



Room for Seconds?

From chicken coops to couch dancing, S.D.'s hot hangs redesign for the times

| By Stacy Rauzen | Photography by Amy K. Fellows and John Dole |

Customers noshing on pancetta-and-egg-covered pizza under ambient lighting at Cucina Urbana have already forgotten Laurel. The former Moroccan-mod restaurant known for its chic clientele has been dumped text-message style. In just four weeks it was transformed into a comfy Italian kitchen whose name was aptly chosen on Twitter, the entire process captured on a blog. "I had two choices: walk away, or do a new concept. I am kind of the ultimate fighter—I wasn't going to give up," says restaurateur Tracy Borkum, who swapped fancy for rustic-chic, replete with a roaring pizza oven.

Sustainability was key. Most of the space (columns, walls, backbar) is wrapped in discarded fence and painted in various colors. The found-object ethos continued with the lighting, courtesy of Jennifer Price (of Solo in Solana Beach), who used recycled glass and reclaimed keys and horseshoes to create chandeliers a-glo-glo. Assorted random pieces—like chicken coops plucked from flea markets—dot the space.

Laurel is not the only restaurant going under the knife to better match economic times. The U.S. Grant,

which in 2006 just underwent a ballyhooed renovation, enlisted La Jolla's Esteban Interiors for the Grant Grill's bar and lounge in hopes to lure a more robust happy hour crowd. Think Mooi crystal chandeliers with Mylar shades, panels of iridescent Bisazza mosaic tile and Esteban Lopez's custom metal bar tables finished in a silver sparkle. "We added lightness and brightness, a bit of glamour," says James Niebling, Lopez's partner. The pair is also revamping the lounge's elevated backspace. "It's cooler, not so traditional."

In the nightlife realm, Side Bar—that unmarked corner joint with Jetson-inspired décor—has gone boudoir with a redesign by original designer Davis Krumins. "It's moody, intimate, dark," he says. The idea: something timeless and understatedly oontz-oontz. Inside, redbird cages dangle alongside Varga Girl prints, and faux-alligator banquettes boast purse holders and removable cushions for ad hoc sofa dancing.

What will Davis think of next? We'll soon see. He's been tapped for the remodel of another Gaslamp nightclub: Aubergine. **R**

REMAKE OR BREAK IT!

Clockwise from left: The reconcepted Cucina Urbana in Bankers Hill goes for cozier décor and an under-\$20 menu to match; the U.S. Grant's new lounge ditches stuffy for cool factor; Side Bar is swathed in velvet; a table for two in Cucina Urbana's whimsical setting.

"I had two choices: walk away or do a new concept. I am kind of the ultimate fighter. I wasn't going to give up," says restaurateur Tracy Borkum, who swapped fancy for rustic-chic and a roaring pizza oven.