

ONE- STOP SHOP

OPERATORS
MAKE THE MOST
OF SQUARE
FOOTAGE WITH
MULTICONCEPT
RESTAURANTS.

BY MAGGIE HENNESSY

OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: 1) In addition to periodic design overhauls, the 33-year-old Spiaggia continues to find new uses to keep its space current, from adding an onsite coffee bar to converting a lounge into a chic private-dining area. 2) With counter service on the ground floor and full-service dining upstairs, there's a learning curve for new customers at Corridor. 3) The Hive is accessible via a separate entrance from Honey's first-floor restaurant and bar and operates as a separate entity, with different hours and cocktails.

In an era of rising rents and razor-thin margins, restaurant operators are finding unique ways to maximize square footage and dayparts as consumers embrace the idea of all-in-one dining and entertainment venues.

The notion of multiconcept venues is nothing new, born of thrifty chefs'/operators' protracted need to make every square inch work for them. But the idea has been refreshed in recent years as complementary trends take hold. Underused private dining rooms or waiting areas are being repurposed into trendy secret bars. Consumers' embrace of fast-casual concepts from high-end chefs is inspiring full-service restaurants to carve out on-site counter-service options for breakfast and lunch.

ONE SPOT, MYRIAD EXPERIENCES

In Chicago, Macanese hotspot Fat Rice turned its newspaper-lined waiting area into low-lit speakeasy The Ladies' Room, where the beverage team turns out playful cocktails with all kinds of housemade bitters, syrups and tinctures. Two upscale Italian eateries—Formento's in the West Loop and Nonnina in River North—offer adjacent counter-service concepts that sling Italian-style sandwiches for carryout during the day.

Also in the West Loop, stylish Mediterranean-American restaurant Honey's turned an eclectically furnished upstairs private dining room into an intimate 30-seat cocktail bar called The Hive. "We would be showing the space for private events, but it felt weird to say, here's this beautiful space with great furniture and a fully sustainable bar, but you can't go in unless you rent it," says partner Justin Furman. "We thought, why don't we open it to the public? It's all about creating multiple experiences for the guest in one place."

