

ALL THE RIGHT INGREDIENTS



Gill Carver at the Deli counter - and everywhere else as well - all at the same time. Added Ingredients is a busy business.

Analysts often slice the retail industry up into four divisions: Comparison (finished goods), Convenience (food and drink), Leisure and Service. For the most part the retailers and their specialisms do fit roughly within those categories. A supermarket may sell some non-food products and have a cafe, but you would still know you were looking at a supermarket.

There are big advantages in specialising in one area and being known for it as well. Expertise is valued and makes for a destination shop. It's also very common to find a shop, of course, with a number of specialisations and department stores as well as traditional hardware shops tend to fit this niche nicely.

At heart, though, there is a risk in specialising: competitors can rob you of uniqueness and technological change can abolish an entire market segment virtually overnight. Think of video rentals and the high street names we used to know, such as Blockbuster.

Even where retailers have multiple threads to their product story, though, they tend to approach the boundaries between the analysts' domains only gingerly.

Occasionally, though, you come across a business that mixes up ingredients from

several of those broad categories and comes up with a whole new retail recipe.

Added Ingredients in Abingdon describes itself as a "Purveyor of Fine Foods" and has been purveying them for more than a dozen years, but has cafe seating (and incidentally serves a

magnificent cheeses, there are baskets of wonderful loaves, a wall of fine wines, stacks of Panettone and lovely olive oils. There are pastas, relishes, preserves, teas



perfect Espresso) and a strong selection of cookware products. So, is this a deli, a cafe or a cookshop? Yes. All of them.

It's very very difficult to walk through the door and not want to start eating. The busy Deli counter stars some truly

and cold meats. So it's very very tempting to nose around (for some time) and the temptation to dwell is magnified by the cafe seating, where they serve wine, beer, cider, open sandwiches, salads, tapas and that superb coffee (along with a glass of water, as it should be).

What you see as you linger is a strong range of cookware, from knives and pans, through gadgets, tools, kitchen linens, mills, graters, bakeware and products from key brands such as Le Creuset and Kitchencraft. As with the food and drink the cookshop product takes up all available wall space and hangs from the ceiling. No space in the small, convoluted space is left un-merchandised. Even the tiny space under the stairs is home to a selection of knives and gadgets.

Once you have noticed some of the cookware you suddenly realise that what you are looking at is a full-on cookshop and it's no surprise to learn that when Gill joined bira as a result of the Wantage roadshow in 2015 she joined with



her primary division as Cookshop & Housewares. After that event Jill tweeted: "Meeting held by @biraofficial showed them to be aware of current issues for independent retailers – business rates, auto-enrolment, music..." and added that she was: "happy to join a group who understands what independent retailers are having to deal with".

Gill agrees that it's a prosperous area, but notes that high and rising property prices mean that consumers have less in their pockets than might be ideal.

Abingdon has the classic ratio of two independent shops to one multiple and a lower than average retail vacancy rate of 9% (against 12.7% nationally) although that still leaves just under one in ten shops



● happy to join a group who understands what independent retailers are having to deal with. ●

empty. The bigger shops, roughly a third of them, though, are some way away from the town centre itself close to the A34 that runs to the West of the town - not in walking distance.

The traders of the town have joined a growing list of areas in voting to establish a Business Improvement District (BID) which will spark into life in 2016 - another example of businesses opting to pay more in rates - where they can see a return.



What the town in which Added Ingredients trades is having to deal with is a sadly common story. A medium-sized market town of roughly 33,000 inhabitants, Abingdon was once the county town of Berkshire and is now a satellite of Oxford and a commuter dormitory for London.

Category-busting isn't for everybody, but adding whole new product areas alongside a core business can spread risk and add attraction. It's a recipe that works for Added Ingredients and could work for other independents. bira alert will be looking to see how others mix it up in 2016.

