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Jamie Kennedy



CANTEEN CREDENTIALS
QVC wanted a boutique look that reinforced the brand while providing a relaxed atmosphere



Gareth Sefton from SeftonHornWinch worked closely with GMW Architects on all the food and beverage outlets

“There’s only one access point and you don’t want people crossing. We worked with SHW to come up with the best layout”

As seen on TV

QVC has been on a mission to create a round-the-clock kitchen operation for staff and visitors – and for its millions of viewers. Jackie Mitchell visits the channel’s new UK base

Relocating a 24-hour TV shopping channel without a blip in service for viewers would be challenge enough for most. Throw in creating three kitchens – a staff restaurant, a reception area café and a studio kitchen for demonstrations – and the task is daunting.

That’s what shopping channel QVC, watched in 195m homes worldwide, pulled off last June when it moved its UK headquarters from Battersea, south London, to a £33.6m

purpose-built media and commerce centre at west London industrial complex Chiswick Park. The building houses two double-height studios, each equipped with one manual-pedestal and three robotic cameras to broadcast 17 hours of live TV a day.

The company finished televising from its old building at 2am on 7 June and was live on air at 9am the next day from its new building.

“The building needed to reflect us as a brand,” says QVC head of

facilities Helen Fenton. “We wanted a boutique look but at the same time a comfortable, relaxed atmosphere.”

FCSI member SeftonHornWinch (SHW) worked with GMW Architects on all the food and beverage outlets: a ground-floor café; a first-floor self-service staff restaurant and kitchen; and a second-floor preparation kitchen for TV cookery demonstrations. QVC hired contract caterer Graysons Restaurants 12 months before the move, so it could be involved in all the key decisions.

Staff restaurant and kitchen

QVC broadcasts 24 hours a day, with live programming from 9am to 2am (UK time), taking a break only for Christmas Day. With a daytime staff of 480 and

70 others – mostly production staff – who work in the evenings, QVC needed catering facilities to suit a variety of people and tastes, from a woman who wants a simple salad to an IT worker who fancies a curry. As well as the studios, the building houses back-office operations including accounts, mechanical and engineering, as well as 200 buyers.

And there are celebrities to take into account. Pop star Lulu appears on the channel, as does the BBC’s *Strictly Come Dancing* judge, Bruno Tonioli, with his new QVC *A Taste of Italy* cookery show.

SHW carried out face-to-face interviews with QVC staff to find out exactly what they wanted from their new restaurant. Gareth Sefton FCSI from SHW says, “They wanted a reduced menu

with the dishes changed regularly so they weren’t faced with the same item every day, as well as freshly cooked high-quality food at sensible costs, with improved food presentation and speedier service.”

One of the aims of the new restaurant – simply called Canteen – was for staff to use it throughout their working day, not just at lunchtime. So instead of conventional seating throughout, the 90-seat restaurant includes a casual area with brightly coloured sofas as well as long tables for communal dining and team lunches. The tables also allow people to dine in smaller groups or alone.

Nicky Fraser of GMW Architects says one of the biggest challenges was designing the restaurant for flow. “There’s only one access point and you don’t want >

DAVID CHURCHILL/JACKIE MITCHELL

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Hours of live TV broadcast by QVC each day

195m

Number of homes across the world that watch QVC

90

Seats in the new staff restaurant

150

Average number of lunches served each day

LIGHT TOUCH Chiswick Park's media and commerce centre (right) is home to QVC's airy staff restaurant (below), featuring a stone hearth gas oven (below right)



people entering and crossing with people exiting. We worked with SHW to come up with the best possible layout."

A servery layout helped cut queuing, with multiple self-serve sections for food ranging from salads to potatoes and soup. "We made sure there was plenty of room in the servery for people to move around so it doesn't get congested," says Sefton. Fenton adds: "We normally only get two or three people waiting at any time."

"Customers want to see how their food is prepared and we wanted to bring the kitchen to the front of house. It's important for QVC to have flexible equipment like this"

Monochrome units were selected for the food stations to give a streamlined, spacious look. "The black tops of the units serve as a backdrop and highlight the colour of the food, especially in the salad section," says Fraser.

Instead of conventional lighting, metal bowl-shaped fixtures "bring shine and a little glamour into these areas", he adds.

Rowena Edwards, chief executive of Graysons Restaurants, says: "We love the

restaurant; the mix of seating and décor is very modern. We've had positive feedback from customers and have encouraged comment through the QVC staff forum."

Eye-catching, black mosaic tiling highlights the back wall of the stone hearth oven area for more glamour, says Fraser. The same mosaic treatment has been given to the back wall of the deli and sandwich station by the main entrance.

