

My opinion on the new BHV Food District in Paris

The BHV Marais department store, housed in the spiffy and trendy Marais district in Paris, has undergone a strategic repositioning over the last years to target younger, fashion-conscious and progressive audience. In that perspective, the store has recently opened Parisian Omnivore District, an original food court located by its building dedicated to men's apparel.



The food court is installed in a pretty secluded backyard. Despite the signage efforts to lure customers in the zone, the area still suffers from a lack of visibility. That is the way it goes sometimes in old cities like Paris.



At the time I visited the store, a rain proof canvas had been installed to protect the whole area from winter weather hassle. Unfortunately, it results in a pallid light environment. Something to fix with appropriate lighting systems.



The food offer features 7 robust look-alike kiosks which showcased a creative line-up: coffee and pastries, fresh juices, lobster rolls, souvlaki (Greek sandwiches) as well as Portuguese specialties.





At lunch time, the kiosks are conscientiously preparing fresh food on the spot while engaging conversation with the customers in a friendly atmosphere. That is one the reason why food halls are superior in term of experience to standardised food courts we can find in traditional shopping malls for example.





Even though prices are pretty high for fast casual food- 20 euros on average for a decent meal - the food is both tasty and generous.





The space around the food kiosks houses some trendy chairs and tables to share with your neighbours and a few plants as a decor. But, we could have expected more comfort to engage people to stay longer and bring also more life and energy into the whole food court.



The kiosk operators have been selected by a dedicated team comprising food experts -who run a few trendy restaurants in Paris- and the BHV team. The leases run up to 12 months and the rents are made up of a fixed part and a relatively challenging variable part. Kiosks have to achieve significant turnover to make a profit. And consider renew their leasing contract.

Up until now, the footfall in the Omnivore Food District is still lower than initially expected. In my opinion, it is due to a conjunction of multiple factors:

- the lack of visibility of the food hall from the street,
- the limited space of the food hall and the way kiosks are clustered around it that do not result in strong visual impact,
- the fact that the food offer doesn't comprise traffic builder propositions such as traditional burgers or a more vibrant coffee shop. In my opinion a refined pastry counter would be very much appreciated as well. And finally, I assume that vegan and gluten-free concepts would have been likely to meet the expectation to the local inhabitants.
- The whole place needs live animation and events on a regular basis to make it more energetic and vibrant.

As a conclusion, I would point out that it is too early to say whether the Omnivore Food District has been a success or not. As every retail innovation, it takes a bit of time before it can benefit from positive word of mouth and consistent footfall. In my opinion, some fine tuning is still necessary to adapt the food offer to the local environment.

In any case, BHV Marais initiative to provide visitors with this creative food experience makes a lot of sense in its quest to position itself as the most urban and innovative department store in Paris.

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