



perfectly palatable

Rowland+Broughton Architecture and Urban Design sets the scene at bb's kitchen in Aspen, Colo., where inspired food, function, and flair are on the menu

By Holly Richmond • Photography by Jason Dewey



It takes more than good design and dedication to create an exciting, successful restaurant that is open 365 days a year, three meals a day. It takes a bit of *chutzpa*, as well. Apparently Bruce Berger, owner and developer of bb's kitchen in Aspen, Colo., has a good handle on that approach when it comes to fruitfully merging his professional and personal life. "Cooking is a major avocation of mine, and I've wanted to open a restaurant for a long time. My wife, however, was completely opposed to the idea, so I thought it was appropriate to name it after her," Berger says with a touch of joyous sarcasm.

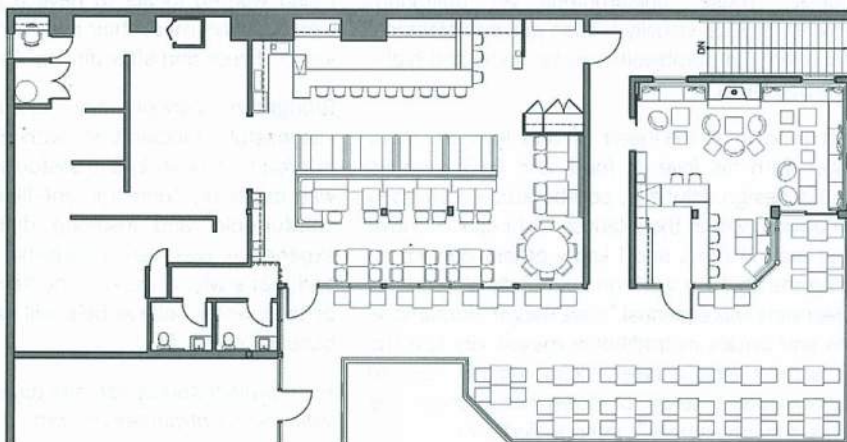
Thus, bb's kitchen (B.B. is short for Barbara Berger) opened in late December 2010 after a decidedly fast and focused three-month rebuild of a second-floor space that once housed an art gallery. Rowland+Broughton Architecture and Urban Design (R+B), with offices in Denver and Aspen, Colo., was the ideal firm to take on the formidable challenge. The 2,500-sq.-ft., 66-seat restaurant and lounge features all of the comfortable elements of an upscale diner with terrific home-cooking at an affordable price, yet in an atmosphere that caters to the sophistication level of Aspen's local clientele. Sarah Broughton, R+B principal, recognized Berger's passion for food and service and matched it with a space that is modern, eclectic, and, above all, functional. "bb's concept is holistic and its design complete, which enables it to seamlessly transition from breakfast to dinner to late-night drinks," notes Broughton.

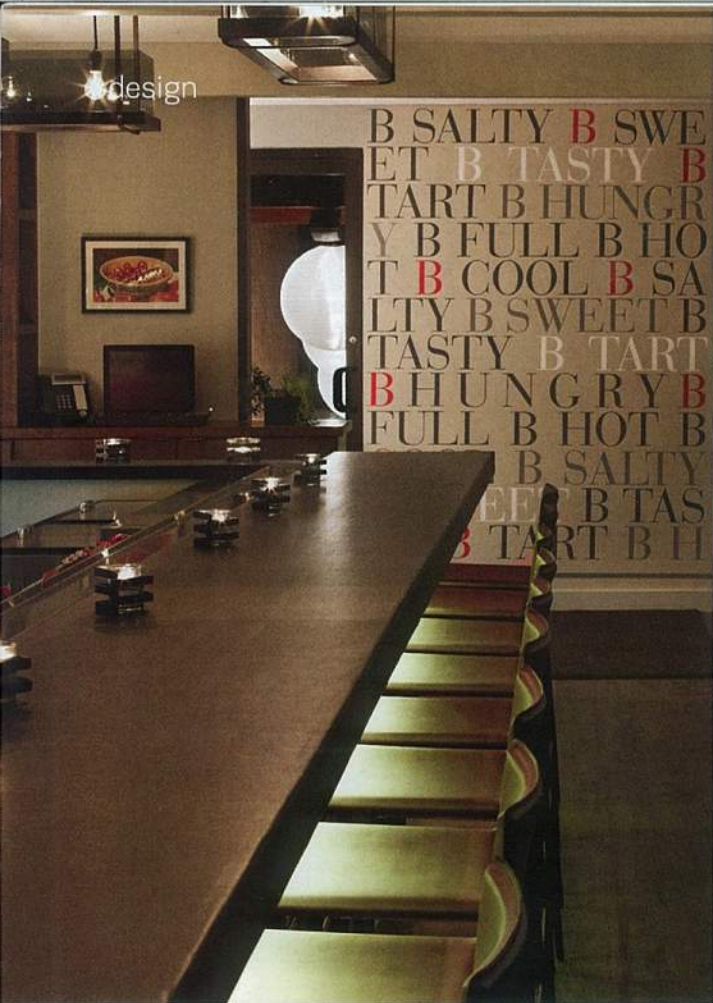
The main dining room features cozy, diner-esque booths and banquette seating in warm wood and

