

ZA Urban and Literary Café in Paris

The recently revamped Unibail's trophy asset "Forum des Halles" in Paris offers the opportunity to discover new brands and new retail concepts. Marketing insights galore.

A few days ago, I shared a post about French sport and apparel retailer GO SPORT which revealed its new retail concept at the same Forum des Halles. My post [HERE](#) (in French only for now, sorry about that)

Today, I would like to take you for lunch at ZA, the very latest restaurant concept brought by successful French entrepreneurs - Fabienne et Philippe Amzallak - who teamed up again with iconic designer Philippe Starck (their previous collaboration in Paris gave birth to hip and trendy restaurants such as Bon or My Cocotte)



Restaurant Bon - Paris 16



Ma Cocotte - Puces de Saint Ouen

With ZA, they propose us an innovative catering experience. A combination of healthy food + digital experience + literary place. Food for thought and the other way round.

A urban literary café of the XXIst Century in one of the busiest shopping mall in France.

Really alluring, isn't it ?

I therefore planned a visit on April 12th to make up my mind.

1 - THE LOCATION AND THE PLACE

ZA is occupying a comfortable 600 sqm premises ideally located under “the canopy” (the brand new gigantic glass roof on the mall’s ground floor). Huge footfall is expected. No doubt.









And ZA will definitely need footfall. I can barely figure out the rent and service charges that go with this prime location. I assume that Unibail (the owner of the property) has made some effort to attract such a creative and unexpected food place in its mall. But still.

Operating expenses are probably high too. I can see an extensive team, both in the kitchen and in the room. It takes a big staff to run such a large restaurant.

According to members of staff, 1,000 customers every day are expected, 7 days a week to meet the owner's business objectives.

As the other brands located in the same area, ZA is not really visible from the outside. I bet that Unibail did not allow brands to install outdoor signage to keep the building architecture neat and unspoiled.

From a property company it makes sense.

For the retailers, it is a major problem that could affect their business. No doubt that they will argue with Unibail on that issue very soon.

To make up with this lack of brand visibility, ZA has placed its funny delivery bike nearby its entrance. Retailers must be savvy.





Anyway, ZA will benefit from an outdoor terrace in the garden to be completed in the months to come. This terrace will bring extra visibility and competitive advantage to the restaurant.



New Forum des Halles and the future garden.

Inside, I really appreciated the simplicity of the decor. Starck has chosen clean, natural raw materials for the furnitures. Everything is well laid-out. Zen and neat. The digital screens above the kitchen are really visible and stand out from the rest.



I noticed the book shelves with their concrete base. Beautiful.



2- ERGONOMICS AND OPERATION

ZA is a digital cafe. Let is be said.

Make sure you bring your smartphone there. Otherwise you would be in trouble.

As soon as you come in, an associate (cool and friendly) checks if you know how this place works. If you don't, he encourages you to follow 3 simple steps:

A- Connect to Wifi. No problem. it goes smoothly and fast. And no need to fill in a boring form to access the service.

B - Download the ZA App (AppStore or Android) Here again, no problem.

C - At last, turn on Bluetooth.

