

restaurant development + design

SPRING 2013

Trend: Communal Tables [p14](#)

Financing [p28](#)

THE GREAT OUTDOORS [p34](#)

CONTENTS

SPRING 2013

Features

28 Credit Starved? Not if You're Qualified

Small but growth-oriented restaurant companies continue to face many financing hurdles, but deals with reasonable terms at attractive rates are available to those who prove they can perform.

By David Farkas, Contributing Editor

34 The Great Outdoors

Designing an effective outdoor dining space takes more than throwing out a few tables and chairs; patio placement, decor, furnishings, unusual features and the challenges of weather, noise and zoning codes all need to be considered.

By Thomas Henry Strenk, Contributing Editor



28

44 What's on Your Playlist?

Diners may not choose a restaurant based on its music alone but what's playing during their visit — and how loud it's playing — are critical pieces of the branding puzzle. New solutions make it easy to manage the mix.

By Amelia Levin, Contributing Editor

52 Small Town Charm

Economics and urban market saturation have many chains seeking refuge and growth in smaller markets where competition is less intense and build-out costs are lower. Execs from Huddle House, Culver's and Woody's Bar-B-Q share strategies for making it big in small towns.

By Caroline Perkins, Contributing Editor

56 RestaurantPoint 2013

Chain development, design and construction executives and their suppliers gathered in Orlando in mid-March for two days of collaboration, education and networking.



34



60

On the Front Cover

Poste Moderne Brasserie, Hotel Monaco, Washington D.C.

CONTENTS

SPRING 2013

Columns

4 Editor's Letter

Defining Innovation

Innovation is really in the eye of the beholder because it has to address a specific need, writes *rd+d* Editor Joe Carbonara.

6 RestaurantPoint Letter

Collaboration Lifts all Boats

Some chain executives continue to form strategic relationships with key suppliers in order to share goals and objectives so their partner can more effectively help them — what a great strategy, writes RestaurantPoint's Pete Prentice.

20 Peer to Peer

Jonathan Benjamin, Corner Bakery Café's vice president of franchise sales, has over the past two years launched the once corporate-centric chain onto an aggressive expansion track through franchising. Find out what's on his mind.

24 Consultant's Take

Put the Customer Experience First

Real brand impact occurs only when consumers shift perceptions and modify their behavior toward your brand. Bob Taylor, strategy director-North America at FITCH, explains why and how the customer experience should trump aesthetics in restaurant design.

80 Talk Shop

Hit the Mall

Ron Loch, vice president of planning and design at shopping center development firm Taubman Centers, offers insights on what's new in the mall/center space and what restaurants need to know to operate successfully within it.



Departments

8 Buzz

Meathead's Opens 11th Unit, Culver's Gets LEED Certification, Fast-Casual Pizza Players Fire Up, Chinese Festivals Inspire Panda Inn Redesign, Amsterdam Falafel Shop Closes 9 Deals, and More.

14 Trend

Communal tables catch on in restaurants from small independents to major QSRs.

60 Project Profile

PARK Restaurant & Bar

A disjointed, subterranean space in a Cambridge, Mass., parking garage is transformed into a classic, comfortable neighborhood hot spot.

68 How To

Love them or hate them, discovery days are a fact of life for most franchise companies. Here's how to make the most of them.

74 Solutions Center

78 Ad Index

Maureen Slocum

Publisher
(800) 630-4168;
fax (800) 630-4169;
maureen@zoombagroup.com

Joseph M. Carbonara

Editor in Chief
(800) 630-4168;
joe@zoombagroup.com

EDITORIAL

Managing Editor
Dana Tanyeri
dana@zoombagroup.com

Contributing Editors

David Farkas, Amelia Levin, Caroline Perkins,
Carol Skerritt and Thomas Henry Strenk

INTERACTIVE MEDIA

Web Editor
Rebecca Kilbreath
(800) 630-4168; rebecca@zoombagroup.com

Online Operations Manager

Gabriel Weckesser
(800) 630-4168; gabriel@zoombagroup.com

ART & PRODUCTION

Art Director & Production Manager
Anne LoCascio
(800) 630-4168; anne@zoombagroup.com

SALES MANAGEMENT

Vice President, Sales and Marketing
Carol McAdam
(312) 961-5572; carol@zoombagroup.com

South/West Sales Director

Kris Duvall
(312) 805-9304; kris@zoombagroup.com

Northeast Sales Director

Mike McCaffery
(919) 585-7615; mike@zoombagroup.com

Accounting Manager

Tracy Mugan
(800) 630-4168; tracy@zoombagroup.com

RESEARCH

Research Director
Terri Solomon
(800) 630-4168; terri@zoombagroup.com

CIRCULATION

Audience Development Manager
Richard Jarrett
(800) 630-4168; rich@zoombagroup.com

For subscription inquiries and address changes, please contact:

847-763-4936 or 877-479-6505,


Fax: 800-630-4169.

