

# restaurant development + design

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## DETROIT'S NEW GRAND DAME

looked at me like I was crazy," he says.

Aparium was ultimately awarded the RFP in 2013, taking the title to the iconic 1929 neoclassical brick building as well as the adjacent Pontchartrain Wine Cellars building on a prominent downtown corner. That same year, Detroit's financial crisis came to a head, and the city became the largest in the nation's history to file Chapter 9 bankruptcy.

"Getting financing to develop and build anything in Detroit at the time was really tough, but we stuck with it and ultimately were rewarded," Kitchen says. "What we thought would be 7 to 10 years for Detroit to turn the corner actually took 3 to 5 years. Developers began transforming the city, artists and craftspeople got involved and energized, and a wave of gentrification was building that we wanted to embrace and be a part of."

### For Detroit. By Detroit

At its core, The Foundation Hotel and Apparatus Room project is a love letter to Detroit and to the city's burgeoning collaborative and artistic culture. Nearly every aspect of it — from the coffee and beer served to the uniforms, custom wallpaper, lighting and headboards — is locally made, locally sourced, locally salvaged. All told, the design and development team collaborated with more than 45 Detroit-based groups and artisans to create what Kitchen says has become Aparium's flagship property.

"The Apparatus Room is probably the cleanest, purest positioning that we have for any of our restaurants," Kitchen says. "It's iconic, polished New American, which is something we felt the city was missing. And everything we did here was influenced by our surroundings. We didn't want to come in and slap a luxury hotel and restaurant in Detroit that meant nothing to Detroit in one of the city's most meaningful buildings."

Designed by Michigan-based McIntosh Paris Associates and Simeone



Above: Located on the mezzanine, the Chef's Table is a combination demonstration kitchen and 16-seat communal table where Executive Chef Tom Lents and/or visiting chefs present ticketed, multi-course menus. Image courtesy of Nathan Kirkman

A smoke-like custom light installation made from white fabric beaded and stretched over a metal frame pays homage to the building's origins. Image courtesy of Sal Rodriguez

Deary Design Group, whose co-owner, Gina Deary, hails from Detroit, The Apparatus Room anchors the five-story, 95,000-square-foot building and is the project's heart and soul.

"From the beginning, it was always going to be a restaurant with a hotel and not the other way around," Deary notes. "There are 100 guest rooms, which of course generate revenue, but Aparium always focused on the restaurant as the element that would bring the project together. As we conceptualized the design, we wanted to reflect the very collaborative nature of Detroit in part by creating a space that's open and integrated. The first floor is a lobby, a bar, a kitchen and a restaurant that all flow together. It has almost a kind of living-room feel."

As adaptive reuse of an historical



landmark property, the team also needed to leave the basic structure alone and make as much use as possible of what the original building had to offer.

The large red fire doors were refurbished, were repainted their original firehouse red and can be hitched open to frame large glass windows through which The Apparatus Room glows at night. One of the doors serves as the entry, leading via vintage red carpet to a small reception desk area surrounded by

a retail gallery of locally made products. Original subway tile walls, flooring, linoleum and marble wainscoting that lined many of the original corridors were saved, cleaned, and either left in place or repurposed. A shaft space between the restaurant and the restroom corridor, originally used to hang and dry fire hoses, now holds a glass-blown floating balloon sculpture, one of several unique design features that blend old and new.

Behind the reception desk, a partition made from salvaged charred wood provides visual and acoustic separation between the check-in area and dining room. It holds a large screen where stylized videos of local artists and craftspeople working to create the various products and installations within the building are shown. "The imagery is beautiful. It sets the stage and gives guests an idea of just how many hands and how much artistry touched this project," Deary says.

The strength of the existing space is especially evident in areas like the private dining room. According to Kitchen, it's the most historically significant space in the building and one in which the

design team was able to create dramatic effect with just a few special touches.

"The beautiful millwork and ceiling shape were there; the gorgeous tile floors were there. Gina and her team just cleaned everything, painted the room a rich peacock blue and added luxurious draperies," Kitchen says. "But the room really speaks for itself. Our real challenge there, and throughout the property, was to not bastardize what existed but to highlight and complement it. Simeone Deary used a tremendous amount of restraint, and the result is a design that's balanced, deeply layered and full of nostalgic glam."

Named for the fire department's actual apparatus room — the area where the fire engines were parked — The Apparatus Room proper measures 5,900 square feet, including a main dining area, a private dining room, a lounge/foyer area, a bar, a new display kitchen and original back-of-house kitchen space. The team also took the opportunity presented by the room's double-height ceiling to create a mezzanine area above the kitchen.

Overlooking The Apparatus Room,

the mezzanine houses the Chef's Table, a combination demonstration kitchen and a 16-seat communal table where Lents and/or visiting chefs present upscale, ticketed multi-course menus. Nominated as a semifinalist for Best Chef — Great Lakes in this year's James Beard Awards, Lents in the same week saw the Chef's Table win Detroit Free Press Restaurant of the Year honors.

"We knew that we were going to have a very ambitious food and beverage program and were looking for a Michelin-starred chef, eat-you-heart-out, this-is-Detroit quality offering," Kitchen said. "We overshot the mark with Tom, who was most recently executive chef at Chicago Trump Tower's Sixteen. He's a Michigan native, which was imperative to us, and is a fantastic chef who's also locally grounded. He does his own thing in the Chef's Table but also uses it as an incubator for visiting chefs and up-and-coming local chefs as a way to give back to Detroit."

### Artistry and Engineering

On the main level, the centerpiece of The Apparatus Room is the large,



Custom, locally crafted furnishings in muted, neutral tones allow the building's original character and fixtures to show through, while an open design creates easy flow between restaurant, bar, display kitchen and lobby. Image courtesy of Nathan Kirkman

### Snapshot

Opened: May 2017

Concept: Iconic New American

Executive Chef: Thomas Lents

Restaurant size: 5,900 square feet, 200+ seats

Average check: \$75 per person

Property features: Integrated lobby,

restaurant, bar, display kitchen;

private dining room; mezzanine Chef's

Table; 100-room hotel

Design highlights: Original building

features (firehouse doors, vintage fin-

ishes); custom, locally crafted lighting,

furnishings and art installations; vin-

tage rugs; salvaged metal ceiling tiles;

historical Motor City design inspiration