Blue and pink fleur-de-lys-patterned tiling also helps lighten the area. "We wanted to bring to life the rear wall and not just have a dull backdrop with a picture of fruit," Fraser says.

In the nearby pantry, staff create sandwich platters for larger group service and catering needs. Behind the deli sits the entrance to the staff restaurant's kitchen.

Although it has separate food stations, blending them into one unit has helped maximise workflow. As Craig Roberts, head chef of Graysons, says: "It's obvious the kitchen has been designed by someone who's worked in a kitchen. And it's wonderful to work in a new space with brand new equipment."

Included in the new kit, he says, are two combi-ovens that can bake, roast, grill, steam, braise, blanch and poach in



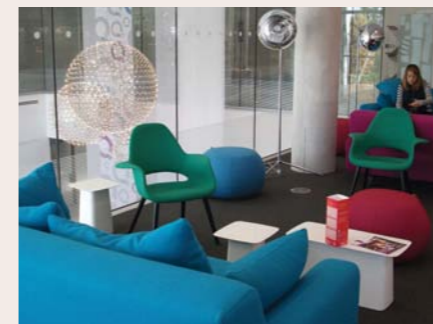
the same unit, allowing for different cooking temperatures and applications. Sefton adds: "Selecting equipment is all about practicality, budget, durability and capacity. You also have to consider how long the equipment needs to last. Our ethos was to make the kitchen easy to work in and energy-efficient."

For example, the warewasher uses heat-exchange technology to save costs by recycling the heat usually lost through waste steam. It also uses a heat pump to pre-heat the cold water coming in, reducing the need for higher-cost hot water.

The stone hearth gas oven in the new restaurant is another equipment highlight. It brings an element of theatre to the restaurant and operates 12 to 14 hours a day, both for regular service and staff meals. "The feedback we had from QVC staff was that they wanted a freshly-cooked hot meal," says Sefton. "This kind of oven can cook the spectrum of food, from garlic bread to meat and fish. We try

to break down the barrier between food served and the preparation area and this oven does just that. Customers want to see how their food is prepared and we wanted to bring the kitchen to the front of house. It's important for QVC to have a flexible piece of equipment like this, one that can adapt to new food trends." As a result, Sefton says, there has been a more constant stream of customers.

The menu on the day of my visit included beef bourguignon, battered pollock, vegetable stir-fry and various pizzas. Menus change weekly and the restaurant serves an average of 150 lunches a day. It is open from 7am to 11am, noon to 2pm and 4pm to 10pm. For staff working from 6pm to 9pm and at weekends there's an à la carte menu.



SITTING PRETTY The new catering operation includes (clockwise from above) casual seating areas in the staff restaurant; new equipment for Graysons head chef Craig Roberts; and a community-spirited meeting area

According to Amy Livermore, senior assistant manager for Graysons, the average spend is £2.50, depending on the menu. "We serve traditional gastropub food with occasional themed menus such as street food or for National Sausage Week. The salad bar and deli bar are popular because customers create their own dishes," she says.

Ground-floor café

The café next to QVC's reception area greets visitors as soon as they enter the building, giving an important first impression. It has the same light and airy feel of the staff restaurant with a choice of seating at long or smaller tables.

Meetings can be held here without the need to go through security. There are also several vendor meeting rooms, complete



with DVD players and HD screens, along with open meeting areas.

Fenton says the aim is to make vendors feel comfortable when they meet QVC buyers – there are 200 buyers covering a vast number of sectors including jewellery, fashion, electronics and make-up.

"The QVC café has a high-street coffee-shop feel," says Sefton, "but it's more casual and inviting and has a community spirit – not us-and-them."

SHW worked with the architects on the display counters and the overall design of the café, which serves speciality coffees, cold drinks and a range of snacks such as paninis, salads, pastries, muffins and croissants.

Preparation kitchen

The second floor is home to the preparation kitchen used for studio cookery demonstrations. "The food prepared here never gets eaten," Fenton says. "It's not a traditional kitchen. Around six vendors a day use it until 2am, so there's lots of storage space, two small domestic Bosch ovens, two walk-in freezers, 16 fridges and a lot of preparation space. There are masses of sockets so you can plug in any kind of equipment as required."

Sefton adds: "We approached this just like any other kitchen – people are still handling food after all. We designed a domestic kitchen to cook food the way viewers do at home, except for a stainless steel worktop and commercial dishwasher."

Fenton sums up the project. "SHW and GMW Architects both met our brief and produced a design that works beautifully. The restaurant is visually stunning but practical and the kitchen and café allow us to provide good food to a high standard," she says. ■

qvc.com www.shw-ckrc.com
www.gmw-architects.com
graysonsrestaurants.com

