



KINGMOND YOUNG, SAN FRANCISCO

EXPERIMENTAL TASTES

By Anne DiNardo, Managing Editor

Safeway pairs its private label brands with a fast-casual dining concept called Citrine. The goal: to spice up the grocer's own in-store food offering.

Today's foodies have a lot to chew on. There's the variety of restaurant offerings, from full-service to fast food to fast casual with curbside pickup. Grocers are also trying to get a seat at the table, using expanded food offerings as new and fresh ways to differentiate themselves. That competition has led to an explosion of prepared food and take-home meals available from the same place where you pick up that gallon of milk and loaf of bread.

Above Sitting at the bar at Citrine New World Bistro, guests have a view into the open kitchen as well as the wine display. Both elements complement the brand's emphasis on culinary exploration.

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— ERIC DANIEL, WD PARTNERS

Safeway Inc. (Pleasanton, Calif.), the national supermarket chain, is responding by bringing a new player to the table. But this retailer's concept isn't another store prototype with an expanded deli section or an in-store café. It's a 5000-square-foot, fast-casual restaurant called Citrine New World Bistro, in Redwood City, Calif. It's not located near a Safeway grocery store. It doesn't even carry the company name on its façade.

"Citrine is part of the Safeway strategy to test and prove many of its retail meal and food concepts," says Jeff Shamburger, Safeway's vp, marketing.

By testing its private-label products on an actual menu (which changes seasonally) for a dining audience, Safeway is trying to better understand emerging food trends and consumer expectations. "Fast-casual restaurants are the big thing right now because they're responsive to customers' desires for better food at a certain price point and delivered in a convenient manner," says Eric Daniel, prototype director for WD Partners, a Dublin, Ohio-based design consultancy.

At Citrine, guests and their taste buds can tour the globe, with a menu organized into seven regions of the world, including Mediterranean, Latin and Pacific Rim. Items such as Thai lemongrass and sweet chili, Italian pizzas and fresh mozzarella are served, plus a selection of international wines, craft beers, coffees and teas. All the while, Safeway is educating its customers on branded products available at its grocery stores, such as O Organics and Rancher's Reserve, by listing them on the menu. "The restaurant serves as a lab where the average shopper learns what they can do with the ingredients available from Safeway," says Daniel.



Left Citrine's first location, in Redwood City, Calif., doesn't carry the logo or name of parent-company Safeway. Guests learn of the brand connection by reading the menu, where Safeway products are listed with various dishes.

Below The fast-casual, limited-service concept means customers pick up a menu inside the door and proceed to the host station to place an order. Guests seat themselves, while servers bring meals out to the table.





Several seating configurations, including a bar near the kitchen, freestanding tables or booths for the most private and quietest of settings, allow patrons to choose how they spend their time at Citrine.

Below Carryout orders are picked up at the "dash & dine" counter next to the host station.



Citrine's emphasis is on fresh and healthy meal solutions, and elements within the restaurant communicate that message. A vibrant graphics package features food-as-art images of pasta, vegetables and fruits. Light woods, bamboo flooring, stainless steel and warm tones peppered through the dining room add to the bistro environment. Guests can choose from several seating options, including stools at the wine bar, community tables in the center of the room or more private booths and banquettes. A separate entrance and counter, called "dash & dine," handles carryout orders and complements the convenience of the fast-casual experience.

Behind the host station, the message "Where do you want to go today?" encourages customers to listen to their stomachs as well as their thirst for travel and adventure. The same question could also be applied to grocers and their ongoing efforts to satisfy shoppers' needs. With Citrine, Safeway is taking a step toward answering that question. ▀

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