Send e-mails to fesmag@halldata.com

REPRINTS

For custom reprints and electronic usage, contact Maureen Slocum at:
(800) 630-4168
fax (800) 630-4169
maureen@zoombagroup.com

OFFICE

 zoomba group

110 E. Schiller St., Suite 312
Elmhurst, IL 60126
Phone (800) 630-4168
fax (800) 630-4169

The Den occupies one of the two additional retail spaces annexed for the project. This residentially inspired cocktail lounge seats 22. Guests in this area can enjoy drinks and small plates.



PROJECT PROFILE

PARK

RESTAURANT & BAR

The Classroom seats 30 and includes a cozy banquette running the perimeter of the room. Chalkboard walls merchandise drinks and menu items. Lighting features antique blown-glass bottle fixtures and overhead table sconces on an adjustable pulley system.



A disjointed, subterranean space in a Harvard Square parking garage is transformed into a classic, comfortable neighborhood hot spot.

When Patrick Lee and his partners at Boston's multiconcept Grafton Group decided that Redline, their nightclub/bar venue, had run its course, they set out to replace it with their vision of the perfect neighborhood restaurant and bar. More in line with their other, more dining-oriented operations, the menu would offer fresh, inventive twists on classic New American

comfort foods and cocktails. The atmosphere would be classy yet comfortable, contemporary but with a patina that fit into the historic Harvard Square neighborhood.

Their vision for what would ultimately become PARK Restaurant & Bar was clear. But getting from Redline — a below-grade space situated at the bottom of a large brick and concrete parking garage — to PARK required a hefty dose of

design ingenuity. In addition to the limitations inherent in the original Redline space, comprised of a low-ceilinged front bar/dining area and a separate back room, designers faced the challenge of annexing two adjacent retail spaces that became available just as the project got underway. The four distinct spaces, which together total some 4,400 square feet, had to remain largely separate but be knit together

PARK RESTAURANT & BAR

Design Insights

PETER NIEMITZ, Niemitz Design Group

Low Ceilings. You just have to deal with them and make them look good. Just painting them black isn't going to make them go away. The ceilings in the front room of PARK are very low, so we decided to put a lot more effort into that surface and make them more interesting and tactile. All of the ceilings in the very low areas were clad in reclaimed wood. In the lounge, or den area, we actually did a vaulted brick ceiling. It was another way to add character and interest to a challenging space. There are four vaults that are lit with LEDs, so there's a real warmth to them.

Colors and Finishes. We wanted to do things that were little unexpected, a little obscure. For colors, there are wonderful caramels, reds and a throwback to avocado or olive green. There's a mix of warm natural woods, black painted wood, soft leather and industrial galvanized steel. It's an eclectic mix of colors, finishes and materials that all come together to create a nice warmth with visual interest.

Cool Stools. We loved the fabric we found for the bar stools. It's a very heavy fabric that's like very heavy, almost unrefined linen. It's nubby, tough and has an interesting print — kind of like potato sacks. It was another gesture toward an eclectic look. There are a lot of stools at the bar, so we wanted to mix it up a bit and not just have that uniform, leather-backed bar stool look.

Facade. PARK is set below grade in kind of an arcade in the parking garage, and frankly it's grim and dark and damp. When it was Redline, we had French doors that opened out, and we put café seating out there, but nobody wanted to sit there. We put in awnings and lighting, sound systems and flowers, but nothing helped. This time, we didn't even try. We just kept the storefront as it was, and we actually filmed the windows and put in shutters because the view was unattractive. To save some money, we said let's just put all of our efforts into the interior and keep the outside a simple urban storefront with discreet signage.



Seating in the main dining room features an eclectic mix of galvanized steel chairs, wooden chairs painted black and red leather booths.

to achieve both design consistency and smooth operational flow.

