

Good Builders Help Restaurant Owners

Fort Lauderdale, Fl - Lack of planning can kill a new restaurant before it opens, but experienced builder, Craig Danto shows restaurant owners how to make their visions a reality on time and within budget.

Danto, a fourth-generation builder with 30 years of experience, is chief executive officer of Danto Builders and Orange Sun Building and Development in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. He's built a number of fine-dining and casual restaurants in the area, including Casa D'Angelo's, Cucina D'Angelo's, Pa' DeGenero's and the Whale Raw Bar and Fish House, to name a few.

"Lack of thorough planning for a new build-out can be the death of a restaurant," Danto said. "Restaurant owners must minimally focus on four critical things to ensure their timely and on-budget project:

- They must define and stay true to the restaurant's concept;
- They must buy the right equipment and understand its specifications and layout;
- They must have detailed plans that adhere to the building codes, and
- They must require a detailed budget and monitor it throughout the building process."

Danto said that the overall concept drives both the décor and the menu, which dictates the equipment package.

"An initial question to ask is if the concept will be fine dining with private seating, or casual with open seating?" Danto said. "Is an elegant, rustic, or other theme décor needed? Decide on finishes to deliver on the concept. Is it fashion before function, or is easy maintenance most important?"

In the case of the Whale Raw Bar and Fish House, its fun, nautical theme was easy to maintain. A combination of colorful murals and accessories with a whale motif were used, along with rustic lighting and a lot of metal and slate for natural texture. Easy maintenance was also important to the restaurant owners, Scott and Danielle Williams, so tables were bolted to the walls and legs weren't used so cleaning the floor was quick and easy.

"The inside walls needed to be prepped so the tables could be mounted securely," Danto pointed out. "The floors and the bar are solid poured concrete with a black pigment so maintenance was kept to a minimum and peeling paint will never be a problem.

"Metal dividers at the wall partitions were also positioned when the concrete was poured so the kitchen

floors could easily be washed without affecting other areas," Danto added.

"The second very important element to understand, the equipment, is dictated by the menu," he continued. "Understand every piece of equipment needed for functionality and aesthetics, including the dimensions, layout, workflow and technical requirements. The kitchen equipment and its installation determine high-cost building items such as the plumbing and electrical, as well as the layout of the rest of the restaurant. If mistakes are made here they're usually costly."

Complete plans with adherence to local building codes are crucial too. "Make sure your architect delivers detailed plans to code," Danto warned. "Otherwise you'll most likely run into costly delays due to building department and construction

issues. If detailed plans aren't available, then restaurant owners need to make sure they have an experienced builder who will anticipate and manage potential issues. If the plans aren't completed yet, then restaurant owners should consider builders who offer creative and innovative designs that will be efficient and effective."

Danto pointed out his company's success in helping Sal Mauro, the former owner of Casa D'Angelo and Cucina D'Angelo. "We saved him thousands of dollars and months of planning and building because we understood his vision, undertook a design build-out in the field, had an architect draw up the final plans, and got it approved through the building department, all within 60 days," Danto said.

The fourth area of concern is another big one — the budget. "Require a detailed budget from your builder and understand each line item," Danto said. "Items can be value-engineered if budgets need to be reduced. Closely monitor your budget and change orders, which can spiral costs out of control."

The Whale Raw Bar and Fish House value-engineered finishes by using industrial materials such as corrugated aluminum panels for bar décor. Gutters took the place of conventional crown molding and accommodated back lighting to boot.

"Planning and understanding all these factors is critical to a successful restaurant build-out," Danto concluded. "Plan the work and work the plan so the odds are in your favor to open on time and on budget." Danto Builders can be reached at 954.229.2006.

**The Whale Raw Bar
and Fish House
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industrial materials
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for bar décor.**