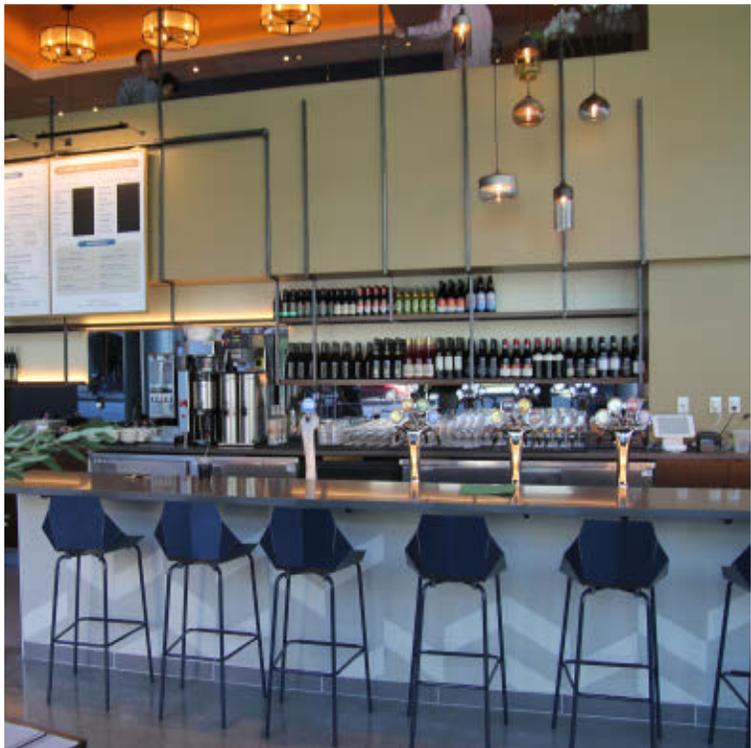
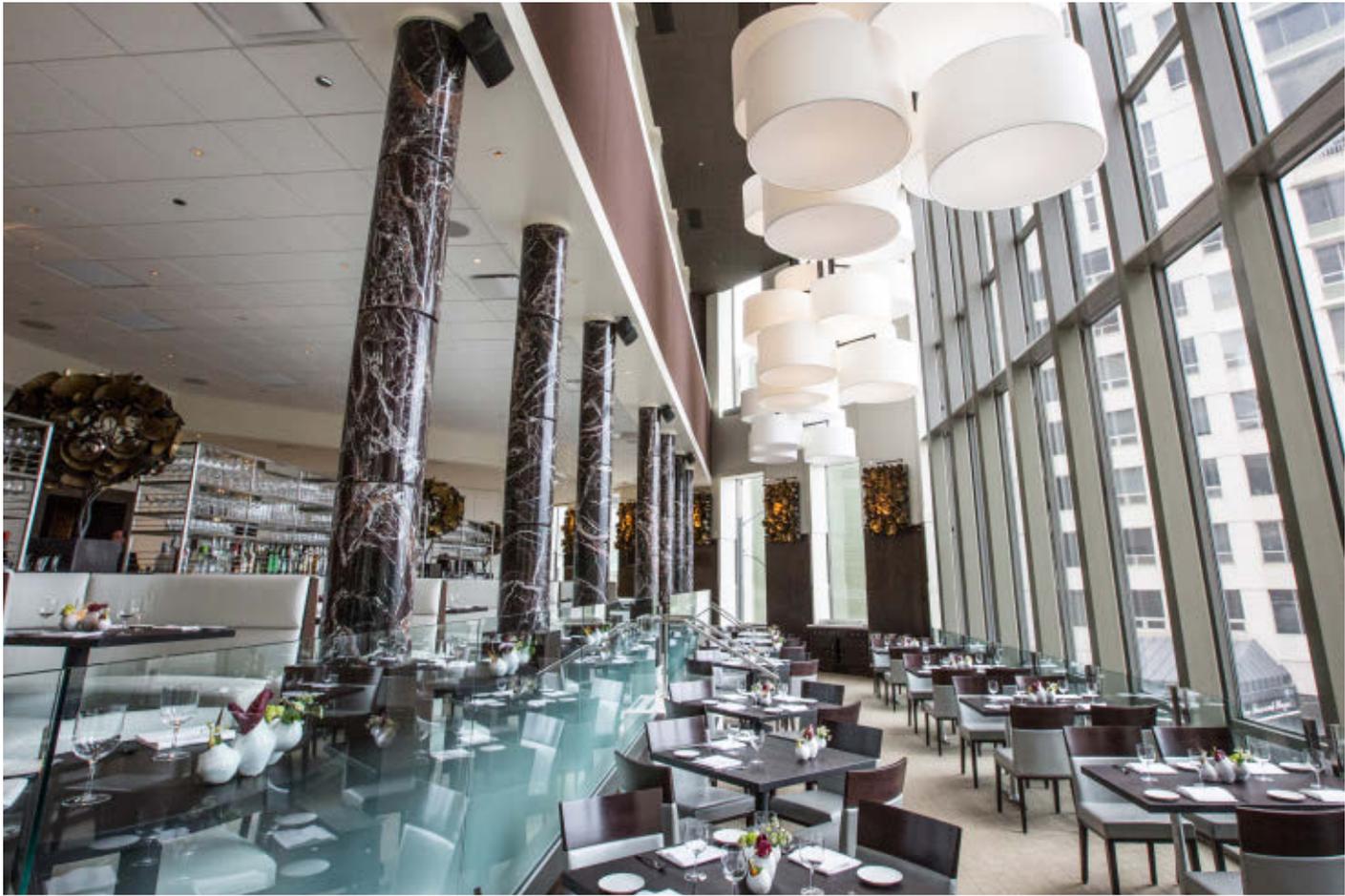


PHOTO CREDITS Clockwise from top: 1) Galdones Photography 2) Hi Neighbor Restaurant Group 3) Adam Jason Cohen



The Hive operates almost as a separate entity from the restaurant and bar downstairs, with a focused list of three daily set cocktails, plus dealer's choice offerings from the bartender on duty. It's walk-in only, accessible via a hidden entrance by the restaurant's vestibule, and opens two hours later than the restaurant (at 7 p.m. instead of 5 p.m.) and is open just three nights a week. Diners waiting for a table or seeking a spot at the downstairs bar are encouraged to head up there before dinner. Or, servers will invite diners up after their meal for a digestif, as if they're part of a club.