The project required almost completely gutting the existing spaces. “We started from ground zero,” Lee says. “To a certain extent, because we were changing the concept we liked the fact that there was going to be some separation. It took about eight months to complete, so when we reopened, it was perceived of as a completely new space.”

Peter Niemitz, president of Boston-based Niemitz Design Group, was brought

in to lead the redesign. “Grafton Group runs some fairly sophisticated places in the Square and around the Harvard University area and felt it was time to create something more interesting and viable for the community there,” says Niemitz, who also designed the group’s Russell House Tavern, Grafton Street Pub & Grill and Temple Bar properties.

“They didn’t want to get too highbrow with it, but did want to capture a different crowd. While we were talking about this whole transformation, a space next door

became available and then ultimately the space next to that became available as well. So we were faced with significantly expanding the size of the venue and also grappling with the challenges of strange ceiling heights in the different areas. Overall it’s a very awkward, angular grouping of spaces because it’s in a parking garage, plus it is semisubterranean and has difficult ingress and egress and not a strong street presence.”

The overall approach that Niemitz and Lee quickly settled upon for the space was to embrace its quirkiness and create a series of rooms, each with its own distinct character and each, in its own way, reflecting the culture of Harvard Square. Lee says that approach fit well with what Grafton Group set out to accomplish at PARK, which was to create a neighborhood venue that would draw people and keep them coming back for a variety of reasons and dining occasions.

PARK’s four distinct eating and socializing areas are:

Main Dining Room and Bar. Just inside the restaurant’s front door, high-top communal tables loosely divide this roughly 1,500-square-foot space. An oak, horseshoe-shaped bar seats 30 and is a focal point of the space. “The bar



Above: The Back Room sports a retro supper club look and feel and offers seating for another 35 guests. It features circular black booths that seat up to 10 people.

Right: PARK Restaurant & Bar can seat up to 80 guests in the bar area and main dining room. The ceiling in these spaces features a ceiling covered in rustic, reclaimed wood.



Project Team

- Patrick Lee, principal, Grafton Group
- Sean Kennedy, construction manager, principal, Grafton Group
- Peter Niemitz, president, Niemitz Design Group
- Derek Pelletier, project executive, Delta Design & Construction Inc.
- Paul Fantoni, project superintendent, Delta Design & Construction Inc.
- Patricia Palmiere, project manager, Delta Design & Construction Inc.

Snapshot

- **PARK Restaurant & Bar**
- **Location:** Cambridge, Mass.
- **Owner:** Grafton Group
- **Project Type:** Conversion of existing bar/lounge space
- **Concept:** Neighborhood restaurant and bar with fresh, inventive twists both in the dining environment and on the menu
- **Real Estate:** Bottom level of brick and concrete parking garage in Harvard Square
- **Size:** Annexed two adjacent retail spaces to expand total venue to 4,400 square feet
- **Challenges:** Low ceilings, disjointed spaces, unattractive facade
- **Design and Buildout:** 8 months
- **Project Cost:** \$500,000

is a significant area that creates great energy in the front room,” Lee says. “But you can also retreat from that environment to the dining side of the room for more relaxed dining.”

Both the communal tables and private tables have rough-hewn wooden tops, and the room’s seating features an eclectic mix of galvanized steel chairs, wooden chairs painted black, and red leather booths and banquettes. Together, the main dining room and bar area seat up to 80 guests.

Black iron ductwork snakes along the ceiling, which is covered in rustic, reclaimed wood, and vintage photos and maps decorate the walls.

The Back Room. A separate room off the back end of the main dining room and bar area, the back room sports a

retro supper club look and feel and offers seating for another 35 guests. Designed to accommodate larger parties and private events, it features circular black booths that seat up to 10 people and a round wood table with zebra-print chairs. Fabric-covered walls sport framed counter-culture art from the ‘60s and ‘70s.

The Den. This area occupies one of the two additional retail spaces annexed for the project. The den seats 22 and is a residentially inspired cocktail lounge where guests can enjoy drinks and small plates. Key design features include a vaulted brick ceiling, olive-painted embossed tin walls and bookshelves filled with vintage books and period antiques. Seating includes plush leather chairs in rich caramel colors and an L-shaped

PARK RESTAURANT & BAR

black leather sofa. Oriental rugs cover the wood-plank floors and help to both soften and define the space.

