

Designer Thomas Schoos Sees Distinctive Restaurants as the Next Step in Airport Evolution

Noted Restaurant and Hotel Designer Says Improved Passenger Experience should be the Focus when Upgrading Air Terminals

In designing *Skewers*, one of the newest restaurants at Los Angeles' LAX Airport, interior designer Thomas Schoos drew on his own experiences as a frequent traveler to craft a unique dining experience. "I wanted it to be a real restaurant that just happens to be in an airport," said Schoos. Schoos, who travels extensively designing restaurants, hotels and private homes in the U.S., Asia and Europe, is familiar with the challenges facing air travelers.

His own experience and insight leads him to believe that imaginative interior spaces and amenities are the future of airport design. "Today's traveler's are jaded and savvy," according to Schoos, and are not easily impressed by architecture. When it comes to airports, "most people are 'been there, done that,'" says Schoos. "Travelers aren't looking to be impressed; they want a break, a relief, a diversion. And they want to be comfortable."



Skewers, the fourth restaurant Schoos has designed for celebrity *Iron Chef* Masaharu Morimoto, is part of a concerted effort to change the atmosphere at LAX, which is undergoing one of the largest modernization programs for any U.S. airport. Besides Morimoto, the effort includes other celebrity chefs like Wolfgang Puck, whose *Express* restaurant debuted at the same time as *Skewers*. According to L.A. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, "These new eateries are just the beginning of many more dining and retail options coming to LAX in the near future." (<http://s.tt/1nhlu>) Besides just providing new food choices, these venues bring distinctive interior design elements into the terminals, while also providing space for passengers to escape from the stresses of air travel.

Schoos believes this design approach is part of an inevitable trend in the evolution of airports. In the early days, airports were grand and futuristic, embodying the optimism of the new "space age." Architects like Eero Saarinen constructed dramatic structures that resembled science fiction sets, with soaring ceilings and large open spaces. As the century lumbered on, however, air travel became more commonplace and crowded, and what was once modern became austere and depressing. Instead of being exciting, airport interiors began to seem like part of a dehumanizing cattle drive.

The antidote to this, according to Schoos, is imaginative interior design, which can bring personality back into these functional public spaces. One of the most obvious means of doing that is by adding a variety

of distinctive restaurants. In the case of *Skewers*, Schoos wanted to get away from anything that resembled fast food, like plastic or Formica. Instead, he incorporated natural textures, such as rough rebar and reclaimed wood, along with fresh colors like wasabi green to suggest new vegetation. In a nod to practicality, floor tile is installed to allow for heavy use and easy clean-up; however, the tile features a hardwood design which provides a natural, homey feel.

Besides soothing natural textures, Schoos felt it was important to divide the space to accommodate different types of travelers. Up front, an easy-access area with a view of the terminal accommodates travelers in a hurry, while a more secluded area provides more intimacy for those with time to kill. To create this separation, Schoos bent rebar rods to form a wall and ceiling and attached reclaimed wooden planks intermittently, allowing for a flow of air and light. According to Schoos, these aged wood planks bring a sense of warmth and charm with their honest wear-and-tear, something one does not ordinarily associate with airports. (Wolfgang Puck's Express Restaurant also makes use of reclaimed wood -- more evidence of a trend toward organic textures in airport design.) The overall effect is more that of a sophisticated gastro-pub rather than a cafeteria or fast food establishment.

Like the décor, the food from Chef Morimoto is decidedly un-airport-like, with all freshly made-to-order selections prepared in an open kitchen. It will still be fast, however, thanks to the quick-grill nature of the Japanese "Kushiyaki" and "Kushiage" cuisine. These traditional dishes consist of small bites of meat, seafood and vegetables that are either grilled or deep fried on skewers (hence the restaurant's name).

Schoos believes American airports will increasingly turn to interior designers, celebrity chefs and professionals from the hospitality industry to re-think and upgrade aging airport terminals. As Schoos points out, certain airports overseas are already ahead of this trend, incorporating such ideas as indoor gardens, museums, iPad libraries and even ice skating rinks to humanize and bring color to airport environments. According to Schoos, this is the kind of vision and imagination that is needed in the U.S. to transform the passenger experience and create the successful airports of tomorrow.

Thomas Schoos Bio: 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 *Top Chef's* Brian Malarkey to design numerous restaurants in many cities, with dozens more planned. This year, his design for *Morimoto Mexico City* was named one of two finalists in the Hospitality Design Awards for Fine Dining.

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For more information about Schoos Design, for high resolution photos, or to interview Thomas Schoos, please contact our PR department by email at pr@schoos.com, or telephone Matthew Hutchison at 323-822-2800. Information is also available on the Schoos Design website at www.schoos.com.