

What's in store for Kensington



Above: the Whole Foods Market store in Austin Texas. The chain, which now has almost 200 branches across North America, will arrive in Kensington in June.

Retailers are used to architects, planners and builders having their say in the design of a new shop. But feng shui experts?

However, at Whole Foods Markets, getting the right energy flows, or qi, is, well... key.

Whole Foods Market used Brooklyn-based feng shui consultant Alex Stark to run the spiritual rule over the former Barkers department store. According to David Lannon, senior executive at the Kensington site, his findings were "very, very positive".

He said: 'We've added mirrors and theme colour in a few positions but he was very impressed with the building overall. There were a few locations, particularly in the back room where we've hung crystals, but most of the public areas were fine.'

He said feng shui principles guided the design - and the opening date - with "no sharp angles, no dead ends and no structural beams over shoppers heads," all of which would affect customers' energy levels, and

presumably their spending.

Overall, Barkers gave Whole Foods Market some major headaches because of its status as a listed building. Many of its art deco features, including the main staircase, had to be preserved.

The council also insisted the US chain restored the big window displays that were a feature of the store in its heyday in the Forties and Fifties. Decisions on what will be in them have yet to be finalised "but it won't be cans of corn or ready meals".

The store will be on three floors with a wine shop, flowers, a bakery, a charcuterie and a cheese shop based on Islington's Fromagerie on ground level.

The basement will have fruit and vegetables, dairy goods, meat, seafood, frozen food, cosmetics and "natural remedies".

On the first floor there will be 11 restaurants and takeaway food outlets, including a sushi bar, a pizzeria, a salad bar and a trattoria.

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