to a different style of cooking: barbecue and grilling, wok and seafood, dumpling and dim sum, and dessert, supported by a shared back kitchen area. Sparing no expense, custom cookware was shipped in from China, including a traditional giant green ceramic slow cooker cauldron used for curing meats and boiling soups. Additional pieces include custom-made dumpling pans, flanked by glowing copper counters, tables and chairs made from reclaimed Northern Chinese elm, and a ceiling displaying Chinese characters. China Live also houses Oolong Café, a grab-and-go tea and pastry outlet; Bar Central, serving food and drinks; Market Restaurant, a 120-seat full-service res-

taurant focused on dim sum and Chinese barbecue; and, most recently, Eight Tables, an intimate fine-dining restaurant modeled after the exclusive dinners served at Chinese chateaus.

BLOSSOM PLAZA'S POTLUCK, LOS ANGELES

Once a transit-oriented apartment community in downtown Los Angeles, the nearly two-acre development is being built out as Potluck. It's evolving into a curated mix of dining and entertainment options created by partners Joey Ngoy, Tsz Chan, and other restaurateurs and chefs, and backed by Forest City Realty Trust Inc. Set to open this spring, the food hall will feature six restaurants, offering everything from fried chicken to Hawaiian garlic shrimp and more than 30 different empanadas. Songbird will be a coffeeshop by day and cocktail lounge by night, and LA Wine will feature single vineyard wines and craft beer selections created by up-and-coming producers. **FE&S**