The Classroom. The other new space acquired during the remodel, this additional dining area sits beyond the den, separated from it in part by open display shelving stocked with early 20th century artifacts. The Classroom seats 30 and includes a working fireplace and a cozy banquette running the perimeter of the room. Chalkboard walls (hence the “classroom” nickname) merchandise drinks and menu items such as PARK’s signature meat pie of the day and local cheese board selections. Lighting features antique blown-glass bottle fixtures and overhead table sconces on an adjustable pulley system.

Lee notes that ceiling heights, one of the biggest challenges of the project, start at around 6 feet 6 inches in the main dining room and bar area and are highest in the classroom area. “As you walk through the main room into the den area and then to the classroom, it’s like a car driving up from the first floor of the garage to the second. The ceiling gets higher as you go.”

He’s also quick to point out that, while distinct, the four areas work together in a cohesive way. “If you’re in one of them, you still feel like you’re in the same restaurant,” he says. “One of the things that we really tried to do is create sight lines so that even if you can’t see it clearly, you know that there’s something else there.

When you walk in, the place feels like it is larger than just the main dining room and bar because at the end of it you can see the den, and the open shelving between the den and the classroom gives you a hint that there’s even more.

“The rooms are close to one another, the sight lines flow from one to another, and there are similar design elements in each of the rooms to bind them together. Elements that are different, such as the wood-plank, reclaimed-wood ceiling in the main room and the vaulted brick ceiling feature in the den, still feel right together.”

A Modern Sensibility

Boston is home to hundreds of traditionally themed English and Irish pubs, but Lee and Niemitz agreed that, while aspiring to offer the comfort and familiarity of those establishments, PARK would take a fresh approach to the genre. For inspiration, they headed to New York City.

“We spent some time going through lots of eclectic cocktail bars and lounges in lower Manhattan and brought back a lot of nice ideas from that experience,” Niemitz says. “We wanted to push the envelope a bit for Cambridge, which likes its down and dirty barroom-type venues. We didn’t want to go too upscale, but we did want to give it whole different feel and vibe. So, it’s a little more dressed up. It’s got a nice mix of finishes and materials and interesting historical elements. It’s

not a modern place, but it has a modern sensibility in its look and feel as well as in the food and style of service.”

The look and feel blends antique and vintage, plush and industrial. New finishes were put in for all ceilings and walls, new light fixtures were installed throughout and the original Redline floor plan was reconfigured to move from what had been a straight bar along a wall to a more central, prominent U-shaped bar. Flooring is a mix of original and new oak planks. The two additional spaces acquired for expansion – a former women’s apparel shop and a yarn shop – were basically blank slates ready to be incorporated into the new design. The original restrooms and the approximately 800-square-foot kitchen were maintained, and a pair of restrooms was added to meet code requirements.

“All told, the space is probably 90 percent to 95 percent new,” Niemitz says. “A lot of places try to save money by keeping a lot of what’s there in existing spaces when they remodel, but they still end up spending a lot of money and ultimately not getting the look and feel they want. This was a nice experience because we really could start virtually from scratch.”

Adds Lee, “I think that when you’re working with a challenging space, if you make good decisions and the place is designed well, you’re left with a unique venue that guests really appreciate.” +

Feature Insights

PATRICK LEE, Grafton Group



Rough Grout. I love the vaulted brick ceiling in the den, and so do our guests. It’s basically quarter-inch bricks fashioned into four contiguous arches in the ceiling. As the bricklayer was putting it in, the grout was oozing out, and we allowed it to set up that way. He wanted to smooth it

out and make it perfect, but we liked the way it looked so we left it, and we’re really happy with it. It has this great look that’s both

contemporary and rustic, and it blends in well with the reclaimed wood ceiling beside it.

Iron Ductwork. Another problem we had to find a creative solution to was the ugly ductwork that came out of the kitchen and snaked through the dining room and bar area, the lowest part of the restaurant. We had to live with it and somehow make it look cool. What we did was to graft on this really cool sort of old-looking black iron and make it a feature that complements the reclaimed wood ceiling.

Biggest Splurge. If we splurged anywhere, it was on the furniture, Oriental rugs and artwork in the den. For a space like that, you really need it to look authentic. If you don’t get quality furniture and accessories, it ends up looking contrived and like you went halfway. We didn’t.