

by Russell Fortmeyer

Although themed restaurants—where entertainment is as significant an attraction as the cooking—are all the rage now, the owners of the new Fire & Ice restaurant in Cambridge, Massachusetts, decided to keep their focus on food. Instead of loading a space up with sports memorabilia or movie props, they wanted the design of their flagship restaurant to showcase an innovative concept for the kitchen: the “improvisational grill.” At Fire & Ice, patrons use their plates like painters’ palettes, assembling their own meals from ingredients available at various food stations, then handing them over to chefs who cook them at a central grill.

From the cool atmosphere of the bar near the entrance to the warmer, animated rear dining area and courtyard, the design is a collage of moods and colors. Paths of light lead diners through the space, while color is used to create the sensation that some areas of the restaurant

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are warm and others cold. The contrasts energize the dining room, creating a festive atmosphere. Suspended, corrugated metal cut in angular shapes, and metal panels punched with geometric shapes have been painted in bright, high-energy colors. These elements are reinforced by an unconventional lighting system partly fashioned out of generic and found lighting components.

A cascade of colorful wall panels leads patrons down from street level to the 235-seat restaurant. The entire space is an integration of its parts; the colors of the food are picked up in wall panels and furniture, and again in the lighting. Reflective textures, spirally sanded metal laminate, a radiating floor pattern, and a kinetic, industrial chic is intended to encourage patrons to busy themselves concocting their food. An open-ended circulation arrangement invites them to meander through the food stations in no particular order.

“Because Fire & Ice is a restaurant based on participation, the owners wanted a sense of excitement, liveliness, and dynamism in the space,” says Mark Connor, project architect. “We wanted to come up with an image that wasn’t theme-based but was still very lively.”

While the architects worked in this vein, the lighting design was kept relatively simple and economical but with a few

Project: *Fire & Ice, Cambridge, Massachusetts*

Owners: *John Schall and Jim Miller*

Architect and lighting designer:
Mark Connor, project architect;
Susan Greco, interior design;
Chris Brown, designer

General Contractor: *Shawmut Design & Construction*

Electrician: *TriState Electric*



Dots of light from generic lamp holders dance among bright geometric cutouts and shapes in Fire & Ice's kinetic space.



Recessed downlights with halogen sources light paths and vitrines containing vases and cut flowers. The architects' intent was to light selectively, rather than washing all of the surfaces in the space with light.

surprising twists. Incandescent pendant lighting in the entry and bar area is provided by conventional desk lamps Connor bought in a local store and simply turned upside-down and hung at various heights from tracks. The shades are clear acrylic and translucent vinyl punched with geometric patterns.

"It's a lot of fun to take these objects that people have in their houses and transform them into something that is uncommon," says Connor. Along the high walls of the bar and on architectural fragments in the dining room, a series of red, blue, green, and yellow A-lamps in porce-



lain sockets "dance," as Connor puts it, across the surfaces. The food stations and grill area are lit with halogen lamps on tracks, which echo the "fire" of the eight-foot-diameter central grill. An outdoor courtyard that seats 45 is lit with caged, bare-bulb construction lights fixed to cables; the layout of bricks in the courtyard's terrace mimics the radiating pattern of the interior dining room ceiling, which is accented with strands of linear fiber-optic lights. Both inside and out, though, lighting is used selectively, bounced on and off different areas, as opposed to illuminating every surface evenly.

Connor says much of the lighting design occurred during the construction process, which suited the architects' desire for the restaurant to have a spontaneous, almost happenstance appearance. In particular, the pendants and the spotlights in the dining area were installed in tracks wherever possible for maximum flexibility. Some of the tracks are on simple dimming systems, but there's no sophisticated control system for employees to manage. Connor says he approaches restaurants very much like theatrical set design: because trends and ideas in restaurant design evolve quickly, it's important to create an impact without spending a lot of money on materials that aren't going to be around forever.

Since its opening almost a year ago, the restaurant has been a hit—both gastronomically and socially. Jim Miller, who co-owns the restaurant with John Schall, believes that good design and good food must be combined in equal parts to assure a restaurant's success. "Fire & Ice's design genuinely reflects the restaurant's unique approach to food service," he says, "rather than being a place that serves so-so food but tries to get by on a themed design." ■

Sources

Desk lamps: *Crate & Barrel*
Track lighting and mono-points: *Juno*
Keyless porcelain sockets, galvanized floodlight bases, and metal construction guards: *Leviton*

Lamps: *General Electric*

Custom pendant bases: *SRP Signs*
Custom pendant shades: *Addsource*
Fiber optics: *Lumenyte*