

April 2008

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Moby

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DESIGN / ARCHITECTURE:
MAE BRUNKEN



Rows of bronze-mirrored tabletops shimmer with radiant chic. A gargantuan, hand-blown glass chandelier hovers over the tawny brown ottoman near the front entrance. Amethyst wallpaper highlighted with gilded patterns envelops the room. And the glow of lavender-tinted lights divides the world outside from the stylish environs of the newest jewel in the tiara of L.A.'s revitalized downtown area.

Mae Brunken was describing in vivid detail her vision on a recent Saturday afternoon at the site of Seven Restaurant and Bar. There was still work to be done. And before the first drink had been poured or the first meal was served, here she was – smartly coordinated outfit and all – giving me a mental tour of the place, which occupies the ground floor of the historic Quinby Building at the corner of Seventh and Grand.

Working with Owner Joseph Tahanian and creator and developer Garry G, Brunken sought to take elements of classic art deco and infuse them with a Studio 54 sensibility. There's a DJ station next to the bar. Sheer curtains create separation between the lounge and the dining area. The lighting design is ultramodern yet welcoming.

Brunken's team includes artist Jordan Carlyle, who contributed an eye-catching piece of art in a light-box behind the bar. Designer Laser Rosenberg was also an integral part of the creative process.

The restaurant, opening in April, is the first of several planned collaborations between Tahanian, G, and Mae Brunken Design. The interior designer, whose extensive background includes set decoration for TV and film, discussed her approach to creating a social environment that is both alluring and enduring.

h: What types of projects do you find yourself attracted to?

MB: Restaurants and clubs – hospitality in general – is what I'm most interested in right now. I like to create environments; it's like creating a set for someone's night out. It's different than residential projects, where you're creating a lifestyle.

h: To what extent is fashion an influence on your work?

MB: I try to keep the color palette fresh. When I see a color trend on the runway, I know it will hit [in interior design] about a year later. So I'm very inspired by fashion.

h: Your style has been described as 'classic with an edge.' How do you keep that edge fresh?

MB: I believe in mixing it up, not doing what's expected. I like to take classic elements and jar the senses or maybe introduce a subliminal aspect. If I keep evolving, the edge is always there. I don't like to repeat myself.

h: Were there any jobs you've had that were particularly challenging?

MB (laughing): Well, there's a lot of psychology involved in design when you're working with any client. Probably the most challenging was a Moroccan fantasy project. I had never been to Morocco, and it was difficult to find artisans who could understand how to create that environment. But now it's ten years old, and people are still amazed by it, so it's become one of my most satisfying projects.

h: What's your least-favorite trend in interior design today?

MB (laughing): It has to be HGTV. It's just bad reality. It's not realistically possible to do what they say you can with the amount of money and time involved.

h: And all this time I thought I was just an inept slacker! ■

To learn more about Mae Brunken Design and see more samples of her work visit her site www.maebrunken.com

For more information on Seven Restaurant and Bar visit their website at www.sevenrestaurantbar.com

*styled by Rita Burns
hair and make-up by Patricia Le*