

# Shopping for Pleasure

*Speciality Retailing, Leisure and Tourism*



High Street, Lincoln

## 8.1 INTRODUCTION

8.1.1 Once, all shopping was speciality shopping since everything was handmade or hand grown and sold by independent retailers. Additionally, the activity of shopping was intermingled with other pursuits associated with fairs, markets and street entertainment which ranged from jesters and pugilists to passion plays and religious festivals to the less savoury spectator sports of bear baiting and public executions. Industrialisation, the influence of retailers such as Thomas Lipton, improved communications and the institutional organisation of what had previously been more spontaneous entertainment spectacles changed this complex melange, which had included shopping, into more segregated and separate activities. The corollary has been to standardise shopping and entertainment experiences and thus to make both the activities, and their physical manifestations, difficult to distinguish between one city centre and another. Where towns have managed, against the odds, to retain some individuality and local character, the ingredients which have helped to make a difference invariably include the surviving elements of speciality shopping, including markets, combined with more distinctive, local manifestations of entertainment and leisure.

8.1.2 The point is underlined by analysing why so many purpose built English shopping centres are bland and characterless. The stereotypical frontages

of high street multiples diversified with the occasional multiplex could be anywhere. In North America, the essential 'wrongness' of this standardisation has been recognised and has generated a major backlash which has spawned centres full of individuality, diversity, colour and imagination. The 'Festival Marketplaces' - Faneuil Hall, South Street Seaport, Ghiradelli Square - not only feel 'right' in the context of bringing back the traditional mix of fun and trade, but they work commercially - in North America they are twice as productive as traditional shopping centres (Retail, Leisure and Tourism: ETB/JLW). Where they have been tried in the UK - Covent Garden, Albert Dock, Princes Square - they seem to work as well. The question for English historic towns is perhaps not 'how do we create a festival market place in our historic town?', but rather 'how do we restore the intrinsic qualities exhibited by such facilities in our traditional centres?'

8.1.3 The lessons from North America are that speciality shopping can be remarkably successful if the conditions are right and if the schemes have the right ingredients. Currently, in the UK, conditions are right and nowhere more so than in historic towns. These conditions include:

- growth in recreational shopping
- growth in tourism both domestically and from overseas visitors
- a shifting emphasis to speciality or niche retailing by the retail industry
- expansion of leisure interests and associated merchandising
- growth in the heritage and nostalgia markets
- a growing awareness of style and design
- a significant expansion in demand for more diversified eating opportunities

8.1.4 The ingredients which help to produce the intrinsic qualities necessary for success include:

- usually small, generally independent (exceptions include Sock Shop, Body Shop, etc.) retail outlets specialising in market niches and providing retail depth (e.g. 100 sorts of teddy bears) rather than retail width (e.g. 100 sorts of toys) - these

- can be market stalls as well as shop units
- retail opportunities which are different from the high street offer
- shops which appeal to tourists/visitors, leisure/pastimes shoppers, collectors/enthusiasts and niche luxury shoppers
- retail opportunities which add to the critical mass of the shopping offer and increase the catchment opportunities for customers to see something being made and to buy it (arts, crafts)
- unusual opportunities for catering (see the food being made, local produce, micro brewery)
- opportunities to view, and participate in, varying forms of entertainment (galleries, recitals, street theatre, living museum type activities, children's activities, exhibitions, carnivals)
- ingredients which enable the experience to be constantly changing
- fresh quality produce in traditional food markets

upon ambitious plans for developing a raft of 'eatery' chains from quick snacking establishments to formal dining and there is significant variety even within each level (e.g. snacking can range from burgers to croissants and speciality ice cream). The Butlers Wharf/Shad Thames scheme in London provides an example of how effective the right catering solution can be both in terms of atmosphere and viability. Additionally, as suggested earlier, there is an increasing trend for making food, eating out and buying to take home being integrated in the same operation and in some cases extending into the 'tourism experience' area. Obvious examples, more developed perhaps in the United States or mainland Europe, include the bakery/coffee shop/cook shop, the chocolatiere/coffee shop/ice cream parlour/sweet shop (Ghiradelli in California or chocolate shops in Belgium) or craft micro breweries.



Market Place, Newark

8.1.4 Factory outlet malls, although relatively limited in this country, and so far concentrated on out of town locations, perhaps have a role to play in the speciality/leisure retail area. The clustering of 'designer' shops, with the novelty of affordable prices, creates a kind of



Ghiradelli Square, San Francisco

speciality centre in its own right while many of the US examples diversify the 'offer' with themed catering and shops selling local specialities, crafts etc. There may be scope, as in the United States, to allow the development of factory outlets in town centre or edge of town locations in order to add to the retail offer, act as a local attraction, and draw in new custom.

