

DESIGN BUILD SERVE

RESTAURANT BUILDINGS THAT WORK

Hatching Asia de Cuba

by Robert Hanselman

Three years ago, Howard S. Wright Construction transformed downtown Scottsdale's Old Town Hotel to The James; they were tapped to renovate again as it became Mondrian. In place of Fiamma is Asia de Cuba, developed by Chef Jeffrey Chodorow of New York City, where the first location hatched.

Most of the 3,000 square feet were redone, says Kelly Dickerman, project executive for Howard S. Wright. "There was an existing bar in there that was relocated. We added a back service bar, redid the flooring, the ceiling and the exterior glass wall. It was pretty much everything."

"Moving the bar created a more open view from the entrance through the restaurant and onto the terrace where sculptural elements are now visible," explains Marsha Crockett of architect DLR Group in Phoenix.

That includes the giant egg by New York interior designer Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz of BNO Design. So which came first: the chicken or egg? The egg, says Noriega-Ortiz. "First I thought it was funny, just to have an egg. Then I figured 'well it's creation.' And then, 'let's just have one of my chickens in there.'"

To match the hotel's Garden of Eden theme, Asia de Cuba is "the farm within the garden," he says. Along with the egg, photographs of Noriega-Ortiz' own rooster (stuffed, not live) punctuate the white walls. Murano glass chandeliers evoke the ripening bananas that hung in his childhood kitchen in Puerto Rico. Other lights feature ostrich and turkey feathers.

Acoustic ceiling panels challenged the designer, so "we took the visual away from the ceiling and illuminated the furniture instead."

Sections of the ceiling and floor remained. Dickerman found a match for the floor tiles

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in New Zealand, but “they only run an allotment every three months,” so when the shipment was 3,000 square feet short, the design changed.

Quick decision-making was key, as unknowns popped up throughout the fast-paced remodel. “Usually a designer has a hard time making their mind up, but Benjamin was very flexible... good about picking an alternative solution,” says Dickerman. Chodorow’s company was another story. “The biggest challenges were the last minute changes by the owner. Like the back service area, they told us about two weeks before we needed to turn (the space) over.”

Kitchen cooler and freezer configurations also changed late in the game, says Crockett. Plus, all this took place while the hotel was open. “So part of the challenge was to work with minimal interruption to guests.”

The designer credits the contractor. “The (construction supervisor), Jay, was amazing...one of the best we’ve ever had,” says Noriega-Ortiz. Together, they made the change go over easy. 🍷

Project: Asia de Cuba

Architect: DLR Group

Interior Design: BNO Design

General Contractor: Howard S. Wright Construction Co.

Signs: All Sign Systems

