

Sustainable Design: for non minimalists

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In the competitive restaurant industry, new expectations have become common: culinary innovation, superior service, trend setting design and sustainable practices in both front and back of house. The challenge for all is to address each of these issues in a unique, brand specific way. Designers face the particular challenge of applying green design while continuing to take their projects to the next level. The Vucurevich Simons Advisory Group (VSAG) decided to meet these expectations head on with their new restaurant concept, Farmers Fishers Bakers. They entrusted GrizForm Design Architects (GFD) with the challenge of portraying the restaurant's whimsical brand, while meeting the requirements of green design. The 9600 square foot restaurant located in Washington, DC is now pending both LEED Gold and Four Star Certified Green Restaurant rating.

Sustainability and green business strategies have been ingrained in the minds of both consumers and business owners over the last several years. In reaction to this now mainstream mentality, the Green Restaurant Association has emerged to encourage restaurants to take a holistic approach to sustainable practices. The requirements of the Green Restaurant Association are modeled after those of the USGBC's well known LEED program begun 1994. While both of these programs supply a standard of measuring positive environmental impact, it is left up to the designers to create a suitable aesthetic within these parameters.

From the start, VSAG let their wish list be known: LEED certification, custom one of a kind finishes and enough design eye candy to keep the customers intrigued on their 9th and 10th visits. They described their brand to the GFD design team, as illustrated in the restaurant's name, Farmers Fishers Bakers, to be the polar opposite of Scandinavian minimalism, the poster child of sustainable design. They mentioned concepts like "layers", "micro climates" and "no surface untouched", words that seem more suitable in 80's grandeur than in a modern LEED project.

As with all challenges, GFD began to think outside of the box to create custom products that met all the requirements of the project, including budget. One example is the tire wall featured in the bar area of the restaurant, constructed entirely of flattened, used tractor tires and backed by formaldehyde-free plywood. In addition to meeting the unique aesthetic of the FFB brand, the tires also provide great texture and sound absorption in this noisy area of the restaurant. And what would have ended up in a landfill to continue releasing toxins into the environment until the end of their days, is now serving a great aesthetic and functional purpose. Another example is the custom furniture, commissioned throughout the restaurant and constructed mostly from renewable resources and green materials. The mix and match dining chairs and wood table tops, are made from solid walnut, avoiding the use of toxic adhesives. However, the pieces of furniture that makes the biggest statement are located in the Larder, or pantry, of the restaurant. Made from recycled steel, with solid walnut wood tops, these tables seat up to 12 people and have been placed on casters to allow for flexible group seating. Another example of how environment, service and design concerns have all been addressed, in the details.



To add a final layer, GFD commissioned environmentally motivated artists to create custom pieces throughout the restaurant. Most notable are the Black Sheep, sculpted from recycled bicycle inner tubes and an ominous trio of shovels, comprised of fallen cedar branches and repurposed shovel heads. These elements played to the whimsical theme of the FFB brand, the layered look of their aesthetic and promotion of sustainable practices.



While it is clear that design was a major consideration for the restaurant, GFD did not forget the importance of water and energy use reduction. These issues were addressed by a team of engineers at CFR Engineering, that provided energy calculations of the space to identify a strategy for meeting all minimum energy requirements of the LEED program. The results of the modeling exercise allowed CFR to design a highly efficient HVAC system. Furthermore, all of the light fixtures in the restaurant, as specified by GFD, include the use of fluorescent or LED bulbs as well as dimmer switches, reducing overall energy use. Never forgetting the aesthetic, GFD researched warm temperature fixtures to include throughout. Additionally, in their effort to contribute to water use reduction, GFD was careful to specify low flow plumbing fixtures for the restrooms including the urinals, toilets and faucets, which also add to the elegant restroom designs. In all, the team was able to exceed many of the minimum LEED energy and water reduction benchmarks.

At Farmers Fishers Bakers, beauty and brains found themselves in a new and unexpected package. GFD discovered that inventive sustainable design sometimes requires you to look no further than literally your back yard or city block. And maybe grandeur has earned a second act, only this time much wiser and more refined.



GrizForm Design Architects is a full service architecture and interior design firm with over 40 built restaurants to their name. See their full portfolio at www.grizform.com.