"The Hive gives guests space before dinner to have a drink and gather their thoughts, not feeling like they're backed up against the rest of the dining room," Furman says. "It's also a nice place to decompress after dinner, and really fits with our whole design and flow. At Honey's, we want people to release themselves from the rest of world when they walk in."

Corridor, a bi-level, counter- and full-service hybrid restaurant in San Francisco's Mid-Market neighborhood, was conceived as a more casual, lower-priced alternative to the fairly saturated market of full-service restaurant options. With City Hall, the theater district and offices for Square, Twitter and Uber all within two blocks, Corridor hosts as many power lunches and happy hours as pre-theater dinners.

"The whole concept was designed around the fact that people in this area want to get great fine-dining-style food, but they have to make reservations way too far in advance, which a lot of people don't always remember to do," says Ryan Cole, partner, Hi Neighbor Hospitality Group. "We also get so many people

LEVERAGING CHEF-BRAND POWER

As next-gen food halls breathe new life into the once-dreary notion of mall cafeterias, well-known chefs are rolling out ambitious branded food emporiums.

Elimination from season six of Bravo's "Top Chef" was far from a setback for Washington, D.C., chef/restaurateur Mike Isabella; one could more reasonably call it the catalyst that made him one of the region's most recognizable, successful chefs. He now owns 10 concepts around D.C., including contemporary Italian spot Graffiato and side-by-side spit-roasted Greek and counter-service Italian spots Kapnos and G by Mike Isabella.

His strong brand identity undoubtedly helped sell his most ambitious project yet: a 10-concept food marketplace opening inside luxury retail outlet Tysons Galleria, McLean, Virginia. Dubbed Isabella Eatery, the 41,000-square-foot emporium will feature a mix of fast-casual and full-service offerings, from contemporary Spanish spot Arroz to Graffiato and Kapnos spinoffs, plus a raw bar, Japanese noodle bar, Mexican cantina, ice cream parlor, coffee shop and retail food market.

"It has every moving part you could think of," Isabella says. He is relying heavily on cross-utilization and economies of scale, despite the huge variance in each concept's footprint, menu and style.

"If you have five or six different vendors, then everyone is paying

more, because they're not buying as much and have to have fairly limited menus," he says. "But if you're buying chicken for five concepts, you have more power."

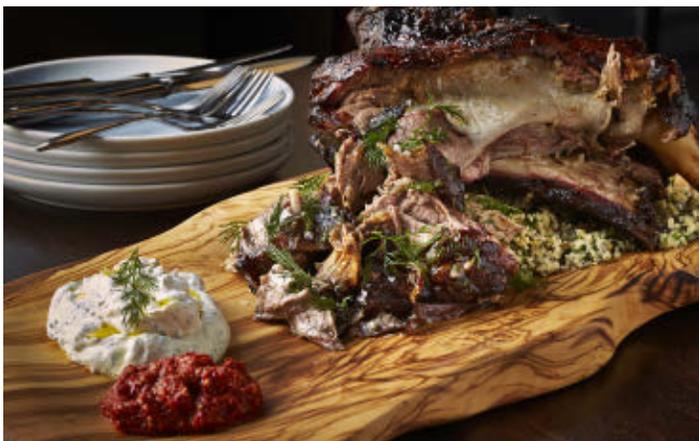
Isabella Eatery reflects the growing popularity of branded chef marketplaces in the vein of Mario Batali's and Joe Bastianich's sprawling Italian emporium Eataly, which has quickly expanded beyond its initial Torino, Italy, outpost to U.S. locations in New York, Boston, Chicago and Los Angeles, as well as Tokyo, Seoul, Korea, and Sao Paulo, Brazil. Eataly was one of the marketplaces that inspired Isabella as he was coming up with his namesake emporium.

Isabella says he and his team did their homework, traveling across Europe and the U.S. to famous food halls such as Time Out Market in Lisbon, Portugal, Eataly, Michael Mina's Locale Market in St. Petersburg, Florida, and Reading Terminal Market in Philadelphia.