8.1.6 Finally, various forms of leisure are increasingly emerging as development partners for speciality shopping areas. These will range, at the modest end of the spectrum, from small, children related facilities (crèche, play ground, play shop) and other attractions like tourist information centres through medium range attractions including small museums, audio visual shows, small visitor attractions (e.g. sea life centre) or static exhibits (e.g. a ship or railway engine) to major facilities such as family entertainment centres, multiplex cinemas or significant sport/leisure schemes (e.g. ice skating). Carefully designed, executed and managed, such leisure/retail schemes can add to the 'critical mass' of a town and help to support its existing retail economy.

8.1.5 Catering growth may also provide a significant stimulus or anchor for a speciality development. UK and US multiples have embarked





## 8.2 RELATIONSHIPS

8.2.1 Speciality shops and leisure uses are rarely a draw in their own right although there are few exceptions (e.g. Covent Garden, Albert Dock) and some historic towns rely on the speciality/leisure mix as possibly the essential ingredient in their attraction (e.g. York's combination of speciality shops, Jorvik, Castle Museum, etc). More typically, it is the balance between speciality shops/leisure and high street multiples, and the different but complementary roles which they perform, which will determine the vitality and viability of a centre.



*Street entertainment, Covent Garden*

8.2.2 Multiples generally provide the anchor or magnet to sustain the regular flows of shoppers to a centre. These outlets provide the retail width of a centre and their range and quality will determine the relative success of centres competing within a region or sub region. Where this multiple 'offer' is relatively undifferentiated between towns, other factors will begin to determine why shoppers will choose one shopping destination over another. Although many factors will affect this choice (e.g. access/accessibility, historic character, parking, safety, pedestrianisation, quality) one of the most significant factors will be retail depth and associated leisure opportunities. This will include the range and uniqueness of speciality shops, including markets, and the range of complementary leisure offers (e.g. museums, galleries, festivals, spontaneous entertainment).

8.2.3 The multiple/speciality relationship will tend to be symbiotic since the presence of healthy multiples with a constant customer throughput will provide a good anchor for the independents and the leisure activities. For their part, the speciality/leisure combination will offer the 'uniqueness' factor differentiating the centre from 'anywheresville' and not only providing a draw for the regular shopper but also performing a tourism/visitor magnet function and, ultimately, a spin-off for the multiples.

8.2.4 The degree to which speciality shops/leisure have a role to play and consequently the balance of these facilities with the high street 'standards' will be governed by issues including:

- immediate catchment
- competing centres and the potential to compete with them
- levels of local disposable income and growth potential
- accessibility
- actual and potential tourism/visitor role
- multiple 'offer'
- potential to develop a speciality role (e.g. image, branding)
- opportunity to expand/integrate speciality/leisure

8.2.5 While the presence of a healthy tourism economy (e.g. York, Bath) or a strong regional centre role (e.g. Norwich) will provide a firm base to enhance speciality/leisure provision, opportunities will exist for other centres to diversify and therefore strengthen their retail facilities. Some smaller market towns, for instance, can sustain arts/craft oriented speciality centres supported by spontaneous or occasional leisure functions (e.g. street performers, festivals). Others can create an attraction role by marketing their particular assets related to, perhaps, a retail niche (e.g. antiques, books, collectibles), while some may be able to sustain a relatively high level of traditional independents (e.g. traditional grocers diversifying into delis, traditional butchers, cheese shops).

## 8.3 POSITIONING

8.3.1 The rental power of multiples means, generally, that they will occupy the 'prime pitches' in the shopping centre. However, their general demand for larger, more modern units has resulted in some speciality or leisure uses surviving in smaller, historic units in the core or in distinctive historic structures (e.g. arcades, market halls) which multiples are unable/ unwilling to occupy. More usually, however, speciality retail and leisure uses have tended to occupy secondary streets on the fringes of the prime or to be clustered around key attractions. More recently, specific speciality schemes have sought to create a 'critical mass' of their own often away from established shopping centres. This approach relies upon a sufficient range of shopping and other uses bolstered by other attractions such as a significant building (e.g. Leeds Corn Exchange) or a waterside location.

8.3.2 Essentially, there is no standard formula for achieving an effective level of speciality retail and associated leisure provision, but the following hierarchy of opportunities may be a useful guide:

### *Principal Streets*

- maximise opportunities for speciality/leisure in small units not suitable for multiples; in historic structures (e.g. arcades); by backland/courtyard provision off alleyways from the prime; above or below street level.
- if conventional unit opportunities are limited, a stereotypical high street full of multiples can be diversified by market stalls, barrows, street performers and entertainers.
- existing street markets can be regenerated by physical improvements, tenant control management and marketing

### *Secondary Streets*

- promote these areas for speciality/leisure uses and enhance their attraction by signing, paving, traffic calming, frontage enhancement schemes, parking improvements, better public transport and enhanced links to the prime.

