

My opinion on the Innovative Coffee Concept from Paul

Paul, the leading bakery restaurant chain in France has recently opened a new store called “Innovative Coffee Shop” located by one of the busiest exhibition park in central Paris. An ambitious tagline that drew my attention to figure out what it’s exactly all about.



In fact, this is not Paul itself that designed and operates the store but travel retail expert Areas (Elior Group) that partners with Paul to serve the clients of the exhibition park.

What strikes first when discovering the store is the pretty unusual and impressive size of the stand-alone building. Up until now, Paul has been used to set up a comprehensive network in city centres and shopping malls through small format stores and kiosks.



The store has the characteristic to be open from both side of the street. First, Paul welcomes Parisian inhabitants with an entrance by the inner city boulevard. That is where the brand showcases its traditional bakery and its bread counter. This is also where the “innovation” lies. The store is the first franchised outlet to be equipped with a traditional baking room and a kneading, whereas every single in-store branch operated by Paul features them since the very beginning of the brand expansion.

Here at Porte de Versailles, visitors can enjoy seeing bakers working on the spot. A key feature to lure bystanders and trigger a desire for a warm and crusty croissant.



The restaurant is also opened on the other side, inside the exhibition center, to welcome not only visitors who pack the place 100 days a year but also the associates who work here every day to maintain the exhibition property. Additionally, the entrance enables Paul's staff to easily supply the kiosks housed in the multiple halls of the park.



On sunny days, the store provides its clients with a fancy terrace. No doubt that it will be very much appreciated.



Inside the store, this XXL Paul features an original decor. No more dark wooden floor and stoned walls, as in Paul's traditional and slightly outdated shops, but a refreshing sleek and light Scandinavian touch that makes a lot of difference and impact. The luminaires, wrapped in a wicker basket, refers to the traditional French bakeries furnitures.



The store also benefits from a large dining room located on the first floor that can accommodate a large number of guests. A variety of chairs and tables offers a bespoke environment for either groups or customers alone. To be frank, I would have appreciated decor elements that spice the place up and bring a more cosy atmosphere. For example, beautiful pictures of bread and pastries fresh from the oven would have been fine and would have supported the brand positioning as well.



The store designers paid attention to the toilets and they were absolutely right. This is unfortunately still an issue in French restaurants.



What about the product range available here? Nothing noticeable I am afraid. Except from a small “white collection” of a few new recipes, this Paul sticks to the offer you can find in every non-franchised Paul. Too bad.



Kiosk for breads and pastries



Kiosk for snacks and meals



While walking through the hallway, visitors pass by the production workshop where sandwiches and desserts are made or baked in-house. The place is clean and professional and gives customers a positive feeling about quality and expertise.



Let's wrap up the visit.

- The architecture of the building is spectacular but suffers somehow from a lack of visual contrast with the buildings around it. A lot of customers are still discovering the store by accident. On top of that, the location is 20 meters away from the pedestrian traffic and the metro stations. The brand has tried to cope with this location issue installing a massive sign to help people identify the store. Will it be sufficient enough?



- The pain point is that the store is overpromising innovation and underdelivering it. Even though this Paul has the opportunity to offer a much wider and creative range of products – including hot meals such as burgers and pizzas – to meet the customers expectations and the potential of the catchment area, all you can find here (at least up until now) is the regular Paul's line of products.
- The store design is worth a visit. The experience is both comfortable and relaxing and much more contemporary than the usual Paul's look and feel.

At the end of the day, the store is much more a large and contemporary Paul rather than an innovative one. Which is perfectly fine. What is innovative for the operator is not relevant from a customer standpoint in the sense that customers don't make any difference between a franchised or a non-franchised store. The brand is seen as a whole. I have to say that I don't understand why Paul 's parent company has accepted that Areas branded the store like this. .

In any case, we are still waiting for a refreshed Paul concept that would project the brand in

the 10 years to come. Stay tuned.

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