A. Flâneur SPEAKS OUT...

A. Flâneur is a regular contributor to Airport Retail News. He is an observant stroller who ambles through airport terminals, looking through the blank walls, past the proud edifices to glimpse the inner human drama of the passengers' experience in restaurants and bars, newsstands and specialty retail stores, gate areas and smoking lounges. In his opinionated fashion, Flâneur writes about his visits providing insight and background to each site.

The B-C Experience and Philadelphia Marketplace

The final leg of the USAir hub trifecta!

To be honest, I've postponed this visit for a long time because I had preconceived notions about Philadelphia (PHL) that would ordinarily doom my review to worthless negativity. I used to travel extensively through PHL, but that was in another life and before Marketplace assumed its developer role. Back in the early 90's the airport was a downright ugly thing to see and use. Its multi-concourse layout had been cobbled together seemingly off the cuff, as if to say nothing more elegant than, "If we need it, we'll just build another parallel concourse and attach it by a walkway." There was no hint of appealing to the eye or mind (nor the stomach or consumer inclinations, I might add) in any of this, and passengers like me tended to trudge to distant gates with our heads hung low in solemn reflection on the misery of our circumstances. The effect was just awful-more like a dilapidated bus terminal than testimony to the aviation age.

Obviously, USAir had better things in mind for its passengers and PHL had

better things in mind for USAir whose domestic hub operations monopolized the B and C Concourses. Each of these concourses had designated security lines at its base and the connecting hallway was pre-security and referred to as the B-C Connector. In the immediate aftermath of PIT's Airmall on the western edge of the state, a concerned PHL and demanding USAir observed that the B-C setup was begging for a world class centralized concession program. Up stepped BAA offering to work its brand of magic, but went with Marketplace Development's better sense of things.

Sense and Sensibility

Well, well, well...I couldn't be more surprised. Here's a concession plan that is incredibly attractive. And the lines! How on earth did Marketplace forge such perfect symmetry from this building? My preconceived notions were dashed at first instance. From the moment I stepped off the plane at the end of the C Concourse to my tardy arrival at my departure gate in the B Concourse, the wonders that I saw and experienced, captivated me.

Good is in the details. The more I think I've got my hands wrapped around this program the more complex it becomes. This requires a forensic analysis of sorts.

Initially, Marketplace received these two concourses and their landside connector and had to make some tough decisions. First and foremost of which was to relocate security so the entire program would be on the airside. This was probably a severely pitched battle since the Developer RFP did not contemplate anything quite so drastic. But, to Marketplace's credit, it knew a condition precedent when it saw one.

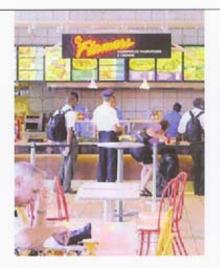
Airside programmable space in hand, the problem is that the security access points are at the base of the concourses at both ends of the B-C Connector, which means the O&D passengers are not forced into and through the central core



(the B-C Connector). The lease plan must draw them in. A destination program is required. Marketplace's derivative shopping center experience allowed it to see the wisdom of an imbedded food court, and their LGA experience reinforced the need to make the retail plan a true destination by combining dominant brands, concepts, and a sense of place. The integrity of the Philadelphia Marketplace mall rests largely on this draw. Otherwise, the O&D passengers will simply take the most direct route to their gate, thereby avoiding the mall.

The B-C connector also has an expedited walkway system, which runs the length of the mail but-and here's the tricky part-completely outside of and without interim access to the mall area. The transferring passengers must be encouraged to avoid the walkway and proceed more snail-like through the mall, or reverse their flow at the end of the walkway and enter the mall at the opposite end. Marketplace hedged its bet on the imbedded food court though an interesting design element: the demising wall separating the mall from the walkway is transparent glass. The glass wall serves double duty as the rear demising wall of the concessions on one side of the mall. This allows walkway pedestrians to see into and through the stores into the mall from the exterior (and allows incremental light and space attributes in the mall).

The retail leasing plan emanates out of the bowels of the mall, if the draw is effective enough, then the real estate near the center of the mall might approach the value of the real estate at the mall's openings. The latter has guaranteed passersby, albeit the portion tied to the relevant concourse, whereas the former operates on the if-come with aspirations of penetrating the entire passenger market. Marketplace has clearly succeeded in executing a very strong lineup of concepts and brands, and this is a Class A shopping experience in every respect—on airport and off. In fact, this is less a transportation facility with a strong concession program than it is a shopping center with gates. In many ways, Marketplace has beaten BAA at its own game. But it's not quite that simple. It never is. There's a Rubik's Cube

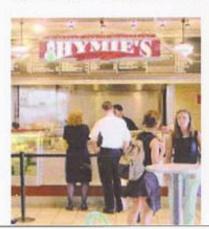


aspect to this perfectly symmetrical program. But I'll try to make light of the dilemmas later. There are more compelling things on my plate right now.

A Cornucopia of Riches

This is a foodie's dream come true.

