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DINING DESIGN | BY JENNIFER MCENTEE · PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROBERT BENSON

CAMPFIRE

Components of a Carlsbad auto repair shop spark ideas for a restaurant



A wall divider with open spaces for displaying camping-related items separates the bar and front dining room from the back dining areas. The interior opens to the table-lined patio.

Wrapped in wood, steel and canvas, Carlsbad's Campfire crackles like a newly lit bonfire. Guests perch on wooden stumps around a patio fire pit, at communal tables of live-edge Douglas fir, along cozy banquettes and on "ranger station" stools around the bar.

From behind windows, the kitchen grill flashes with flames from wood, a supply of which is stacked in canvas-wrapped shelves along one dining room wall.

It's the kind of spot you'd like to find after a long hike with friends, weary and ravenous for a wood-fired meal.

Owner John Resnick — in his first solo project after helping launch Consortium Holdings' Craft & Commerce and Ironside Fish & Oyster — tasked Los Angeles-based design firm Bells & Whistles with composing a contemporary restaurant that could be called Campfire but wouldn't be too campy.

"I was very careful to say, 'I want it to feel reminiscent of that spirit of the campfire, where people gather around a fire sharing food and drink with friends.' We want people to feel like it's a community gathering place, to evoke some memories in a subtle way."

Bells & Whistles principals Barbara Rourke and Jason St. John drew their concept from

the most beautiful campsites they've seen — from mountain lodge venues to beachside KOA campgrounds. They began by addressing the building's long and narrow dimensions. The 6,000-square-foot structure previously held an automotive repair shop. The back end comprises a Quonset hut that John says was brought over from Camp Pendleton in the 1940s or '50s.

John was drawn to the shape and patina of the Quonset hut, but the curved interior needed to meet health and building codes for restaurant use. A secondary frame was built within the arc, then covered with canvas and decorative wood boards.

Bells & Whistles juxtaposed geometric design elements with the building's structural lines. The hostess stand is backed by a powder-coated steel panel that John likens to an A-frame cabin. It allows a clear view through to the dining room, as does an angular room divider/server station midway through the restaurant.

Retro Thermoses, picnic baskets and camping gear decorate the green-painted wooden divider. Open shelving displays earthenware and camping accouterments. Dozens of vintage arrows are playfully lodged in one wall.

A 20-foot mural of a mountain range was crafted from wood slats. Barbara conceived



of the art piece and commissioned artist Jason Xavier Lane of San Diego-based JXL Studio to bring it to life.

Seating includes contoured wire chairs, wooden folding chairs, a banquette covered in dark green canvas and leather straps to resemble a rucksack, and white oak *Ranger* stools. The patio is lined with tables that offer seating on plank benches and wire chairs, as well as picnic tables and, along the Quonset hut, seating on a large beam of wood. Fun touches include tree stumps around a concrete fire pit and a teepee for young guests to explore.

"It was important to John that this be a family-friendly restaurant," Barbara says.

There are hints of the building's former history as an auto body shop. The property's owner and developer, Brett Farrow, installed two roll-up garage doors that open the bar to the patio.

The lower part of the 25-seat bar is wrapped in cedar salvaged from the previous shop's storage trellis, clear-coated and set in a herringbone pattern by JXL Studio. The bar top is stainless steel.

Vintage-style pendants with filament bulbs, some purchased at flea markets, illuminate the space like kerosene lamps.

"It feels new and old at the same time," Barbara says. "We want to create spaces that are timeless in their nature."



John considered several other buildings before discovering this property. He instantly fell in love with the quirky building and its burgeoning State Street locale.

"I feel like this is where it was supposed to be — this space and this cool, funky street," he says. ❖

Clockwise from top left: Arrows "shot into" a wall make a playful statement. Wood for cooking is carried from one dining space to the kitchen. A teepee sits outside the Quonset hut. Near the entrance, wood slats create a mural depicting a mountain range, in front of which are a rucksack-inspired bench and *Ranger* stools around a table anchored to a post. Wood curves around the Quonset hut interior.