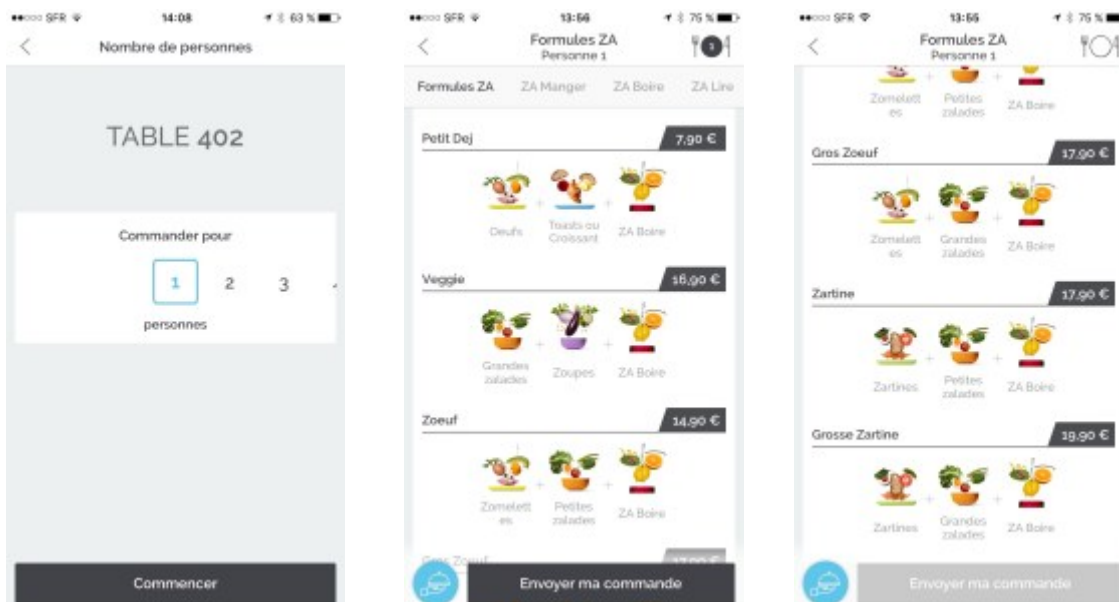
Ready ? Go sit.

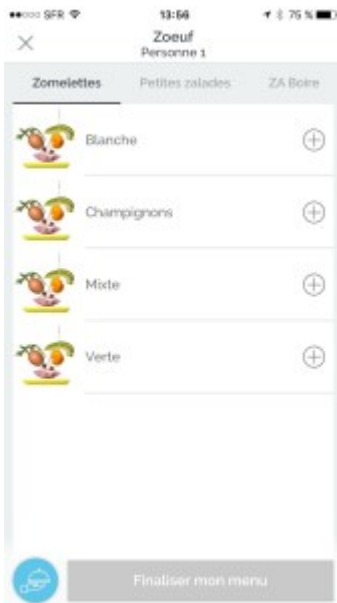
To order, you will just need to use the App.

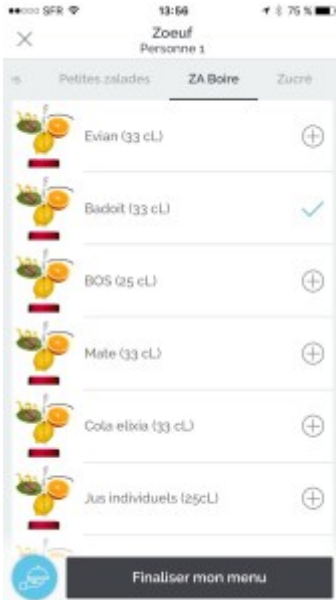
First of all, place your phone right on the number of your table.

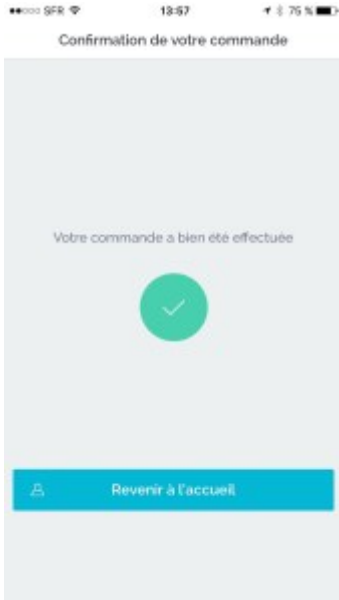


And then, you are set to order on the app. Less than 10 quick steps are needed.











The technology is fluid and simple. I appreciate some features such as the option to split the check.

In case of technical problems, you can ask for help just pushing the blue icon on the bottom left of the screen. An associate will be next to you in a minute.

And I did have problems. Many.

First, my smarphone (iPhone 6) could not connect to the table I first picked up. After many attempts and help from the staff, I gave up Table 401. Table 402 is running OK. Phew !

Once my mind made up, I decided to pay in cash. Done. I waited for my tray to come automatically in front of the number of the table, as in a Japanese restaurant.

