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Designer Thomas Schoos Gives Nautical Imagery a Wry Twist in ‘Herringbone’

The Noted Hospitality Designer Creates Fourth Venue for Top Chef Brian Malarkey

West Hollywood, CA (December 11, 2012)

When Thomas Schoos began his design for *Herringbone*, he knew he would have to dig deep in his bag of tricks, not only to top the other three restaurants he had already created for *Top Chef* alumnus Brian Malarkey, but also to insure that this new restaurant attracted the right kind of attention among the many upscale restaurants in tony La Jolla, California. To achieve this, Schoos drew on his experience as a modern artist to re-



imagine and transform a dark, cavernous warehouse space into a sensuous indoor garden that celebrates seafood and nautical themes with wry humor.

As user reviews on sites like OpenTable and Yelp reveal, guests may come to check out the innovative cuisine of the two *Top Chef* alums Malarkey (who will also be a judge on the new ABC show *The Taste* in 2013) and his executive chef Amanda Baumgarten, but, they linger because of the stunning ambience – raving about open air courtyards, cozy fireplaces and eclectic art. Probably the most popular feature is the introduction of six 100-year-old indoor olive trees throughout the space, their massive, twisted trunks and overarching branches converting an austere industrial environment into an olive grove. To allow for the trees, Schoos had to tear out suspended ceilings and add skylights, making the old barrel-vaulted ceiling visible. This ceiling fits the nautical theme perfectly, resembling the inverted hull of a ship. Schoos reinforces this notion by creating a series of chandeliers out of inverted antique row boats, adding vintage Edison light bulbs hanging in bunches from course ropes.

Creating chandeliers by hanging ropes and Edison bulbs has, in fact, become a trademark of the “fabric” group of restaurants owned by Malarkey and designed by Schoos (the others being *Searsucker* in San Diego, *Burlap* in Del Mar and *Gabardine* in Point Loma). In each of these restaurants, Schoos has found objects fitting the restaurant’s theme and created chandeliers by hanging rope and Edison bulbs from them. For *Herringbone*, Schoos went even farther, creating a chandelier over the bar out of an entire whale skeleton that is suspended inside a steel structure resembling the frame of a blimp. For Schoos, this was a question of balance and contrast. “I needed something that could compete with these huge

trees, but that was still organic and textural and spoke of the sea. The skeleton seemed perfect,” says Schoos. “Plus, the blimp picks up on the building’s structure with its barrel shape. It just works.”

The whale skeleton isn’t the only nautical artifact given an unexpected twist. An entire wall of the dining room is filled with rustic lobster traps, evoking the stacks of traps one might see piled on a commercial pier, except that they are filled with inflated puffer fish, complete with google eyes that stare comically out at diners. Puffer fish are also used as lamp shades on a large wrought iron chandelier. The eccentric visuals continue in the seven large-format paintings Schoos created for the restaurant featuring seafood presented in a modernist style with graphic text and amusing juxtapositions.

Although dramatic and entertaining visuals are part of the Schoos/Malarkey brand, according to Schoos, each restaurant presents a new challenge. “I never want to repeat myself,” explains Schoos, whose career began as a painter and sculptor. “It’s like a movie with lots of sequels. Some of the characters are the same, but each movie must stand on its own.” The fabric restaurant “movie franchise” has been very successful, with each new restaurant building audience and reputation. Still, Schoos feels that Herringbone is something special. “The open courtyard, the sea air, the trees, the art, the open kitchen where you can watch the food being prepared – it all goes together to make a refreshing, vibrant experience. No wonder it’s hard to get people to leave!”

To see more photos of Herringbone, please visit <http://schoos.com/portfolio/project-details/items/portfolio-commercial-herringbone.html>

Thomas Schoos is known as designer of some of the most successful hospitality venues in the U.S., ranging from *Tao Restaurant and Nightclub* at the Venetian Hotel in Las Vegas, which has been the top-grossing restaurant in the U.S. every year since it opened in 2005, to *Searsucker* in San Diego, voted by OpenTable as the second most popular restaurant in the country in 2011. Schoos has partnered with celebrity chefs like *Iron Chef* Morimoto and *Top Chef’s* Brian Malarkey to design numerous restaurants in many cities, with dozens more planned. Meanwhile, Schoos continues his career as an artist and painter, contributing original works to many of his projects and even incorporating art into their structures and designs. This year, his design for *Morimoto Mexico City* was named one of two finalists in the Hospitality Design Awards for Fine Dining.

For more information on Schoos products and designs, or to interview Thomas Schoos, please contact our PR department by email at pr@schoos.com or call Matthew Hutchison at 323-822-2800. Information is also available on the Schoos Design website at www.schoos.com.

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