

DESIGN DIALOGUE

REFRESHING FRASCA

Redesigning and expanding a James Beard award-winning restaurant isn't easy, but figuring out what to order might be just as difficult



BY JENNY SEYFRIED
PHOTOS BY
RON POLLARD

Amory Narvaes looks towards Frasca's kitchen and laughs, realizing the design process has come full-circle. The chefs are designing meals within the design he and architect Sarah Brown created for the Boulder, Colorado restaurant. "Seeing the chefs and staff prepare the meals and bring them out of their new kitchen are what makes these unique projects more than worthwhile," Narvaes says. We chatted with Narvaes, of Narvaes Western Construction, and Brown, of Semple Brown Design, about the ins and outs of designing for dining.

Above: Amory Narvaes and Sarah Brown at Frasca

Explain for us the clients' goals with the renovation.

SB: The overall project was revisiting and renovating Frasca as well as incorporating the new restaurants Pizzeria Locale and Caffé, all of which work out of the same kitchen as Frasca.

Three projects in one—that's a big undertaking. What were the biggest challenges?

AN: The owners wanted to make sure we could keep Frasca open as long as possible and reopen them as fast as we could—and I think we succeeded. It was only shut down for a six-week period, and in that time, we had to remodel their dining room and rebuild their kitchen completely. We had hundreds of people working round-the-clock.

How would you describe Frasca's aesthetic redesign?

SB: We like to create timeless spaces and use materials that aren't too trendy. The overall space is clean and contemporary, but it has some eclectic pieces that give it a comfortable feel, like using reclaimed walnut from old train cars for the flooring. Frasca had very high ceilings, so we added beams and custom chandeliers that pulled the scale of the space down. We also added a private dining room that gives it a smaller, more intimate feel.

How is designing and constructing a restaurant different from any other space?

AN: With restaurant renovations, you have to consider pretty complex mechanical systems—ensuring that systems will function, that everything is waterproof. We have to reinforce areas of bars that are used aggressively; for the life of the restaurant, we have to constantly consider durability.

Now that the project is complete, what do you take away from it?

SB: One of the pleasures is that we get to see the users and their enjoyment of the space after it's completed. Restaurants are a lot of work, but the end result is a celebrated space.

...and what do you order?

AN: The menu changes all of the time. It's always different, and everything is good.

SB: I like everything at Frasca! Pizzeria Locale has a version of a Margherita pizza that has spicy prosciutto on it that is my favorite. 🍕

