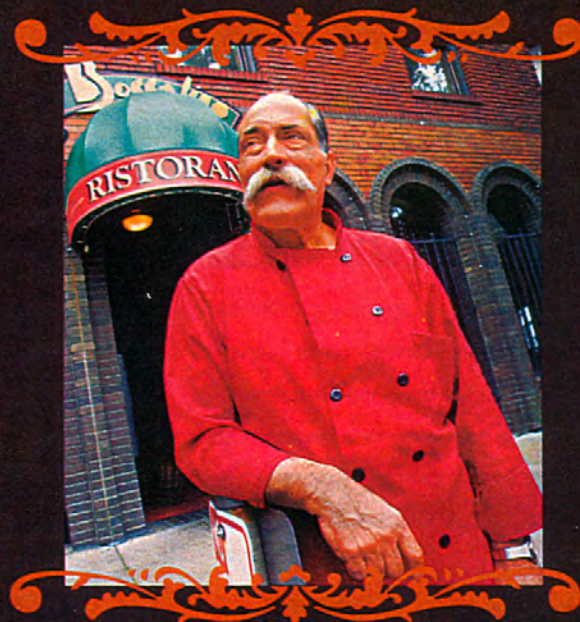


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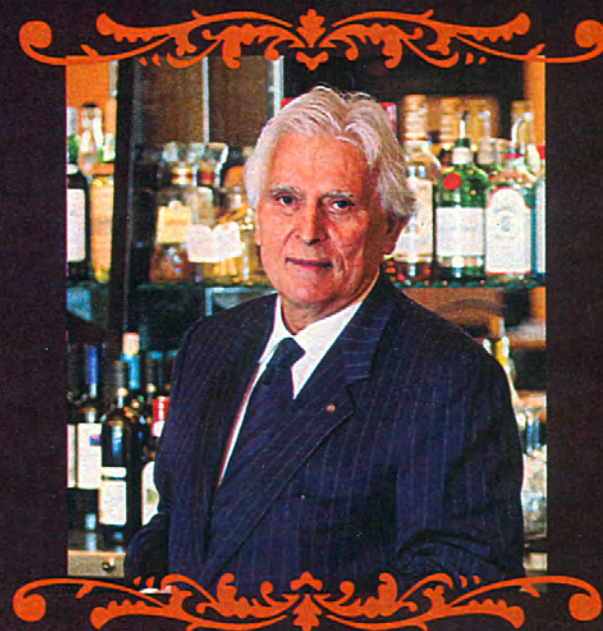
The Seattle Times SUNDAY MAGAZINE | NOVEMBER 18, 2007



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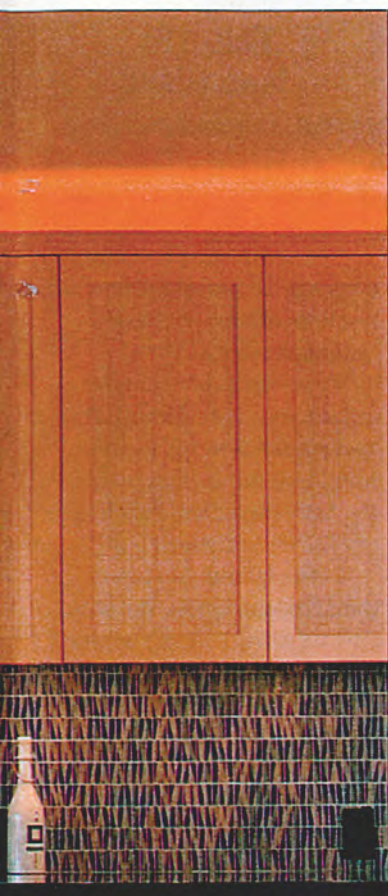
The Godfathers Of Gourmet

25 years ago, the opening of a unique Italian eatery
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& connections that grew into the dynamic, delicious melange
that is our modern restaurant scene





"The challenge here was to do something fresh and new in a house that had strong character itself, an older home," says architect Nils Finne. "The oak floor was a thread of continuity with the rest of the house. This whole dark, light kind of play came from a Japanese aesthetic. The cabinet panels use bamboo inset panels with Alaskan yellow cedar, and the counters are a mushroom color, a Belgian limestone."



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Ahhh, Naturel

WE'RE ALL BENT over, looking up under Leah Hair's kitchen island. "Just look at this," she says, patting the chocolatey giant hunk of an old elm tree, reclaimed for a new life from Urban Hardwoods. And there, sure enough, cut into the underside of this massive slab of wood are plumbing lines and electrical outlets.

It's details like this that make Hair's new contemporary kitchen in her traditional Magnolia home what it is: a warm, inviting place to cook in, hang out or cozy up.

"I thought, whether this turns out great or not depends on the details," she says. She asked architect Nils Finne, "Are you a detail person?"

He is.

Finne designed the island, stools and steel brackets of the light fixtures. "We're clearly after these juxtapositions of organic versus machined edges, dark against light, straight against curvilinear, natural materials versus industrial materials; the cat-tail-rush seats against the steel; the sea grass in resin; the tables with a straight edge on the inside and, on the outside, a living edge."

"My son studied with a master Japanese potter, and Nils picked up on those pieces with the contrast of dark and light woods, and especially with the tatami mats over the cabinets," Hair says, gazing across the room over a cup of tea, perfectly at home in her organic kitchen.

