

# FRAME

## The Milan

## Experience

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The Great Indoors

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Landini Associa

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# Food for Friends



Landini Associates

Supermarket

# A Toronto supermarket by Landini Associates makes a theatrical meeting place for the local community.

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Photos Trevor Mein



The store's 'brutal' façade is softened by colour and light.

## Loblaws Great Food

**Location** Maple Leaf Gardens, corner of Church and Carlton Streets, Toronto, Canada

**Design** Landini Associates (landiniassociates.com)

**Architecture (exterior)** Turner Fleischer Architects Inc.

**Sculpture** Streamliner Fabrication Inc.

**Murals** Wall to Wall Murals Limited

**Signage** Somerville

**Lighting** Hammerschlag + Joffe Inc.

**Materials** Concrete, marble, plywood, granite, ceramic tile (walls), vinyl tile (floor); laminate

**Area** 8000 m<sup>2</sup>

**Completed** 30 November 2011

For Canadians, a home-cooked meal is no longer synonymous with simplicity. As the culture embraces cooking as theatre and groceries as status symbols – fetishizing the fresh, the locally produced and the organic – retailers are transforming the experience of food shopping into something equally flamboyant. The new flagship store for Canada's Loblaws chain may be the best example yet.

Its interior design, by Sydney-based Landini Associates, is ground-breaking. Where category leader Whole Foods designs its stores around a bland loft aesthetic, Loblaws does the exact opposite. The 8000-m<sup>2</sup> store brings together some spectacularly theatrical ploys, such as an elevated open kitchen and a cantilevered cheese cave, to help create an environment that's rich in experiential detail as well as in



Sketch for the pizzeria, showing the early decision to use reflective materials and relatively low-key lighting.

## Dramatic Lighting

Most food stores leave shoppers and products bathed in high-frequency fluorescent light. Not so here. Instead, rectangular downlighters, hung low, light the shelves, while separate fixtures light the aisles. Elsewhere, dramatic sconces cast shadows and keep the overall level of illumination eye-pleasingly dim. 'At some places we installed no lighting at all, which is very unusual in supermarket design,' says Landini.

colour and ornament. A cookery school, a café and other social spaces add vital amenities to a newly residential area lacking facilities. Landini, a former creative director at the Conran Group who grew up in England and Italy, won a limited competition to design the space as part of a team led by Toronto's Turner Fleischer Architects.

The store occupies the ground level of a former ice-hockey arena, Maple Leaf Gardens, which was the home of a professional team, the Toronto Maple Leafs, for 68 years. In hockey-obsessed Canada, the building is something of a holy site. 'Part of the brief came from the city, which wanted our design to refer to this history,' says Landini. 'But what we didn't want was to create a little museum. The store is on an important corner, and it was important to create something very active.'

Landini's design plays with Toronto's hockey history in explicit terms. In the underground parking garage, murals are based on the Maple Leafs' championship years, indicated in large print and on ...

**'The materials we used are unexpected in a food store'**

Rectangular downlighters, hung low, add drama to the space, while spotlights highlight produce.

Landini Associates



CRAB

INTERNATIONAL FISH

LOBSTER

SALMON

SHELLFISH

SHRIMP

FULLY COOKED

SMOKED FISH

EXIT

per  
et



Presiding over the escalator is a dramatic 12-x-12-m blue sculpture, in the shape of a maple leaf, which is made out of seats salvaged from the building's past incarnation as an ice-hockey stadium.



An early sketch for the entrance demonstrates the bold colour palette.

## 'We wanted to do something passionate'

A visual for the deli and cheese section shows the alternative, neutral palette created by concrete, steel, and the building's existing fabric.



... varying scales along the walls. Inside the store, shoppers find a 12-x-12-m sculpture, in the shape of a maple leaf, made out of seats salvaged from the building. And marking each checkout counter is an LED sign that mimics the flip-dot technology of the hockey arena's hallowed signs.

Yet Landini's design also responds in unexpected ways to the architectural character of the building: a concrete barn built cheaply and quickly in 1931. To Mark Landini's Australian eye, its expressive structure and austere modernist façades seem 'brutal' and lend themselves to a similarly rough aesthetic. Along one exterior wall of exposed concrete, he preserved the painted outlines of an original staircase, which now zigzags far above the floor level of the store.

