



Contact: Matthew Hutchison, Schoos Design
323-822-2800 / matthew@schoos.com

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Puesto Opens in San Diego, Latest Restaurant from Designer Thomas Schoos

Restaurant's industrial design converts a former jail into a colorful arena for Mexican food

After the success of their popular Mexican “street food” restaurant in La Jolla, California, the family that owns *Puesto* decided they wanted an atmosphere a bit more upscale and eye-catching for their new location in the just-opened The Headquarters complex near Seaport Village in San Diego. The Headquarters development was once the San Diego police headquarters, and *Puesto* would occupy a former file library and jail cell block. To accomplish the transformation, *Puesto* hired Thomas Schoos, the designer behind



such iconic venues as *Tao* in Las Vegas, *Searsucker* in San Diego and *Morimoto* restaurants in Honolulu, Napa and Mexico City. When Schoos saw the large industrial space, he immediately realized that, instead of attempting to obscure or “clean up” the distressed architecture, it would be far more evocative to preserve the rustic, sensual textures, using them as inspiration for the overall look of the restaurant.

Chipped wall paint, glue marks on the ceiling, old light switches, plumbing and electrical conduits were all left exposed, though clear-coated to preserve them in their distressed state. Schoos also decided to keep the catwalks that were part of the original file room, turning them into a dining mezzanine. In contrast to this, Schoos has placed contemporary décor and artistic elements that create an eclectic, casual vibe while exhibiting a typically Mexican love of color. Two striking examples are the murals by graffiti artist Chor Boogie that occupy walls in both dining rooms, adding a riot of vivid color and graphical interest.

“I wanted Puesto to be as vibrant and alive as a street festival or bullfight in Old Mexico.”

-Thomas Schoos

“Even though it is a big industrial space,” explains Schoos, “I wanted *Puesto* to be as vibrant and alive as a street festival or a bullfight in old Mexico.” In fact, with a mezzanine overlooking the action, the space feels a lot like a “food arena” where watching food being prepared is part of the show. To keep food



central, Schoos placed the open kitchen along two walls of the front dining room with only a copper screen separating guests from the flames, aromas and visual stimuli of cooking.

In addition to the food, color and activity, Schoos brightens the industrial space even more by introducing nature, both by opening the space to the outdoors and by bringing greenery inside. Along the front of the restaurant, massive two-story glass doors were added to open the restaurant to the pedestrian plaza out front. From the outside, passers-by can see guests dining on two levels through the tall doorways, creating an alluring facade. Though new, the added doors fit the industrial vibe with their four-inch-square beams made from textured steel. Between the two dining rooms, an indoor/outdoor living room is created with large doors and a tile “carpet” that extends from inside the room out onto the patio. To bring nature inside, the rear dining room features a wire mesh that covers an entire wall, allowing a creeping fig vine to climb the wall toward the skylight. And in the front dining room, aralia trees float in the air in massive concrete pots suspended from the ceiling by steel cables, like giant industrial flowerpots.

Schoos, who is also currently designing the posh new *Herringbone Restaurant* in the Mondrian Hotel on the Sunset Strip in L.A., sees *Puesto* as a perfect coming-together of location, venue and imagination. It creates a new, more upscale look and feel for the former short-order business while celebrating the history of a San Diego landmark. “It just feels like the type of place where you want to eat delicious crab guacamole or a steak taco along with signature cocktails with friends. It’s an urban street party in a killer location with color, art and action. It’s one of my favorite designs.” More photos of the restaurant may be seen at <http://bit.ly/1bvi76q>.

About Thomas Schoos

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 Open Table as the second most popular restaurant in the country in 2011. Schoos has partnered with celebrity chefs like *Iron Chef* Morimoto and *The Taste*’s Brian Malarkey to design numerous restaurants in many cities, with dozens more planned. In 2012, his design for *Morimoto Mexico City* was named one of two finalists in the Hospitality Design Awards for Fine Dining. In 2013, two Schoos-designed restaurants, *Figue* and *Herringbone*, were both nominated in the fine dining category for the Gold Key Awards for hospitality, comprising 2 of the 3 nominations. Recently, Schoos has been creating his own new restaurant brands that he will design as well as co-own, including a new beach-themed café called *Beach Nation* that is set to open in West Hollywood in 2014, and an Alpine-themed restaurant called *Ludwig* that will be located at the Original Farmer’s Market/The Grove in L.A.

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For more information, to acquire high-resolution photos, or to interview Thomas Schoos, please contact the Schoos 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.