

PROPERTY

DESIGN



Cafe de Coral at Harbour City, Tsim Sha Tsui, above and below middle, features pockets of interesting zones. McDonald's in Admiralty, left, and a branch of Yoshinoya in Central. Photos: Bling Studios, Landini Associates, Sum Sing



Fast diners channel new looks for new experiences

Food chains seek to build mood and image over the ever garish and louder

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Despite McDonald's claim to selling 75 burgers every second worldwide, the man who built the world's largest fast-food chain, Ray Kroc, insists he is in the business of real estate, not hamburgers.

So when sales started to flag a few years ago, it was real estate, not recipes, that McDonald's took back to the drawing board. The outlet in Hong Kong's Admiralty Centre, opened in December 2015, was the pilot project of that exercise worldwide.

That took designer Mark Landini, founder and creative director of Landini Associates in Sydney, Australia, back several decades to his days as a young professional working in London. "When we all had ponytails, were wearing expensive Jean Paul Gaultier suits and carrying Filofaxes, McDonald's was the coolest thing on the planet. We used to go there for breakfast, for lunch, and after the pub," he said.

Landini considers the cheeseburger, when it arrived, as "genius". Fast forward three decades, and he concedes that the brand had "lost its way a bit". "All we're doing [as designers] is making fast

food meet the market again." For the pilot project, Landini opted for an urban vibe in a "palette of materials you wouldn't normally associate with fast food", like concrete, steel, glass and oak.

"We took out the ceiling, and balanced the hardness of concrete and ceramics with a much softer, more interesting lighting scheme."

The lighting, which dims at night to induce relaxation, was integral to his push back against the trend among chains to be ever garish, louder, brighter.

"People had associated fast-food restaurants with laminates and plastics and bright colours," he said. "A good restaurant, especially in a densely populated area, needs to be a place of respite and rest where you can stop and enjoy either the food or the company of

friends. It's a leisure moment – so it needed to be quieter."

The layout is also pivotal. "We've created places you can choose to suit your mood – in a window or a quiet corner, or with friends at a long high table to watch the barista make coffee." Places were needed, he says "for people to sit and be human again".

Landini Associates, which also designed the staff uniforms and environmental graphics as part of the project, has since overhauled two other McDonald's outlets in Hong Kong – in Tai Po and Citipiazza in Taikoo Shing, both of which opened in May this year. He believes the "simple and classic" design palette will not date anytime soon.

Hong Kong's local fast food chain, Café de Coral, has adopted

a similar approach with the latest renovation of its Harbour City flagship in Tsim Sha Tsui for what it terms as its "5th generation design". Candice Chan, founder and creative director of J Candice Chan, chose a "soothing colour scheme, sophisticated furniture and modern use of sustainable green materials". "Unlike other quick-server restaurants in the market," she said, "the design aims to create a New York bistro with a touch of garden theme."

The shop is designed to satisfy different dining groups, Chan explained. "This might be executives who are in a rush, young couples seeking a quiet corner, or a corporate group wanting a communal space to collaborate their ideas," she said. Each of these "pockets of interesting zones" inherits its own characteristics.

The architects also collaborated with a young local artist to create a bespoke mural depicting

the daily lives of Hong Kong people. "Scenes such as ferries on Victoria Harbour, flamingos in Kowloon Park and famous statues in the Avenue of the Stars are a reminder of our beautiful home," Chan said.

In one of the busiest commercial districts of Hong Kong, designers Four Lau and Sam Sum of AS Design Service channelled the "slow pace and coordination" that is the Japanese way for the design of Yoshinoya in Central.

"Our brief was to turn Yoshinoya's image from fast-food chain into a higher quality brand image, appealing to the new generation," Lau said.

Associating the elements of fashion, luxury and class with quality of life, the design urges the uber-busy younger generation to slow down and spend time with friends. Its "optimised luxurious residential dining environment" introduces younger Hongkongers to a new way of living, Sum said.

Shaping a sense of "home" as the core brand value is achieved through soft lighting, modern wall lamps, flat picture frames, and calligraphy containing special meanings. With a natural stone doorway matched by accent interior colours, simple architectural lines, casual bar and a feature imitation roof chimney, its designers say the restaurant "successfully becomes the new focus and hangout spot in the heart of downtown".



The interior of the McDonald's outlet in Admiralty is designed to 'suit your mood'. Photos: Landini Associates