

The New Meaning of Life, Northwest Style

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A FORKFUL OF SMOKED SALMON helps the vitamins go down; and a massage doesn't hurt either.

General Nutrition Cos., long known for boxy mall stores lined with cans of "Gainer's Fuel" and racks of power bars, is rolling out what it hopes will be a nationwide chain of "wellness" stores. They will blend the gourmet- and health-food products of its Nature's Northwest unit, Portland, Ore., and the upscale health and beauty products of its Amphora chain, Seattle, in an expansion of the Nature's Northwest rubric.

"The definition of self-care keeps getting bigger," says William E. Watts, GNC's president and chief executive.

A publicly traded retailer of vitamins and supplements, GNC, Pittsburgh, has been growing rapidly in recent years, opening more than one outlet a day and generating more than \$1 billion in annual revenue last year. The company's second-quarter profit rose 21% to \$28 million, but its shares took a hit after the company announced plans to cut some vitamin prices to lure more shoppers.

GNC's expanded-format stores will cost about \$6 million each. The company tentatively plans to launch as many as 10 next year throughout the Northwest, with a national roll-out on the horizon if the concept wins a following.

At its newly opened Nature's Northwest prototype in Lake Oswego, Ore., aging baby boomers can buy



Interior views of the new Nature's Northwest store in Lake Oswego, Ore.

standard groceries, gourmet foods and expensive bath and beauty products. They can also take a yoga class, have their hair highlighted, or soak in a German hydrotherapy tub.

To accommodate all this under one roof, "you want to create a sense of separation," says Kenneth Nisch, chairman of Jon Greenberg & Associates, a retail design firm in Southfield, Mich., that worked on the project. "You don't want people in mud masks wandering around where people are shopping, as entertaining as that might be for the shoppers."

The first image of the new 42,133-square-foot store comes at the bottom of the driveway: a natural-treatment process catches water rolling off the parking lot and cleans it. Their gas guzzlers parked, shoppers walk past raised garden beds made from recycled materials (not wood; don't want to cut down too many trees) where gardening classes take place—

classes that, along with cooking lessons, draw in customers and keep them hanging around. Step inside, and the eye immediately goes to the high ceilings and slanting glass skylights.

"It gives the sense that the market is flamboyant and big—a place of abundance," says Robert Swain, the project's Seattle-based architect. Also visible is the second-floor balcony, where the spa and beauty salon are located. "Seeing somewhere else gives you a sense of place," Mr. Swain says.

What people can't see at the entrance are check-out registers—they are on the other side of the store, by the exit. "Why confront people with the most unpleasant part of their experience when they first walk in the door?" says Stan Amy, the president of Nature's Northwest. Instead, there is fresh produce and a brick-oven pizzeria up front, meant to evoke the atmosphere of an outdoor market and let shoppers in a hurry rush in, buy hot food, and rush out. There are also prepared foods in microwavable containers, a take-out sushi counter, and juices and sodas.

Continuing along the main boulevard in this planned community, shoppers get caught in a narrow passage by the bread section and are directed into what seems like a separate, corner store with aromatherapy and beauty products. Now there is a choice: continue along the main aisle to the vitamins and pharmacy, or turn left up the steps to the second level. "We have to constantly make you keep changing your mind," says Mr. Swain, the architect.

A compact-disk-listening station in the middle of the stairs helps lure people up and keeps them lingering. A "library" with bookshelves, and tables with reading lights and computers for Internet browsing, has the same effect.

Back downstairs, the aisle winds around a pharmacy before finally reaching the aisles of traditional food items and health foods. Customers who may have just come in for groceries already have seen everything else in the store. By the time they arrive at the checkout line, some shoppers are overwhelmed.

"It's too big," says Kris Preslan, who lives in the neighborhood. "There are too many choices."

But others say they will return because of the choices. "It's not just feeding yourself as fast as possible, it's enjoying the process," adds Mr. Amy.

More Office Windows Open and Close

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stuffy and someone opens the window and the mood changes," says Eugene Torchia, the clothing retailer's vice president of corporate architecture, who became the windows' main champion.

Other features of the Gap building aim to keep workers comfortable. Mr. McDonough designed each floor with high ceilings so hot air would rise. Air-conditioning vents in the floor deposit cool air in the workers' "breathing zone." Many employees work in cubicles, and Mr. McDonough gave each one an air-conditioning vent with its own controls—so one worker can enjoy an Arctic blast but his neighbor doesn't have to.

At night, the building's ventilation system sucks bold air from outside and pumps it under the raised floors where the computer cables are. The air cools the concrete slabs, and they in turn help cool the building during the day. The building has its own health club complete with swimming pool, and an employee cafe

serving "whole" foods and organic meat.

As building amenities go, the windows were cheap. Gap spent about \$60 million on the 195,000-square-foot building and the surrounding land. Adding operable windows cost an extra \$40,000. Just as Mr. McDonough predicted, there haven't been problems with workers opening their windows in bad weather. If there's an after-hours cloud burst, though, maintenance workers have to go around and make sure all the windows are closed.

Gap's next frontier will be putting operable windows on a 15-story edifice it plans to start building next month in San Francisco. This time, Gap engineers have to worry about something called the "stack effect": Open windows at the top of the building may draw air rapidly through the bottom of building, effectively creating an internal wind tunnel. Gap determined that the difference between internal and external temperatures in San Francisco was small enough that it wouldn't disturb workers.