- undertake the development of a new speciality centre within and behind the facades of existing secondary areas creating new shopping courtyards (e.g. York, Bath)
- convert significant historic buildings or complexes for speciality shopping centres

### *Off Pitch Areas*

- stand alone speciality and leisure schemes will generally only work if there is the critical mass to attract a sufficient level of customer flow and if links to the main activity areas are effective - Tobacco Dock in London is an example of possibly getting the first point right but not the second.
- consider the opportunities offered by integrating a factory outlet centre into the main shopping area

## GUIDANCE

- 1 Determine whether there are opportunities to increase the level of speciality representation by:
  - numerical comparisons with similar centres (e.g. number of outlets per thousand catchment population)
  - comparison of 'speciality range' with other centres
  - approaching speciality centre developers/operators
  - seeking advice from consultants
  - promotion of markets as part of the tourism "product"
  - consider factory outlets as a tourist/retail draw



*The Mustard Shop, Norwich*





- 2 Identify locations for additional speciality provision
- 3 Develop local plan policies to control issues such as unit size and overall level of floorspace
- 4 Analyse location and develop strategies and initiatives to integrate the location with main activity areas
- 5 Market the area as part of the town's overall promotional activity to potential retailers and customers
- 6 Retain careful management control to focus on the mix, of genuine speciality and sustain quality
- 7 Information and interpretation of the historic elements for uses.

### **CASE STUDY: REINDEER COURT, WORCESTER**



*Reindeer Court, Worcester*

The development of a group of small speciality shops and restaurants in the heart of the historic centre of Worcester.

Reindeer Court is a recent shopping development situated between New Street and The Shambles, adjacent to the main shopping streets of Worcester.

It was originally backland, providing car parking and access for the surrounding properties. The conversion of a derelict 15th century coaching inn gave the opportunity to provide a narrow arcade

of speciality shops (31 units), the design of which reflects the historic flavour of this part of Worcester, adjacent to the old medieval city. Listed buildings have been tastefully converted and blended with new build to provide an “old world” atmosphere.

The mall now connects three shopping streets that were formerly not linked here, providing new pedestrian and covered routes in the heart of the shopping centre. The entrance on to New Street provides access to the pedestrian bridge from the St Martin's Gate multi-storey car park, thus providing a more direct and vehicle-free route for shoppers to the main centre. Within the Reindeer Court scheme, a new square has been created, adjacent to Milners Café bar which provides outside seating in summer. The whole development has an historic feel that is attractive to tourists as well as residents. Genuine speciality shops occupy the majority of the scheme and include boutiques, jewellery, crystal-ware, and even a juggling shop.

This gives an indication of the scheme's success as even during the recession only 6 units out of the total of 31 became vacant. A small number of flats above the shops have also been incorporated into the scheme.

### **CASE STUDY: OLD RED LION COURT, OFF BRIDGE STREET, STRATFORD-UPON-AVON**

The scheme comprised the conversion of the Old Red Lion Public House to form two retail units, the demolition of part of the public house and outbuildings and the construction of nine retail units to form a shopping court.

The Old Red Lion is a listed building and lies within a Conservation Area. The scheme retained the main part of the former public house. A number of internal walls and features were removed but some were retained to preserve the compartmentation and domestic scale of the interior.



The total retail floor area created was 1,215 sq.m. The new retail units are two storey, constructed and finished externally with render, brick and plain clay tiles with stainless steel and hardwood framing used in the construction of window frames and glass screens.

The scheme presents a well-designed solution to the re-use of the redundant building and the redevelopment of the site. The development retains the courtyard and its domestic scale and character. Internally, a degree of 'opening-up' was conceded to enable a retail use to be practicable.

All retail units are occupied and the scheme's prime location (just off the main shopping street) was an important factor in this. The unit size has controlled the development, with occupiers including a hair and beauty salon, restaurants, womens fashion and leisure wear.



Old Red Lion Court, Stratford-upon-Avon

## Further Reading:

1. *Leisure & Retailing: Oxford Institute of Retail Management, Longman Group 1990*
2. *Speciality Shopping: Jones Lang Wootton, 1989*
3. *Speciality Shopping Schemes: Stratford on Avon District Council*
4. *Tourism Strategy: CBI*
5. *Retail, Leisure and Tourism, London: English Tourist Board and Jones Lang Wootton 1989.*
6. *Leisure facilities in shopping centres: Shopping Centre Horizons Autumn: 13-21. Harrison J. 1990*
7. *Opportunities for Shopping and Leisure Development: Chestertons, 1985.*
8. *Visitor Expenditure in Scarborough Town Centre: Scarborough B.C. and U.R.P.I. 1986.*

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SIMONS