

Around Town



The capital's shopping experience is about to undergo a serious makeover with the Galleria on Al Maryah Island set to open at the beginning of August. Touted as a mixture of high-end shops and restaurants, *Angela Beitz* gets an exclusive look at what we can expect to see in the next few weeks.

Some say shopping is the UAE's national sport. That being the case, things are about to reach something close to Olympic standards. The Galleria at Al Maryah Island is a new 33,000 square metre (355,000sqft) luxury shopping and dining destination with a stunning waterfront promenade, which is due to open on August 6. It is situated at the centre of Sowwah Square, Abu Dhabi's new Central Business District, and was developed by Gulf Related and Mubadala Real Estate & Infrastructure (MREI).

The Galleria will feature a mix of luxury to mid-market international and specialty retailers alongside food and beverage offerings including signature chef-driven and fine-dining restaurants, iconic cafés and quick service casual food outlets. Beautifully designed over two levels of retail, The Galleria will also showcase iconic luxury fashion and fine jewellery brands alongside accessories, watches, beauty and international high street brands. This new precinct will bring with it a host of designers such as Diane von Furstenberg, Jimmy Choo, Moschino, Mulberry, Marc Jacobs and Tory Burch to Abu Dhabi.

The Galleria has also achieved a major milestone with the completion of the precinct's impressive roof. The sculptural glass and steel atrium structure provides an iconic im-

age for The Great Room, which forms the heart of the precinct's retail and dining offering across both levels. Framing the grand entrance, the prominent roof sweeps across the entirety of The Great Room and seamlessly integrates into the sky-line view. Complex structure engineering experts RFR, who previously designed similar projects including the inverted pyramid of Le Musée du Louvre Paris, are responsible for the unique feature.

'The design brief was unusual as we inherited the existing building's footprint and needed to design within these constraints,' Jean Le Lay, director of RFR who designed The Galleria tells us. 'We also had to bring together widely contradictory elements. On one side, sun exposition and humidity levels were a key concern. On the other hand, the design brief revealed a strong wish for delicate-looking aesthetics appearing to stretch seamlessly from landscaping to sky while complementing high-end retailers located below in The Great Room. Our experience developing previous glazing projects including the Burjuman Shopping Centre in Dubai and Terminal 2 of Charles de Gaulle Airport helped us deliver the perfect solution for The Galleria in less than two-and-a-half years.' Comprised entirely of steel and glass, the striking roof's intricate design offers three layers of structural and thermal protection, in addition to cleverly applied shading devices. The building's visual aesthetics are further complemented through the skilful use of joints and insulated joints moulded into a defined design. With the assistance of computer generated shapes, the unique roof pattern took its inspiration from the texture of snakeskin. Minute variations in the elements' size and diameter make this architectural structure a sophisticated and meticulously planned accomplishment.

If shopping isn't your thing you will be pleased to hear that The Galleria will also be bringing a mix of over 25 dining options including internationally recognised signature restaurants and family friendly cafés with outdoor seating overlooking the water and the Abu Dhabi skyline.

We also sat down for a quick chat with Francis Loughran, who is the managing director of Future Food, the company responsible for the food and beverage offerings at the Galleria, who explains the points of difference. 'The destination will be tailor-made to the clientele. With a customer base that varies from corporate workers to retail shoppers, we developed a F&B mix that suits their needs, taking into consideration when they eat and they type of food they are looking for. It was important for us to carefully select outlets that reflect the best of the local region as well as international fare. We are hoping The Galleria will bring customers a world of choice. From a quick espresso bar to fine dining

on the terrace of an internationally acclaimed restaurant, we are aiming for The Galleria to be a true dining destination. Restaurants such as Armani Caffé and Zuma offer a mix of cuisine type, price-points and dining locations.'

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