

# Pretzels and more from Energy Kitchen

In 2000, a young German chef convinced Selfridges in London to give him a small table in its food hall from which he intended to sell pretzels. This was the beginning of a brand that we know today as Energy Kitchen, selling juices, soups and pretzels in shopping centre locations. The chain is still small, but CB caught up with founder, Christian Gierstorfer at the opening of the new Swindon outlet in late summer.

Christian Gierstorfer is a trained chef who studied business at a hotel management school on a sandwich course based in Germany and here in Oxford. During a placement in London in the late 1990's, he couldn't help noticing that the choice of food available to shoppers was one of two extremes – either fast food or full sit-down restaurant. There was little in between and what there was tended to be a cold offering, like a sandwich. He came up with the idea of combining fresh juice with a hot soup, cold salad or healthy pretzel.

Christian's first venture involved him renting kitchen space from a hotel in Piccadilly Circus from where he baked and prepared his pretzels and sold them to local cafés and coffee shops daily on a sale or return basis. His big breakthrough came when he secured a table in the famous Selfridges Food Hall. The pretzels became so popular that Selfridges gave him a space in its Food Garden Café, he developed the soup, juice and salads and the concept started to take shape.

The London Selfridges initiative was so

successful that in 2001, Christian repeated the process, establishing his second outlet at Selfridges in Manchester's Trafford Centre. More stores followed, including Harrods in 2006 and then in summer 2007, the first free standing Energy Kitchen outlet opened in the Swindon Design Outlet. In this listed building, Energy Kitchen occupies a prominent position within the food hall in the centre of a mall. The customer can see all of the food being prepared and the offering has expanded to now incorporate hot drinks, sandwiches and smoothies. At the heart of the menu, however, is the pretzel. Energy Kitchen has worked with a baker to develop the pretzel dough, which is then baked-off on site. A sweet pretzel is also available; an alternative to the usual offering of cakes, doughnuts or muffins, which Energy Kitchen's menu does not usually include.

Christian himself designs the layout of Energy Kitchen outlets. The layout obviously changes depending on the space available, but the core principle is ensuring the customer flow is smooth. Christian explained, "Everything on the

counter is developed by me. When I did the first visual, I worked with a landscape artist and then a shop fitter in order to get the design to work. Sometimes we might get an architect involved too. There is a lot of innovation in the Energy Kitchen layout, which enables us to fit so much equipment into such small areas."

The choice of location, is, as always, very important. People don't go shopping for a pretzel or a soup, it's an impulse buy whilst they are shopping for something else. For this reason, Energy Kitchen tries to ensure its sites are highly visible and that its design and staff connect quickly with the customer, selling the fresh food concept and attracting customers. When opening a new site, Energy Kitchen believes firmly in the importance of sampling, to encourage the consumer to perhaps try something new and also to test out new recipes that are continually being developed.

With more outlets promised in exciting locations, Energy Kitchen is a name to look out for in the future.

[www.energy-kitchen.co.uk](http://www.energy-kitchen.co.uk)