What could anyone possibly want for? I arrived at the very end of the C Concourse. Normally, this would be considered the outer reaches and I would consider myself lucky to find a branded coffee operation, a limited sku newsstand, and a small bar catering to people who just have to. But I am instead immediately confronted by Jetrock Bar & Grill, Le Petit Bistro, and Jazz & Java. I am shocked. I am quite literally just standing in the hallway staring at what must be a mirage. Perhaps these operations are some kind of outpost destination? No, as I observe walking toward the terminal, they are just the beginning of a continuous parade of very good food & beverage concessions. In fact, it cannot be said that the concession program traits off down this concourse at all. The end is as strong



as the beginning and the middle. While this may seem to defy a business model that relies on the logic of diminishing passenger flows, it's one hell of an overthe-top service attribute in an airport. Most telling is that the design specs and build-out of even the most distant locations adhere to the same remarkably high standards as the prime real estate.

I had an espresso in Jazz & Java made by a young man with bright red streaks in his hair who advised me to "pick up around the corner, chief." There I found a brightly lit seating area that, at that moment, was the refuge of choice for flight crews who were content with their sandwiches and salads from Le Petit Bistro. The presentation of panini, focaccia and croissant sandwiches under glass at this restaurant is very appealing. I parked briefly in Jetrock to taste two Yuengling beer products-the Light Lager and Black & Tan-which I recommend highly. I skipped by Sbarro's, Philly Steak & Gyro (too early in the experience to push the envelope of my beltline), and Auntie Anne's to observe Sky Asian Bistro. Beautiful design, well staffed, interesting menu up front to browse, nice looking sushi being prepared in front of me...Okay, there's a quality level in this that makes me a little suspicious. And that means a.

Spotlight on a Local Operator

Local restaurant developer, OTG Management, provides the crowning glories of this F&B plan. Jet Rock Bar & Grill (B and C Concourse locations), Sky Asian Grill, and Cibo Bistro & Wine Bar do not appear to suffer from any of the limitations implied by the squeeze into airports. They are more than a step above the usual fare and far bigger than the spaces they occupy. These airport restaurants are the very definition of excellence. Somehow, in a way that I don't completely comprehend, operations combine superb concepting and identification; detailed and expensive design, furnishings, fixtures and construction elements (the variety of millwork finishes is remarkable); menus that deliver on the highest level of creativity and quality () am thrilled with Cibo's and Sky Asian's extensive array of well-selected wines by the glass, Sky Asian's noodles and wonderfully fresh and handcrafted sushi in a geographic setting not particularly conducive to such, and Jetrock's Americana fare and draught beer presentation); and high service standards (how are these employees sourced, retained and motivated?). I had no problems with the price points either.

So, my incredulity is perhaps understandable: how do these restaurants succeed under the weight of typical airport pressures? (I certainly hope the answer is not akin to the Saturday Night Live skit about the People's Bank of Change, where the bank's spokesperson notes that while none of the changemaking transactions make money the bank hopes to make it up on volume) We all know something has to give to meet necessary hurdle rates and, once the imposing design and construction elements are sunk costs, it is usually the wage and food cost variables (leading to lower service and food quality attributes). So, my hat is off to Marketplace for working a deal that allows for these operations and I look forward to seeing OTG expand their operations into other airports.

Philadelphia Marketplace Food Court and Beyond

The food court anchors the interior of the mall and is simply an exemplary execution. First, it's entirely visible from the corridor; second, it is not overconcepted; third, the counter space provided is actually enough for the operators to meet transactional needs; fourth, it has seating in spades; and finally, it is just an incredibly inviting welldesigned space with a high ceiling, a feeling of spaciousness and a bright lighting plan (visible weather notwithstanding, I can't imagine feeling the gray effects of a rainy day in this food court). I should add that I like the selected concepts and the deference to local brands, especially Flamer's Charburgers and Hymle's Dell. And I found Philadrink (another OTG operation) to be an aesthetically agreeable place to ponder my alternatives. T.G.I. Friday's (whose dark wood storefront design really

doesn't complement the program) and the particularly inviting Independence Brew Pub notwithstanding, the B Concourse F&B plan still beckoned.

And the B Concourse just makes my cornucopia analogy a silly understatement. Here I find OTG's Cibo Bistro & Wine Bar and their second Jet Rock Bar & Grill, along with Eat at Joe's (burgers et al), Bain's Deli, The Grove, Frozen Fusion, another Auntie Anne's, and Bubba's Baked Goods. The F&B plan is an absolute embarrassment of riches. I gained weight just thinking about it. I need to return to the mall to scope out the retail if only for health reasons.

Retail Through the Looking Glass

Well, first off, Philadelphia Marketplace entryways are wonderfully designed storefronts in their own right. The B side is framed by The Gap (beautiful store) and Staples (a spectacular leasing coup!). Caviar Assouline (whose presentation is kind of Petrossian-generic) and Discovery Channel Store anchor the C side.



Philadelphia Marketplace signage arcs overhead. Both entrances to the mall are as strong as I can imagine. As I look down the central corridor from one end to the other, I see a bright lineup of individual storefronts on the glass-walled side, an eye-catching blade signage program into Infinity. Very, very inviting.