'The materials we used were certainly modern,' he says, 'and not ones you would expect to see in a food store.' Indeed, there are large walls covered in glossy red-

## Vibrant Colour

The store's most unusual aspect is its palette, which is dominated by a vivid orange for the floors and bold red accents. Landini says these choices were intended to make the store stand out, to distinguish it from competitors with simple shelving and polished concrete floors. 'We wanted to do something that was more passionate,' he says, 'and our challenge lay in creating a meaningful connection to the brand.' He made that connection with the use of orange and red: the same colours appear on the Loblaw's logo.

ceramic subway tiles, and columns and walls panelled in plywood with a rich stain. The main materials are exposed raw concrete and bold-hued vinyl-tile flooring.

But the designer's eye is most visible in

several architectural interventions. The store's prep kitchen, for example, is suspended a full level above the retail floor. Here 16 chefs work behind display windows, visibly preparing food for the store's restaurant counters.

Then there is the Wall of Cheese: a 6-m-high stack of fridges, their glass doors ready to slide along bare I-beams. Inside are more than 400 varieties of cheese, including a 45-kg wheel of Stilton. Conceived by Landini, the wall provides a visual spectacle while also signalling the store's quality and breadth of selection. Although the interior design represents some bold thinking about merchandising, it also echoes the experience of food shopping before and beyond supermarkets. 'In Italy, my aunt always went to the market three times a day, even though she had a fridge,' Landini recalls. 'She would go to get out into the world. Here, we wanted to create a meeting place, and I think we've done that.'

Blocks of bright colour distinguish the store from its competitors and connect with the hot red and yellow of Loblaw's logo.





Associates

Sliced just the way you like it

We will happily slice your bread to any thickness. Just ask.

Supermarket

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A nostalgic font for the sign and rows of wicker baskets give a village-store feel to the bakery.



## Low-Tech Lettering

The store's wayfinding system features an unusual stencil-like font, which the design team based on stencilled section and seat numbers found on the existing walls of the Maple Leaf Gardens arena. Used in various scales, the font adds a hint of low-tech roughness to the store's glossier surfaces. There are some exceptions to the rule, including the metres-high word 'DELI', which – moulded into a concrete wall behind the deli counter – echoes the style of the font on the main façade, and the retro lettering used for 'Bakery' and 'Patisserie'.

*'We're not reinventing, but rearranging'*



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A sketch for the signage showing the simple, nostalgic approach.

## Making Maple Leaf

For the Loblaws project, Landini Associates took its usual approach, exploring early ideas through 'scrapbook visuals', resembling mood boards, which reference elements that go into the finished design. 'Many of the

items used in these visuals are from our completed projects,' says Mark Landini. 'We are not reinventing but rearranging.'

In tandem with the scrapbook visuals, the office creates computer-rendered views, which become what Landini terms 'iterative design-development tools'. He explains: 'We tend to start with only one or two of these views, which help us to explore the lighting, the development of material use and the overall form. We change and update them constantly until we are satisfied. As a multidisciplinary team, we're all working in one studio at the same time. That means we consider graphics,

Signage refers to the stencilled numbers that once identified the stadium's seats.

lighting and materials as a whole, right from the start, rather than layering them onto the design at a later date, as many studios do.

'For the supermarket, the first two views we created were of the entrance, with the chair sculpture, and the deli/canteen area, where we used concrete and steel with a striking red floor. We then made an animation that moved through the whole space, allowing the client to view our complete vision.'

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Delectable treats on show entice shoppers to dine in the deli section.



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The café provides its surroundings – a newly residential area still lacking facilities – with a vital social space.



## Rich Experiences

The store is located in a commercial district of central Toronto that is acquiring a residential character in the form of new condominium towers, but has few residential facilities at the moment. To cater to the new locals, Landini's team persuaded Loblaw's to offer an unusually broad array of in-store amenities. These include a café, with broad windows facing the street corner; the separate Tea Emporium, which offers free samples of ten varieties all day, every day; a cookery school, with a large demonstration kitchen at the middle of the store; and extras such as a bakery, a sushi bar, a pizzeria and a pasta bar.

Floor plan.

1. Natural foods
2. Dairy
3. Meat
4. Butcher
5. Fishmonger
6. Health and beauty
7. Natural foods
8. Grocery
9. Medical centre
10. Vitamins and supplements
11. Customer service
12. Pharmacy
13. Checkout
14. Bakery
15. Cheese wall
16. Tea emporium/  
Patisserie
17. Café
18. Produce
19. Salad/juice bar
20. Bread
21. Deli
22. Canteen
23. Take-out
24. Sushi
25. Floral
26. Cookery school



Level 1.

Level 2.

Landini Associates

A sketch shows the relaxed approach to the eating areas.



*'We wanted to create a meeting place'*

The checkout area is backed by a mural referencing local history.

Supermarket

