

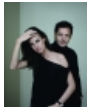
Sector Spotlight: Restaurants

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New Leases on Life: Feminine beauty, prohibition and provocative contrasts help create memorable dining experiences within a trio of high-profile venues.

By **Matthew Hall**

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Cook Hall, Atlanta

Gone from the W Atlanta-Buckhead hotel is the Market restaurant, a global diner concept that featured white terrazzo floors, chrome-detailed furniture and swirled wall murals. In its place is Cook Hall, a Prohibition era-inspired space populated with American walnut wood, vintage glassware and old-fashioned textured wall coverings.

That makeover, says Culinary Concepts Hospitality Group president James Gersten, reflects changing dining preferences. "People are eating out more frequently and are looking for great food, service and a comfortable environment," says Gersten, whose New York-based restaurant management group operates venues within several of locale. "They don't want the pressure of ordering a bottle of wine at each meal or three courses. It's just not how we dine anymore."

Brought in to create the interiors of a restaurant reflecting that new reality was Atlanta's blackdog studio LLC. "The original design direction involved creating a gastro pub, but we knew that trying to drop an English pub-style interior into a very contemporary box would not necessarily be successful," says blackdog principal Carolyn Auger-Joiner. "So we introduced some industrial/warehouse techniques to help bridge the gap between new and old. Culinary Concepts wanted to create a neighborhood hang-out type of space that would draw people in but also keep them coming back. So making the interior casual and comfortable was very important. Real hardwood floors, dark walls and vintage lighting help bring that feeling home."

Designers also installed communal-style tables throughout the restaurant, which includes a 2,500-sq.-ft. main level and an 800-sq.-ft. mezzanine. "That allows groups of people to pull together tables as needed for socializing, which reinforces the relaxed vibe within the space," says Auger-Joiner.