deep red tones that are contrasted by the subdued black, greys, and whites of the space's backdrop. One side of the dining room showcases a custom designed bar with "belly up to the bar" counter stools, while an adjacent, full-service lounge completes the casual-yet-elegant atmosphere with its own unique design qualities. This mix of seating allows guests a range of opportunities for dining, from power breakfasts to romantic dinners to après ski snacks and cocktails.

Berger was adamant that the atmosphere should feel hip but not so over the top as to be unappealing to more mature guests. R+B met the challenge by creating an aesthetic sensibility with mass appeal, which include flexible seating and a layering of

Bold red accent paint behind the bar complements the warm wood furniture while drawing attention to the custom designed shelving (opposite). The bar offers a hip yet relaxed environment and features "belly up to the bar" counter stools in brown regenerated leather. The writing is literally on the wall with additional text art, "Purely Delicious," which expresses a contemporary, whimsical quality. An open kitchen establishes the casual atmosphere of the dining room, while the food and wine reveal the sophisticated, seasonal offerings that underlie the interior milieu (above). Homemade jams and syrups in traditional mason jars line the rear service area shelves, playing double duty as backlit interior accents.





“bb’s concept is holistic and its design complete, which enables it to seamlessly transition from breakfast to dinner to late-night drinks”—Sarah Broughton

design elements that simultaneously offers a sense of openness with pockets of intimacy. Broughton says that cohesion was key, and a major challenge included creating an unassuming level of comfort in an atmosphere that is decidedly upscale. She says, “We met the challenge with specific design solutions that considered both the elegance and flow of the space, but also its functionality. No matter how great the food is, if the restaurant doesn’t ‘work’ and service lacks, it will not be a success.” These “unglamorous yet utilitarian” elements include visually hidden gas and electrical components, a dumbwaiter, water lines, and high-grade acoustics.

Great food is at the heart of bb’s kitchen. Thus, Berger, with his love of food, and R+B, with its creative design solutions, collaborated on an open kitchen plan within the relatively tight space. “I love being around food, and I know others do too, so having the chefs at work on beautifully plated food in clear view was essential,” says Berger. Homemade jams and syrups in traditional mason jars line the rear service area shelves, doing double duty to communicate a sense of down-home charm, as well as serving as backlit interior elements.

Artwork also is a major player in bb’s appealing sensibility. The Bergers have been collectors since the 1960s and have a particular fondness for text art, which they felt would be ideal for the space. Images such as “Be Salty” and “Purely Delicious” cover an entry wall, as well as an accent wall behind the bar, literally providing food for thought. “I wanted bb’s to be whimsical and witty, and make people feel like they were getting a top-notch dining experience for a reasonable price. I also wanted locals to have a place to go that would always meet their needs, from breakfast to lunch, dinner and after dinner,” Berger explains.

Broughton cannot say enough about the successful collaboration with Berger, and she is proud of how R+B transformed a space that was decidedly “unrestaurant-like” into a popular, comfortable, and inspiring dining locale. “The experience was very hands-on for all involved, and that’s why it works,” she says. “It was a labor of love, and I believe bb’s will continue to thrive because of it.”

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"Be Salty" text art covers the entry wall (opposite left) as guests make their way through the bar to the main dining area or lounge. Durable Parterre flooring in a resilient wood plank vinyl exudes warmth and contrasts with the neutral walls and accents of red. The lounge area (opposite right) is an ideal place to wait for a table or enjoy cocktails and snacks après ski. Under-mount lighting on the bar casts an intimate glow. The entry vestibule (opposite bottom) features a custom-designed console table fabricated from Douglas fir wood slabs, powder-coated steel in bright red, and handblown glass. Wood slats (above) on the adjacent walls add texture, dimension, and cohesion with the bar and main dining area. Video art (below) is displayed on a flat screen monitor above the fireplace, with AV equipment conveniently hidden behind the wood-clad fireplace surround. An L-shaped banquette and red lounge chairs offer flexible seating. It's "Girls! Girls!" on pin-up girl wallpaper in the whimsical yet modern restroom (right). A cherry red laminate sink provides a pop of color against the black and white newspaper print backdrop.

