



Café Maia

The new coffee outlet at the University of Leeds, is fully sustainable, right down to the t-shirts worn by the staff. We chat to the team to find out why it's such a success.

Named after the Roman goddess of growth and rebirth, Café Maia is the eco-friendly café within the University of Leeds' new landmark £15m student services building. Incorporating the latest sustainable materials in everything from its design to the uniforms worn by its staff, Café Maia is the vision of project manager John Holley and designer Matt Fletcher. Both have their own companies but worked together on Café Maia after successfully collaborating on another university project, Mungo's Bistro, at the University of Kent, Canterbury, featured in this magazine in July.

Café Maia provides an important meeting place within the University of Leeds' £15m Marjorie and Arnold Ziff Building. The new focal point of the city centre campus, it is six-storeys of high tech eco-friendly and sustainable



The new Cafe Maia looks at home in the new Marjorie and Arnold Ziff Building.

design, forming the nerve centre of the university's student services departments. With such a high profile and eco-friendly remit, the café had to adhere to the same exacting standards while also appealing to a varied customer base ranging from students to the Vice Chancellor.

Ian Addy, catering operations manager, says: "We had a couple of options and we chose the one that fit the building the best and stood for what we were trying to achieve. The stakeholders, which include students, wanted a state-of-the-art café for a state-of-the-art building. The building houses the great and good

SHOWCASE



of the university, including the Vice Chancellor, and that level of personnel. And it's a showcase building, the first you come to. It's a one-stop-shop for students and parents and anyone coming to the university. The image needed to be right. We wanted to take it to the next level from what we've got elsewhere on campus."

The café is situated on the 10th floor of the building and has views out towards the main shopping areas of Leeds city centre, which helps give it its light and airy feel. Ian says: "It has some comfort seating and dining seating and it's all open plan. It's got a fantastic ambience and it's doing extremely well. The building won't be fully occupied until January but already we're full at lunchtime on most days. It's fantastic."

In terms of planning, the café area presented challenges, not least the presence of several structural columns. Matt Fletcher says: "It's not the most conventional of spaces. It's almost as though it's on a balcony. There's an open area that looks out through the glass façade and you can just see Leeds high street, which is particularly nice at night. The columns made it difficult to ensure there was customer flow through all areas. We put in a hard floored main service area and a soft seating area to

Cafe Maia is "growing good taste" campus by campus.

the glass balustrade. We've broken it up with plants so you get some more private areas. There's a softer lounge area with a carpet. It's more secluded from the café side where people are eating and drinking."

In addition to the fresh modern look, the café also stands out in the area of sustainability. Matt says: "The café concept uses back-to-nature principles focusing on sustainable materials and resources, in line with the principles adopted by Farrell and Clarke, the architects. Wherever possible we've tried to use materials in the fit-out that are sustainable."

The most impressive of these is certainly the showpiece back-lit panel on the front of the service area made from eco-resin containing natural grasses. The worktops are made from

a material containing 40 per cent post-industrial waste and the café also has a wall covering hand-crafted in the Far East from coconut husk, a waste product which would otherwise be discarded. The husk is fixed onto a flexible backing and is one of Matt's favourite features. The product's ethical credentials can be traced right back to its manufacture. The company selling the wall covering operates according to strict fair trade rules while also ensuring its workers are not discriminated against on the grounds of gender, age or disability.

The theme even extends to consumables and uniforms. The café uses recycled napkins made just outside Leeds, which are now being used in the university's other catering outlets. The coasters are made from recycled tyres,





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pencils are made from recycled CD cases and the staff’s baseball caps are made from recycled plastic bottles. The Café Maia branded shirts, meanwhile, are produced in compliance with Oko-Tex and Worldwide Responsible Apparel Production (Wrap) standards which ensure practices like child-labour, unfair work conditions and environmental pollution are not employed during the manufacture.

Ian Addy further fulfils the remit with the produce on sale, including, of course, Fair Trade coffee. He says: “In line with the eco-friendly building we wanted to make sure that the food we served was ethically sourced, fair trade, and where possible, locally sourced showing that we’d considered fuel miles. This is a principle the university has always applied to its

15 catering outlets on campus but for Café Maia, it’s particularly important. “For example the hand-baked cakes are made in Leeds. The pastries are delivered from a bakery which is only a couple of miles down the road,” he says. “The coffee is fair trade and we also sell some fair trade retail products. We have our own branded sandwiches which are locally produced and made fresh every day.”

The two-pronged approach is designed to ensure the brand, from its fixtures and fittings to the food and drink it serves to its customers, ties in with the Café Maia slogan, “growing good taste”. Matt and project manager John Holley are so enthused by its potential that they’ve set up as a company, Café Maia Ltd, with the intention of promoting the concept to

other universities in the new year. John says: “We’re really excited about it and from our perspective we can see it’s not going to be a brand that will stay the same.”

The pair are already looking at designing their own Café Maia furniture range made with recycled materials and pledge to develop the concept as new products become available. John says: “We’re looking at bamboo flooring and we’re in talks with a consultant about using energy saving lighting.

“The University of Leeds has been very, very supportive so we’re hoping that next year, once the information gets out we’ll have lots of enquiries.”

For more information on the Café Maia brand, visit the website: www.cafemaia.co.uk **UC**