

# DYNAMIC RESTAURANT DESIGNS

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photos Latitude: Janis Nicolay Photography | U Lounge: Ennis Chung | Health Fare: Health Fare



Latitude on Main Street

**W**hile specific aesthetics can fall in and out of fashion, restaurant design should never be simply about the latest trends in finishes and furniture “discovered” at the trade shows or in design magazines. The design is relative to the project concept, clientele and location. The favourability of the materials and furnishings selected should be based upon durability, cost and, most importantly, their contribution to the overall branding of the business.

The branding aspect is specifically important in the development of solid restaurant models. We believe that to be successful an overall restaurant concept must be all-consuming, and the fully branded environment will enhance the food experience, not detract from it. Every restaurant requires a different flavour and experience, making it all the more important to build your restaurant's brand into the design. We never try to put the design above food, but also owners and chefs should not discount the value of design. In fact, at the outset of each project we believe it essential to be fully aware of the menu, and to include the food concept in all of the decisions regarding the image and final look of the dining room. Just as a successful restaurant must be about great food, the design should be a reflection and celebration of the kitchen, ensuring the overall dining experience is cohesive for the guest.

So while we never base our design concepts around current “trends”, we do submit that there are important design elements and directions that we are seeing more frequently. There are three recent projects we have been involved with that represent some of these current components in the overall business branding: Health fare (green design), U Lounge (rooms within a room), and Latitude (feature installations).

The recently opened **Health Fare** in South Edmonton is a reflection of the owner's desire to bring honestly healthy alternatives to the fast food industry. In what is meant to be the first in a rapidly growing franchise, our immediate reaction was to complement the forward-thinking menu offerings with a sustainable design approach. Material and fixture specifications were of paramount concern, and this manifested in a mix of recycled, local and reclaimed selections. Wall paneling is made from Kirei Board, a material made from sorghum, a drought-tolerant and fast-growing plant. Its aesthetic is at once modern and earth-friendly. The chairs are made from recycled plastic and aluminum, and tables are locally crafted from reclaimed wood. Regarding energy-use concerns, colour-corrected compact fluorescent lighting was used as a low-wattage alternative to halogen fixtures. Other “healthy” material choices were Marmoleum flooring and durable white solid surfacing, while the wall graphics are made with water-based ink and low VOC adhesives. Green materials were not just used in the restaurant design, but also throughout the branding process; compostable corn-based cups and containers were selected for the take-out component of the restaurant.

**ULounge** is a large (4,800 square feet) liquor-primary bar/restaurant in South Surrey. The challenge in such a large space was to create a dining experience that wasn't overwhelmed by the nightclub atmosphere. This was achieved by creating “rooms within the room” around a centrally-located bar, contributing to more people-watching and social interacting. Each “room” has a different aesthetic and function, offering a variety of ways to enjoy the dynamic menu, while maintaining a connection to the entire experience of

the space. The main dining room offers the most conventional setting for eating and drinking, with the central purpose of attracting daytime and nighttime diners seeking a relaxed atmosphere suitable for quiet conversation. Raised booths ring the central bar, and offer the most dramatic views of the action. Here, a semi-private feel has been created with the use of floor to ceiling drapery surrounds, which are further accented with a dramatic colour-changing LED lighting system. There are also two lounge areas: the upper lounge area features low soft seating and cocktail tables; while the lower lounge provides for large parties to mingle amongst the warm lighting of the candle filled wall feature.

Our newest design is for **Latitude on Main Street**. We were involved in early consultation with the owners regarding the naming of the restaurant. What's in a name? A name can be descriptive, emotional, playful, metaphoric or random, to name a few. The name chosen was a reflection of the owners' intent to be heavily North and South American wine-focused, and eventually became the main inspiration for the highlight of the room: the feature installation that spans wall to wall and floor to ceiling at the end of the wall bench seating. This impact piece was created with individual blocks of local old-growth woods that were hand-stained using Argentine and Chilean wines — which were of course being sampled for the menu! The blocks were then assembled in an ordered randomness of alternating grain and colour. On a warm day with the large sliding glass doors open to the street, the branded installation is clearly visible even before the guest enters the room.

These three examples show how building the brand into your design is essential in order to successfully communicate your message to your guests the minute they enter the door. This message should be reiterated during the whole guest experience, whether they are waiting in the lobby or lounge, on their way to the washrooms, enjoying the meal or paying the bill. Just as successful restaurants must be about innovative and great-tasting food, the restaurant design needs to be about celebrating the entire experience of dining out.

In the ten plus years we have been designing and building restaurants, one thing is certain: restaurateurs are investing more than ever before in design and branding. With the rapid growth in the industry comes greater focus and emphasis on a complete entertainment package, and this is materializing in the form of even more adventurous and exciting approaches to design. Creative interior design does not always require a million-dollar investment; in fact even restaurants with low budgets are paying more attention to the design and branding elements. Case in point are the two restaurants we designed for ourselves, Habit and the Cascade Room. They represent to us the fact that well-planned and executed design and branding concepts contribute — and never detract — to the financial and emotional success of any dining establishment. **CQ**

Invoke International Design Inc. is a multi-disciplinary firm established by Robert Edmonds and David Nicolay in 2001. With combined backgrounds in architecture, interior and graphic design, the company focuses on creating branded environments for the hospitality industry. In addition to being co-owners of Habit and the Cascade Room they have been responsible for the design of many successful restaurants in Vancouver.

