

## Wendy's testing store designs that 'push the envelope'

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Except for the iconic logo of a redheaded little girl, the newly-reopened Wendy's located in a Columbus, Ohio suburb looks nothing like the simple, nostalgic look that lingered long after the late founder Dave Thomas opened the first restaurant in 1969.

The unit debuted in July, shortly before the chain's headquarters **returned to** its Central Ohio roots after spending nearly 4 years

in Atlanta.

The new prototype is one of four conceptualized by Tesser, a branding and design firm based in San Francisco. It boasts a contemporary look inside and out, complemented by **upgraded menu items** such as premium salads, natural-cut, sea salt fries and Berry Frosty Parfaits. New menu options are also being trialed at the prototype stores, including Redhead Roasters proprietary coffee, smoothies and baked goods such as cookies and muffins.

According to Tré Musco, president and chief creative officer of Tesser, the aesthetic changes are deep and set a "completely new bar for the QSR category."

"You have all of these chains remodeling now and it's mostly cosmetic. I think anybody can pick out a new color of fabric, but not many are willing to reinvent a little, which is what Wendy's has done. They didn't just want a new façade, they wanted category changing ideas," Musco said.

### Setting a new bar for QSR

One of these unique ideas is the testing of four different concepts. Currently just two of the four prototypes are open, both in Central Ohio. The other two will be open sometime this fall in undisclosed locations.

They are all modern designs, but have four unique stylings, according to Denny Lynch, Wendy's senior vice president of Communications.

"We don't expect to go forward with all four – that's why they're in test. Our customers will decide with their feedback and through consumer research," Lynch said, adding that the prototypes are serving as "living laboratories."

"We've done extensive research on what our consumers want on our menu to help us understand what we're doing well and what we can be doing better. With these four design concepts, we will do the same. This is our roadmap – asking our customers to really be open and honest with us and to track clear, concise data on what they want," Lynch said.

The "ultra modern" prototype (see [photos](#)) in Dublin, Ohio, features "radical architecture," according to Musco, while still embracing the brand's heritage. A bright red center wall hosts the famous Wendy's logo, as well as the "Quality is our recipe" quote from Thomas, positioned in tall silver letters atop the front façade.

Inside, warm, natural colors and brick and wood materials balance the bold use of red color throughout. Also, various focal points signify the extent of the reimaging effort, and "push the envelope a bit," according to Lynch. They include:

- **Large windows.** Fourteen-foot, floor-to-ceiling glass windows were installed around the outside of the restaurant. "The windows make the restaurant look more modern and they promote the idea of transparency; that Wendy's has nothing to hide. They also allow for plenty of natural light, which is uplifting and makes the store look bright and clean," Musco said.
- **Varied seating.** The Wendy's prototype includes family tables; high-top, bar-style seating; café-style booths; and cozy chairs surrounding a fireplace. This appeals to a wide range of consumers, whether they're eating on their own or with a large group, Musco said.
- **A new queue line.** One of the biggest changes in the new Wendy's design is the introduction of the fast casual-style "chute line." "I believe this is the first or one of the first QSRs to feature this line style, where guests are lined up on one of the walls, not in a big space in front of the registers. Think of it as similar to Chipotle. People are lined up in a polite way, they're more relaxed and they're not in a big bunch fighting for a spot at the register," Musco explained. As part of this set up, pre-order boards like those found in drive-thru lines, are mounted on the wall next to the queue.
- **Food focus.** The Wendy's kitchen is now partially exposed, so customers can view the baking and prep areas, as well as fresh produce. "The whole idea of the layout is to support the food story. People eat with their eyes. We wanted to reinforce that Wendy's makes the best quality food and the best way to do that is to simply show them," Musco said.
- **Technology.** Wendy's has added digital menu boards to the prototype and will be testing their effectiveness. Digital menu boards have also been added to the drive-thru line at test stores, as have digital confirmation boards.

The Dublin restaurant also includes two [Coca-Cola Freestyle machines](#) and touchless features in the bathroom, such as hand dryers and soap dispensers.

### **Three years' worth of brand positioning and research**

Tesser has been working with Wendy's for three years, when the chain brought on a new executive team and launched its "You know when it's real" [brand positioning](#).

Once the "real" message was in place, the team focused on how to communicate the brand, its food, the legacy of Dave Thomas and the future, Musco said.

"We were able to be part of that team and set a future vision. Then about a year ago is when we were brought on to put the positioning to life – to make 'real' real," Musco said. "Last fall we began turning that idea into a store of the future."

Tesser and Wendy's combined research focused on understanding what the consumer liked and didn't like about the current brand. Musco said Dave Thomas and his original idea of having "fresh, quality food" both emerged as positive themes for the brand.

Research was then conducted across quick-service and fast casual segments in general, asking what people liked and didn't like about burger-centric concepts. Once the data was compiled, Tesser got to work on a creative design.

The trick, Musco said, was in conveying something new without losing the brand's identity. Also, there is a fine line in creating a design that is contemporary and fresh, but still warm and welcoming.

"We wanted to come up with something people would drive by and say, 'Wow, there's something new and important happening at Wendy's,'" Musco said. "We tried really hard to have something ultra modern, but not cold or austere. I think we struck a good balance."

All four concepts reiterate the modern-but-warm objective with a sign in the entry that reads: "Welcome to real. Welcome to fresh. Welcome to Wendy's Columbus." Each sign will be tailored to the city where the restaurant is located.

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