

Dining in Style—How an '80s Icon Reinvents Itself

Fine dining is all about the *Experience*. From the moment you arrive until evening's end, you expect a memorable restaurant experience. Such memorable experiences take place every evening at Spago in the Forum Shops at Caesar's Las Vegas.

Spago has been the preeminent Las Vegas trendsetter in cuisine, service and design for more than twenty years. The restaurant's sophisticated and stylish environment had been ideal for the celebrated California-style cuisine of Chefs David Robins and Eduardo Perez. But things change.

To enhance the experience of its celebrity clientele, the management of world-renown Spago recently decided to update its once very hip '80s look. Engstrom Design Group (EDG), a San Francisco-based commercial design firm, specializing in upscale restaurants, was selected for the project.

Steven Didrick, one of EDG's lead designers, explains that "Spago is known for continually updating and remodeling its properties. In fact, design is regarded by most fine restaurants today as their point of differentiation." According to Didrick, the design intent for this Spago remodel was sleek and contemporary. Every design element, from the hostess station to bathroom lighting, had to be *en vogue*. EDG sought to create a gallery-like feel to the restaurant with clean, white backgrounds for rotating artwork, contrasted with rich brown accents.

Neo-Metro—The Perfect Match

Didrick joined forces with Fred Halpert, project manager for Terra Nova Industries, a commercial contractor in San Francisco, also specializing in high-end restaurants. While at the Hospitality Design Show in Las Vegas in September 2006, Didrick's and Halpert's heads turned as they spotted the exhibit of Neo-Metro, a luxury manufacturer of contemporary plumbing products for the hospitality marketplace.

Neo-Metro basins, consoles, tubs, toilets, urinals and accessories are designed exclusively for installation in high-end restaurants, night clubs, and office buildings. Indeed, Neo-Metro, a division of Acorn Engineering, won the best of show award in Las Vegas for its new EBB wall-mounted basin [link See Jeff]. Decision made. Products ordered. Spago's Neo-Metro-inspired bathrooms would soon be the perfect complement to carry through the design intent, according to Didrick.

Market Savvy

Neo-Metro is quite familiar with Las Vegas and the upscale hospitality market. Already, the company has completed custom applications in the **Moon Bar at the Palms Hotel**; **The Spa at Mandalay Bay**; the **Ka Theater at the MGM Grand Hotel**. Other special projects include the **Ghost Bar at the top of the W Hotel**

in Dallas; **the new Pod Hotel**, which recently opened in Manhattan; and the **Sushi Bar at ICON South Beach**, the Miami Beach luxury condos, designed by world-famous French designer Philippe Starck.

For Spago, Neo-Metro's System M2 was selected, a precision solution that merges creative design with true ease of installation and care. Model 8983-4 features straight front round washbasins under integral shelving. The enclosure and housing are fabricated of heavy-gage, type 304 stainless steel with a satin finish. The basins are engineered to combine the look and feel of commercial-grade designer basins and countertops with durability in mind. [link to technical schematic here. See Jeff S.]

System M2 offers a wide range of options in shapes and configurations. For Spago, the four-basin configuration was specified. Halpert also chose a specialty option: sensor-driven, integral undershelf to conceal water spouts. The absence of visible faucets dramatizes the sleek effect. Patrons need only to step up, place their hands under the discreet shelf and voila! A vigorous stream of fresh water cascades into the basin. The system's pressure balancing mixing valve delivers a constant water temperature for the comfort of users. [Insert Image]

Minor Challenges

The countertop unit itself was large, 11 feet long, and had to fit into a rather unforgiving alcove. But it is designed to do so. Tasked with installation, Halpert's plumber particularly liked the single waste connection. In addition, Neo-Metro custom designed trash receptacles for the expansive countertop system that tilt out easily from under the counter for quick and easy removal of trash bags. This custom design is now a part of the Neo-Metro line. Often, Neo-Metro designs and engineers create custom designs for unusual applications. Spago has high volume traffic into the "facilities" and the cleaning crew appreciated the added convenience. A little more finessing on the valves to the soap dispensers, and the installation was complete.

"We were very pleased with the results," says Halpert. "With so many options to the Neo-Metro System, I had the freedom to carefully consider installation issues before making suggestions to the design team. We were under a deadline and we definitely saved time." Halpert added that he intends to recommend Neo-Metro for upcoming projects.

Aesthetics First

As Didrick explains, “We specifically chose the seamless look of brush stainless for aesthetics and convenience. System M2, ideal for luxury hospitality applications, gives the option of mirrored or brushed stainless. Brushed stays cleaner longer and does not show water spots. And it doesn’t compete with interior wall designs. Mirrored stainless catches light much differently.”

Didrick specified incandescent sconces above the basins to bathe faces in a soft glow; he did not want the lighting to reflect back any yellow tones; brushed stainless served his vision well. In fact, Didrick concludes that, “Neo-Metro was the one and only supplier able to fulfill our design intent and meet all the restaurant design specifications.”

In recent years, restaurant design has evolved to become more of an extension of one’s home. Now, fine restaurants are often lit indirectly with beautiful lamps or lighting as ceiling art. You find lounges with low-seating where you can come in for a relaxing glass of wine and ‘experience’ a moment.

Stainless steel, which was always ‘back of the house’ in those powerful commercial kitchens, has now been moved out front into customer dining areas, bars and lounges. This trend originated, in large part, with upscale homeowners who developed a robust appetite for professional-style stainless steel appliances and plumbing products in kitchen and bath remodels, and it is expected to continue for the foreseeable future. Spago’s General Manager, Oded Talmore, enthuses that “our regular clientele has truly appreciated the new look and those patrons who are visiting us for the first time are quick to compliment the redesign, especially the bathrooms.” [image]

Recyclable Advantage

Eco-friendly building, along with the use of sustainable materials is another widespread trend impacting the construction industry. Many people do not realize that stainless steel is a recyclable metal, a feature that pleases Neo-Metro’s founder, Kristin Kahle. “Our commitment to designing beautiful plumbing products extends to the environment. We want to ensure we do our part to manufacture responsibly,” she affirms. What’s more, all Neo-Metro products are ADA-compliant and fully meet UFAS and ANSI standards.

Neo-Metro is also a member of the Green Building Council, a leading non-profit organization dedicated to sustainable building design and construction, and developers of the LEED building rating system. www.usgbc.org. What’s more, if an installation uses an instantaneous water heater with Neo-Metro valves, additional LEED points are earned.

In the end, all parties involved in the Spago remodeling project declared it a success: designer, contractor, supplier, client and its customers. More projects are already on the drawing board.

Few 1980s icons have withstood the test time. Most have gone the way of *Dallas* or the DeLorean, Rubik’s Cube or the Fitness craze. Staying power goes to Madonna who still tours to sell-out crowds.

And then, there is Spago—an 80s icon that stays fresh, contemporary and completely relevant by redefining and redesigning itself with style, sophistication and a touch of stainless steel.

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For more information about Neo-Metro products and custom applications, please contact Jeff Showalter at 626.855.4819 or jshowalter@neo-metro.com or visit www.Neo-Metro.com.

For more information on the companies mentioned in this article, please log onto:

www.engstromdesign.com

www.terranova-ind.com

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