

# BlackBook

## PLANS FOR EXPANSION AT THE PLAZA FOOD HALL

By Kate Winick | December 19, 2011



Hotels exist in a sphere somewhere between public and private—however intimate the activities in the rooms upstairs, their public spaces are a site of ever-increasing interaction with the neighborhood. A hotel like the [Plaza Hotel](#), in New York, has traditionally held a strong place in public life, from hosting dignitaries to serving high tea to generations of little girls, and as we head into a new year, their latest public effort is expanding as a result of its success. The Plaza Food Hall, created in partnership with celebrity chef Todd English, has transformed the hotel's retail corridor into a feast of culinary delights that's drawn in thousands of visitors since its

opening in 2010. We spoke with Kristen Franzese, executive vice president at the Plaza and the managing partner of the Plaza Food Hall along with English, about what's coming next.

**How did the Plaza Food Hall take over the luxury retail corridor, which was something of a mixed success?**

I think we had a two-phase approach—the first piece was to expand the Todd English component, which will be the anchor to a culinary destination. It's not that the shops didn't work, but we're on a remarkable shopping corridor, so it's hard to find those that belong here that don't already have a presence here. Then, people kept asking for more of the food hall, so we thought it would be a logical expansion to take over the whole of the second level. Think of Harrods or a similar market that showcases great New York companies and brands.

**What were your criteria for selecting the vendors?**

We really had to think about the aesthetic components and how we'd create a distinct footprint and we just started talking to people, purveyors and vendors that we know, and virally we just got passed along to get to over a dozen new vendors. It was a really organic process.

**What are some of its unique visual design features?**

Our designer Jeffrey Beers really found a balance between nodding to the Plaza's heritage with the mosaics and unique lighting fixtures and great elegance, but updating it to look more modern. There are also specific things carried over, like the laylight in the food hall that references the laylight in the Palm Court. The Plaza to me always felt very warm, and everything will be redone with that in mind, in keeping with the current food hall.

**When is the new space set to open? Is it open in the meantime?**

It's due to open spring of 2012. The current food hall is open and it's been tremendously busy over the holidays. The traffic has been astounding. It's a combination of the draw of the food itself, where the wait can be 40 minutes, to some of the holiday offerings—there's a line around the corner for Santa. It's great food in a great area near great shopping, and there's a nice mix of visitors and local, it's the go-to lunch place in this area.

**Why open a food hall?**

The food hall was always part of our company plan when we reopened the hotel. It was just a matter of developing a concept, finding a partner, and thinking about what it would mean—the price positioning, the offering. We wanted an eclectic menu, with a market component, that could be reasonably priced and not feel too precious. Todd really understood what we were trying to accomplish, and we had a very specific idea in mind of what we wanted it to look like, and we just brainstormed together. He loves European style food halls, so it was easy to envision for him.

**What need does this fill for the hotel, and for the neighborhood?**

The current food selection is just unique in the range of offerings and how well we execute them. There's not a lot of places you can go if you want sushi but your girlfriend wants pizza—it's a great casual place to hang out, business travelers can dine here alone surrounded by great energy, and you'll see your food prepared; it's a whole experiential offering.

### **Who can we look for in the spring additions?**

[William Greenberg](#), which has had the best cherry pie and black and white cookies for years; [Luke's Lobster](#) is a really new and unique product. We didn't want a tremendous amount of overlap. [Francois Payard](#) will be with us, he's been at our café for the past year so he'll take a new space, and then [Lady M](#) makes the most amazing crepe cake I've ever had. But we also have [Sushi of Gari](#), which is a completely new and different component. They all collectively work together.

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