



Going to Market

With its new concept, Canadian food retailer Longo's shows there's more to grocery design than aisles, checkout counters and endless shelves.

By John Ryan, European Editor



TOP Created in 1957, the famous mural "The Story of Oil" is a reminder of the site's history as the headquarters of one of Canada's largest oil companies, Imperial Oil.

SUPERMARKET DESIGN TEAMS ARE FREQUENTLY challenged to make the mundane interesting. At its most basic, a grocery store consists of a series of aisles with merchandise-filled gondolas, followed by a row of checkouts. Getting away from this model frequently proves problematic for big operators across the sector.

Longo's is one exception, however. The Toronto-based grocery chain, with a number of branches in the greater Toronto area, recently launched a format called The Market by Longo's, and the most outstanding example of its outside-the-box format can be found at the downtown Imperial Plaza condo development. The store design is the handiwork of Glen Kerr, principal, and Ferial Rahbari, creative director, at Ampersand Studio (Toronto). Work on The Market by Longo's occurred over the course of a year, opening this past October.

Built in 1957, the building is described by Kerr as a heritage site: "It was the Imperial Oil building (until 2004), and is [currently] being converted into retail and condos." Due to the historic nature of the site, the renovation has meant the store, a modest 8500 square feet, has features that needed to be kept intact, including a 40-by-20-foot marble mural, called "The Story of Oil," which depicts the location's rich past.

"It became a challenge, because you want to make the most of the heritage of the building, but not let the heritage overwhelm your client's brand," Kerr says. "We needed to find the balance between showcasing heritage elements ... [while creating] branded elements that were impactful enough to stand out."

Relatively small compared to most grocery stores, it could not contain all that a supermarket normally offers. Instead, Kerr explains, it operates as more of



a convenience store for urban shoppers on a “food-for-today” mission. He says that, from the start, the design’s intent was partly to emphasize the produce selection: “With Longo’s, they’re known for their fresh offerings, so we wanted to make sure this store was a ‘fresh’ shop. We even did the marketing campaign for the opening with the [tagline]: ‘Now that’s fresh.’”

In navigational terms, the store is easy to read. “You don’t have the sense that this is a store that pulls you in and you’re going to get lost,” he says.

As a result of the location’s heritage, it has a bipartite floor plan, wherein marble and granite form the key materials near the checkout. Deeper into the store, and beneath the lower ceiling heights, there is a “more modern palette of materials,” says Kerr, including ceramic tile and reclaimed wood around the perimeter.

Rahbari says that the design is the outcome of a deliberate restriction of the material and color palettes in order to complement the marble and make “the products [the] hero. We wanted to be respectful and complementary to the heritage aspect of the building.” She continues: “There’s more of a streetscape feel and market sense, and that there is less of a grocery feel [to the store].” Rahbari says that



each area was designed to be different and the model was “an old European market feel.”

Longo’s is currently in the process of implementing some of the location’s design details to other urban sites. “Some components, like the chandeliers and window display, were site-specific, but the new market concept is being rolled out [market-wide],” says Rahbari. Elements carried over to other stores will include “the look and feel of the communication, finishes and the market feel of the space.”

If differentiation and engagement are what’s being sought in a food-shopping experience, then this new format from Longo’s has just what customers are looking for: aesthetic appeal, true brand identity and a strong sense of heritage, proving that grocers don’t have to adhere to old stereotypes. ▾

ABOVE To differentiate the brand from its heritage site, while paying respect to the building, designers created impactful signage with bold lettering and illustrations, which achieved both design intents.

ABOVE LEFT With a smaller-than-most floor plan, The Market by Longo’s is intended to be a “fresh” convenience store for busy urban shoppers of Toronto.

PROJECT SUPPLIERS

RETAILER
The Market by Longo’s, Toronto

DESIGN
Amperсанд Studio Inc., Toronto

FLOORING & WALL TILES
Olympia Tile, Toronto

MILLWORK
Aspen Architectural Millwork,
Bolton, Ontario

REFRIGERATION/FIXTURES
Neeland,
Burlington, Ontario

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