

## #EatWithHonor: 'Fast-Fine' Restaurant Concepts



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We've all been there. A client stops by unexpectedly, just in time for lunch. Your team just won the project they've been working on securing for months. A quick-fire meeting goes into overtime.

A meal is in order, something special, somewhere nice. But while a white-tablecloth restaurant seems too formal and can be time-consuming and pricey, the go-to place around the corner is too mundane. What to do?

Thankfully, the recent influx of what has come to be known as "fast-casual" restaurants is providing the perfect option for people on the go who don't want to sacrifice flavor and ambience for a satisfying dining experience. An article in the local daily recently noted that fast-casual dining was the fastest-growing segment of the restaurant industry with \$38.5 billion in total annual sales last year.

The article was prompted by the fact that Denver in particular is experiencing a fast-casual restaurant boom. What began with the opening of Chipotle Mexican Grill here in the mid-1990s, followed by Smashburger in 2007, has enabled restaurants like Pizzeria Locale, by fine-dining Frasca Food & Wine's Bobby Stucky and Lachlan Mackinnon-Patterson, to expand out of state. Now, let's take the concept one step further and raise the standards to a "fast-fine" dining experience.

Keeping a finger on the pulse of the trend, our firm is proud to be the architecture and interior design partner on the new Honor Society Handcrafted Eatery, slated to open soon on 16th Street, adjacent to the newly redeveloped Union Station. Over the last 11 months, the R+B team has worked hand in hand with Honor Society founding partners Rob Alvarado, Jonas Tempel, Ian Smith and Justin Brunson (owner and executive chef of Old Major and Masterpiece Delicatessen in Denver). Brunson plans to pair his daily Honor Society specials, made with seasonal Colorado-based ingredients, with a full-service bar and craft cocktails created by Glenn Pollack, former head bartender of Oak at Fourteenth, thus bringing a holistic approach to the fast-fine establishment.

As the designers of the space, we look at the environment as a full-service restaurant rather than a typical "fast-food" or "casual" establishment. Situated in a LEED-certified building, which required each tenant also to achieve LEED certification, the design inspiration of the 3,500-square-foot space is to join together a barn's perpetuity with the clean, fresh lines of a modern loft. Working alongside our



Honor Society Handcrafted Eatery

Photo courtesy Brent Moss

client, we did not compromise the design. It is just as high quality as you would find in a full-service restaurant. Instead, the team defined the brand's mission, thus raising the expectations on restaurant design, food and service - while maintaining a lower price point.

A chef-driven design, creative menu curation and specific kitchen design requirements were the fundamentals of the project, with the pizza oven as the centerpiece. With such a robust kitchen plan, there was little distinction between designing a fine-dining restaurant or a fast-fine establishment; the only difference was to anticipate the flow of the space. To aid in the flow of the restaurant, which includes an ample bar and offers both sit-down dining and take-out services, we utilized extensive 3-D modeling. This helped fine-tune the design and materials palette and allowed the client team to "see" the space prior to construction.

While waiting for their order, guests are treated to a view of the open kitchen where fresh, seasonal ingredients are being transformed into healthy, tasty dishes. Restraining the already neutral palette of primarily reclaimed and recycled materials allows for the colorful menu offerings to shine through and not compete with the interior design. Thus the overall design serves as a platform to elevate the menu items.

Honor Society surely will serve as a hub for residents, visitors and local workers looking for healthy, well-crafted, affordable food. The fun, contemporary setting is a bonus. Helping to create it from scratch for such insightful clients was a delight. And, lucky for us, our studio is only a few blocks away. \\\

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