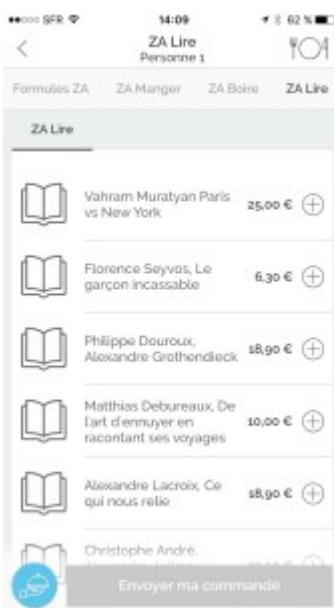
Unfortunately, fifteen minutes later, still no tray. I asked an associate who told me that, for some reason, my order had not been registered. But, as I paid in cash, I did not get any receipt. The associate had to believe me that I already paid. Uncomfortable situation. Finally, I ordered again orally. For a digital cafe, kind of irony, don't you think ?

Not a big deal. Technical problems may happen. Especially in an early stage of a store.

3 - THE EXPERIENCE

While I waited for my meal, I wanted to know more about the literary side of ZA experience.

With the App, you can choose from 7 books and buy them on the spot. No best sellers here. Not even famous authors.



But, you can also access a much larger choice (2,000 books according the staff) through a tablet brought to you by the manager (and the manager only).

The tablet offers you ORSERY service, a digital publishing company. You can choose a book on the tablet and get it printed on site through a big copy machine in the restaurant. 8 minutes are needed to get the book printed.



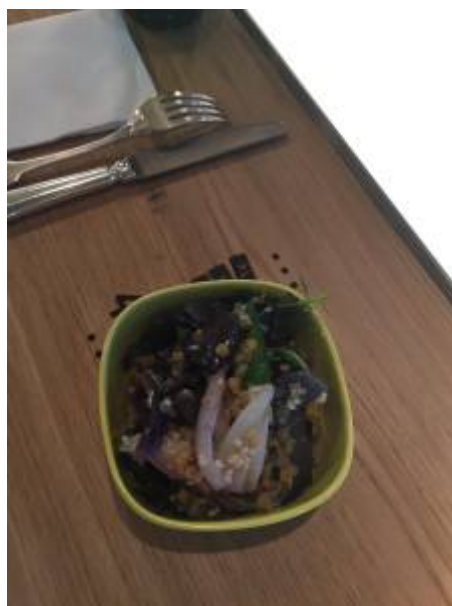
I have to say that I could not find a book I would like to read. I am a heavy novel reader though. Maybe ORSERV is experiencing problems to convince famous authors to join its platform.

The giant printer in the restaurant is kind of ugly. And nothing has been done to nicely showcased it for the moment.

I bet that ZA will give up this printer soon and set up a comfortable lounge to read books from the shelves instead.

4 - THE FOOD

My tray suddenly stopped right on my table spot.



Lentils and eggplants salad



Omelet with mushrooms

Don't be afraid. It was much better than it looked like. Fortunately !

It did not look nice indeed. The "small salad" I ordered was actually very small. And the basic omelet was just decent.

14,90€ beverage included. This is the price you pay in whichever Parisian Brasserie for the same kind of meal.

Anyway, I felt disappointed and did not feel like generating a positive word of mouth for ZA.

I regret very much that the healthy food I had was not properly enhanced through the presentation. The yellow plastic tray did not bring any nature feeling and positive memory.

I have the feeling that ZA has done much better in design than in food. I am sure you already

felt the same in trendy and hip food places around the world. Those that remain successful never underestimate food quality.

Everywhere in Europe (especially in London or in the Netherlands, which I know better), I can see new food concepts popping up at every corner. Most of the time with ambition and quality.

At the Forum, I regret that the “Halles Spirit” is not present anymore. I spontaneously think of DE HALLEN in Amsterdam, a vibrant and exciting food court that brings an amazing continuous flow of urban consumers.

Don't you think it would be successful in Paris as well ?



De Hallen - Amsterdam

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