

THE TRENDS IN ART, FASHION AND DESIGN

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THE
EVOLUTION
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*Equality, simplicity,
collaboration: the new rules
of the female century*

Fast Moving Gourmet Food Case Study

Itsu, London, by Afroditi Krassa

Afroditi Krassa's design concept for Itsu attempts to achieve a contemporary understanding and representation of Japanese culture. Most of London's Japanese eateries reference very traditional Kyoto or the ultra-minimal theme. Krassa instead drew inspiration from central Tokyo, which she describes as 'hyper-real'; neon signage, cartoon culture, typically overloaded Japanese packaging design are combined with more traditional elements such as Shoji screens and cherry blossom imagery. The final design also draws on the way that food is now increasingly related to good health and good looks. 'We believe that it is now time to move to on the next step, which is to build the fun into eating healthy food,' says Krassa. 'It is not just good for you but, a bit like applying make-up, it helps you feel and look better. A lot of the influences came from the way cosmetic and fashion retailers work

and brand their products. We looked closely at several contemporary cosmetics brand and tried to learn from them.' The impact on sales has been phenomenal: the Vogue House branch of Itsu made, in a single week, the equivalent of six months' earnings of the previous occupants, in some weeks making a bigger profit than the local McDonald's. The Piccadilly and Broadgate outlets both made record sales in their first week of opening, outstripping projected profit figures. Itsu is currently opening another four sites, plus two in New York. Krassa, who is currently finalising a new concept in office design, says: 'My overall design concept is that the previous dealt with form and function, while now we have entered a digital era, where consumers expect physical objects and spaces to fulfil another request: the sensorial. The experience of using a space, the feedback of a product or space, are becoming more and more important.'

www.afroditi.com



The Iitsu Japanese concept (left), designed by Afroditi Krassa www.afroditi.com, www.iitsu.co.uk; a selection from Deliverance (below) www.deliverance.co.uk

that can be enjoyed at work or at home.' Menu highlights include baguettes filled with lobster, crayfish or foie gras and even a plat du jour, a complete meal in a box, with bread, a drink (wine, if desired) and a delicious pastry. Specialities such as pate, baby leaf and lobster salad and tarte provençale all feature as mains.

DINNER KITS

Another concept, Warwickshire-based Gastronomaut, creates and delivers frozen restaurant-quality meals to the consumer's door. All the meals are produced by hand, to order, by Gastronomaut's chef, Damon Corey. The menus make maximum use of free range, seasonal and local produce. The menu includes chickpea, sweet potato and coconut curry, baked organic salmon with parsley sauce and Savoy cabbage, or braised lamb with leeks and haricot beans, and starting prices are as low as £4.50. Leaping Salmon in the UK and Urbanbite in the Netherlands offer similar services.

According to researchers from WGSN, the fashion and lifestyle website, this trend is also taking root in the US, where meal preparation stores such as Dream Dinners, Let's Dish and Sayrelyn's Culinary Classics are proving a hit with time-poor foodies. Pre-prepared ingredients and recipes that can serve up to six are created at 'meal assembly stations' in a couple of hours and taken home to freeze.

BREAKFAST BARS

Meanwhile, Chicago-based Cereality has created the 'gourmet cereal' market. The cereal café is designed to create a relaxed Saturday morning vibe, and allows customers to mix and match a wide variety of cereals, toppings, 'slurrealities' (cereal meets smoothie) and seven different types of milk.

According to president and CEO David Roth, the FMGF breakfast concept was destined to resonate with consumers and leverage pre-existing brand loyalties. 'The great thing is that the customer can personalise their breakfast experience,' explains Roth. 'It can be healthy and organic, with wholegrain cereals and yoghurt, or you could create your own idea of a gourmet cereal, complete with malted milk balls, pop rocks and lucky charms.'

Another new concept, Cerealicious Cafe, a cereal buffet serving 32 brand-name varieties, oatmeals, smoothies and a choice of 40 cereal toppings, is rolling out in Columbus. Sites near Case Western Reserve University and Kent State and Bowling Green State universities, along with

Manhattan, Florida and Chicago, are potential targets of an aggressive plan to build 100 cereal cafes in the next five years.

According to Bill Lubinger, reporting on Cleveland.com: 'Cereal has gained cachet in places as disparate as boardrooms and college campuses. The cereal-is-in trend stems partly from the widely publicised health benefits of whole-grain foods, but also the demand for prepared foods that can be consumed quickly and relatively cheaply.'

FUTURE GROWTH

The European Market for Gourmet Foods and Beverages 'Packaged Facts' report says that European consumers are spending \$20bn a year on gourmet food. Growth in the European market is expected to reach over \$40bn by 2009. Furthermore,

American adults who consider themselves gourmet consumers are fuelling a \$41.2bn industry. The market for gourmet foods and beverages will top



