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## Good design a key ingredient at successful Seattle restaurants

By [LYNN PORTER](#)  
Journal Staff Reporter

In October of 2008, Deming Maclise and James Weimann were about to buy a Ballard building for their new Paris bistro-style restaurant, Bastille Cafe & Bar, when the stock market plunged.

They pulled out of the deal and were resigned to losing the \$25,000 due diligence money — in fact they were having a drink to toast the failed endeavor — when their broker called and said the owner of the 1904 building was offering a discount.

The partners went for it, Maclise said, even though “the sky was falling.”

But they faced a new economic reality: Food and drink prices had to work for the recession-conscious consumer, and the design had to also.

“It can't be too precious,” said Maclise. “It can't be too white-tablecloth, or it's going to kill us.”

Maclise and Weimann joined executive chef Ethan Stowell and Chad Dale, a partner at evo Properties, for a recent talk on “Interacting with Design: Restaurateurs & Their Spaces,” sponsored by the Seattle Architecture Foundation. It was moderated by Allecia Vermillion, food and drink editor for Seattle Met magazine.

Old buildings charm people, said Weimann.

“They're romantic,” he said. “We talk to people all the time. They see an old gas station and they say ‘we're going to do an amazing hotdog-to-go (restaurant) in this gas station.’”

They don't understand that renovation can cost a heck of a lot of money, he said. For instance, an early estimate of \$200,000 for a seismic upgrade at the Bastille building “ended up being a joke.” Seismic work cost significantly more. Revamping the whole building cost more than \$1 million, rather than the \$350,000 early estimate. Weimann and Maclise are co-founders of JWD4 Design, a Seattle company that designs restaurants, cafes, hotels and bars. They designed and own Bastille, which opened in June of 2009. The executive chef is Jason Stoneburner.

They also designed and own Poquitos, a Mexican restaurant on Capitol Hill, and Macleod's, a Scottish pub in Ballard. Both opened in 2011.

Maclise is a former barista who designed and owns four Caffe Fiore coffeehouses in Seattle.

Chad Dale is partners with Bryce Phillips and Ira Gerlich in evo Properties, a Seattle development company focused on small, interesting adaptive reuse projects. That includes The Kolstrand



Photo by [Geoffrey Smith \[enlarge\]](#)  
The rehabilitation of The Kolstrand Building in Ballard was designed by Graham Baba Architects of Seattle.



Photo by [Jackie Donnelly \[enlarge\]](#)  
Revel/Quoin, a restaurant and bar in Fremont, is near Adobe and Google.

Building in Ballard, Revel/Quoin restaurant and bar in Fremont, and Fremont Collective, a restaurant/retail project that will open soon on Stone Way.

Kolstrand is an early 1900s historic brick structure that houses two restaurants: Stowell's Staple & Fancy Mercantile, and Renee Erickson's Walrus and the Carpenter, which Bon Appetit magazine named one of the best new restaurants in America in 2011.

Dale is a business partner at the Walrus and the evo principals are partners in Revel/Quoin, where Rachel Yang and Seif Chirchi are the chefs.



Photo by Geoffrey Smith [\[enlarge\]](#)

**Bon Appetit named The Walrus and the Carpenter in Ballard one of the best new U.S. restaurants in 2011.**

Graham Baba Architects designed the rehab of both buildings.

Dale also likes old buildings, but agrees that redeveloping them is not for the timid.

Before work started on The Kolstrand Building, he said, "There was three and a half feet of water in the basement. You couldn't really walk around there."

The building was purchased in August of 2008 and the renovation was completed two years later. The project went significantly over-budget, and probably would have cost more if not for the recession, Dale said. Construction companies were bidding low just to keep busy, but that's starting to change, he said.

You don't need a large budget to create an interesting restaurant space, Dale said, and an eatery can be successful if the food and service are good.

Some neighborhoods call out for certain types of restaurants, he said. "Revel is an example of a restaurant that was so obviously needed."

Revel is in Fremont at 403 N. 36th St., near Adobe, Google and other companies with young, well paid workers, but few restaurants that cater to them, Dale said.

Maclise said some of his and Weimann's restaurants are driven by the design, but some are "fully food-oriented. That's what we're going to put the design around." For instance, they are working on a Seattle eatery where food is made in a stone hearth oven, and are looking for materials and architectural pieces to fit that.

They look here and abroad for old fixtures, architectural pieces and design ideas. While doing Bastille, they went to Paris flea markets to find items that reflect the feel of cafes and restaurants in that city and to take in that aesthetic. Ideas and pieces for Poquitos came while traveling in Mexico.

"James and I joke all the time that we're just trying to get write-offs for our travels," Maclise said.

James cautioned designers to beware of too-trendy elements, such as Edison light bulbs.

Once you start seeing them all over town, "It almost starts to become a little invisible because it's expected," he said.

Stowell is executive chef and owner of Ethan Stowell Restaurants in Seattle. His restaurants include Tavolata, How to Cook a Wolf, Anchovies & Olives, and Staple & Fancy Mercantile, where he is the chef.

Stowell was named one of the 2008 Best New Chefs in America by Food & Wine magazine and has been honored with multiple James Beard Award nominations for Best Chef Northwest.

He said good design can drive business. From lighting to door handles, the right look influences how customers feel about a restaurant. It's important for cooks who want to become owners to understand this.

Restaurant design

“They learn how to run a kitchen, but they don’t learn how to run a business,” he said.

Stowell said Seattle is fortunate to have a number of restaurants where chefs run the show. He likes open kitchens in his restaurants so he can interact with customers. He has to train cooks to understand they have an audience — at all times. The kitchen staff needs to be upbeat even when a customer walks in minutes before closing.

There is much debate about noisy versus quiet restaurants. Stowell said customers like a little noise. “I think they feel better when people around them are having a good time. I am one for a noisy restaurant. My wife disagrees with me.”

The chef said Anchovies & Olives on Capitol Hill was in construction when the recession hit, so he and his wife, Angela, had to use some of their salaries to pay construction bills and some features had to be completed later. That was late in 2008 and early 2009. “Anybody that had a restaurant at that time took a hit,” he said. “People stopped going out to eat.”

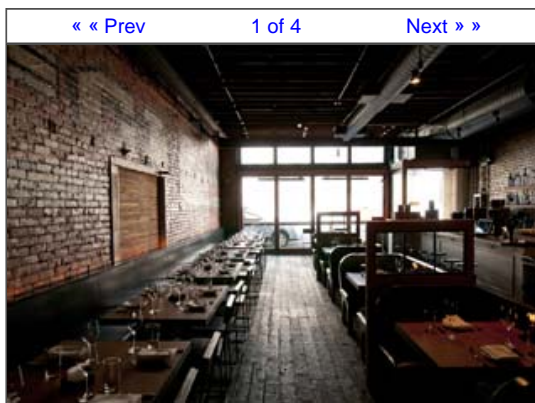
Anchovies & Olives opened in January of 2009 and is doing quite well now, Stowell said. Drome Design Studios was the architect.

Stowell said he likes to have restaurants near his home.

“We just kind of open restaurants in neighborhoods we live in,” he said, and it turns out they are popular spots.

He opened Union when he and Angela lived in downtown Seattle. Now they live in Ballard, not too far from Staple & Fancy.

Stowell grew up on Capitol Hill, “so I thought we’d throw one up there,” he said.



Photos by Geoffrey Smith [\[enlarge\]](#)  
Staple & Fancy Mercantile

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