"At the end of the day, a really great food hall experience of course has really high-quality food, but it also means you can go out with a couple of people and everyone is satisfied, whether they want dumplings, sushi or really beautiful bread and cheese," he says. "You don't need to make a decision or compromise, which is sometimes exactly what you want."

ABOVE: Isabella Eatery central bar rendering.

OPPOSITE, LEFT: Kapnos Marketa, a marketplace spinoff of Isabella's popular Greek restaurant, will sell spit-roasted meats such as lamb for take-home dining. OPPOSITE, RIGHT: Spiaggia's third-floor private event kitchen doubles as a fresh pasta-making station during the day, supplying the dining room and cafe menus.



going to shows or the opera after dinner who don't have time to wait or sit through multiple courses."

Diners can either make a reservation or walk in for lunch or dinner. If the former, once inside, they're led up to the mezzanine dining room, where they'll have a traditional, full-service experience. If they walk in, they order at the counter and sit at a high-top table on the ground floor to wait for their food to be brought out. There's almost always confusion on a diner's first visit, but Cole says both guests and staff love the setup.

"The hybrid model is really efficient," he says. "Half the people go through the full-service process while the other half are already getting their order taken before sitting down, which alleviates the most time-consuming part of service for our staff—order taking. It allows you to pace your time, so you're not getting that time suck if you get five tables sitting down at the same time."

The restaurant recently added breakfast, absorbing Corridor Cafe, the adjacent, 700-square-foot cafe, into the restaurant, and turning the cafe into a kitchen and prep space for catering. So now, Corridor is open all day, filling seats at all dayparts. Not only does this maximize the space (for which the group pays rent even when the lights are off), it also satisfies consumers' growing penchant for convenience and plenty of options.

"People like being able to go to one place and have so many options—we had one guy come in three times yesterday," Cole says. "Plus, the informality of the space gives it a casual, approachable feeling even though you're getting the same quality food in the cafe or the dining room."

STAYING RELEVANT

Indeed, evolving is a big part of the multiconcept movement. Tony Mantuano, the James Beard Award-winning chef/restaurateur

behind Italian fine-dining stalwart Spiaggia in Chicago, was looking to stay relevant when he opened the more casual Cafe Spiaggia adjacent to its "grown-up" fine-dining sibling in the post-Recession years.

"At first, (Cafe Spiaggia) wasn't in the cards, but there was a need for a more casual place, especially for the neighborhood to have lunch," Mantuano says. "There aren't a lot of fine-dining Michelin-starred restaurants that serve lunch, so it just made sense."

Operationally, it made a whole lot of sense, too. The concepts share back-of-house spaces across several floors. The second-floor kitchen separating the dining room and cafe acts as the hub of both restaurants, housing basic and all pastry prep, plus a dish room and walk-in coolers for all three areas. The third floor, which

houses Spiaggia's private dining room, has a prep kitchen that doubles as a fresh pasta kitchen for the dining room and cafe during the day.

The 33-year-old Spiaggia keeps on tinkering, too. When the team unveiled a glass-enclosed lounge in 2015 as

part of a design overhaul of the dining room, Mantuano found that patrons only used it on Friday and Saturday nights. So, this spring, it was converted to a 20-person private event space. "It's this little jewel box of a private event space that people love, because it's part of the restaurant instead of on a separate floor," he says.

"We're always looking at the business, trying to find ways that makes it more attractive to guests and how they want to use it. The same guest that we have to appeal to today wasn't even born when our original restaurant opened. It's not sacred to them. We have to change and evolve, because people's tastes evolve and change." ■

“IT’S ALL ABOUT CREATING MULTIPLE EXPERIENCES FOR THE GUEST IN ONE PLACE.”

JUSTIN FURMAN

MAGGIE HENNESSY IS A CHICAGO-BASED FOOD/DRINK WRITER AND CHEF WITH A BACKGROUND IN BUSINESS WRITING AND MORE THAN EIGHT YEARS' EXPERIENCE AS A JOURNALIST AND EDITOR COVERING THE FOOD/RESTAURANT INDUSTRIES. VISIT HER WEBSITE AT WWW.MAGGIEHENNESSY.COM.