Finne took out a wall to create one long room that reaches from the front garden-view of the house to the back Elliott Bay side. Where the long elm island ends, the elm dining table picks up, carrying the eye the length of the 34-foot-long room. Both tables have custom blued-steel bases with a laser-cut bronze overlay. The island features a live-edge profile of the tree it was.

Continued on next page >

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The elm dining table is a work of furniture-making precision while still honoring the tree that it once was.



Finne designed the kitchen stools, which have a blued-steel base and a cattail-rush seat woven by artist Del Webber.

Continued from previous page

Finne also designed the kitchen stools, which have a blued-steel base and a cattail-rush seat woven by artist Del Webber. The lighting consists of 15 small candle-like fixtures in custom steel brackets. Finne's cabinets are bleached Alaskan yellow cedar frames with bamboo panels, a light contrast to the dark Belgian Blue limestone counters accented with a stone mosaic backsplash that has a bamboo-like pattern. Next to the backsplash is a long horizontal window with a bear-grass resin panel.

All these Asian details flow quietly into Hair's living room, which holds pieces collected from travels in West Africa during the Peace Corps. This kitchen transformation has not gone unnoticed. Finne's work recently was recognized by the Seattle Design Center as the winning kitchen in the 2007 Northwest Design Awards.

"It is fine materials honestly presented," Hair says, summing it up.

It wasn't supposed to be all this.

Continued on page 40 >

This tree is an island

MAN AND NATURE meet in the middle of Leah Hair's kitchen. The big slabs of umber-stained elm seem simple enough for a kitchen island. But what lies beneath is a work of design mastery.

"From the beginning we talked about the dining table and island as being pieces of furniture rather than cabinetry," says architect Nils Finne of FINNE Architects.

"In the island you have the disposal, with a stainless shroud around it so you don't see it. There's a 4-foot-long trough sink. The plumbing pipes had to come up in precisely the right place. These things are not buried inside some cabinet you're not going to see.

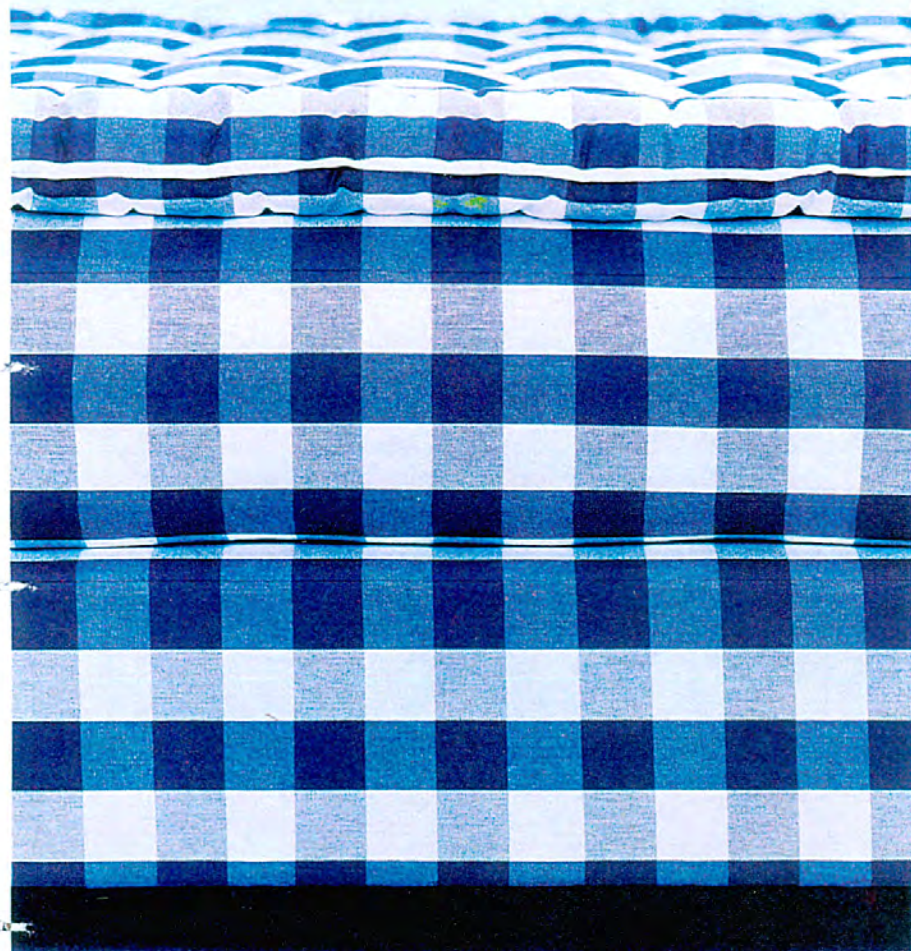
"The final thing you don't see is the electrical. Where do you plug things in in this beautiful table? We routed out the underside of the slab and laid in the wiring and outlets. The wiring had to sneak its way up adjacent to the plumbing so you don't notice it's coming up out of the floor."

Finne credits contractor Joe Villano from Schultz Miller and Urban Hardwoods for making the island the center of Hair's kitchen paradise.



Finne designed the steel brackets for the lights, which were "intended to evoke a series of live candles above the two tables," he says.

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This is Leah's favorite little corner to read and have a cup of tea. The fabric on the window seat is by Laura Lienhard. Finne designed the blackened-steel occasional table with a free-form stone top.

Continued from page 38

"This project started because I had a dying stove, a dying refrigerator and a dead disposal; and I wanted a gas stove," Hair says. "This is a family house. I didn't want a designer kitchen."

To run a gas line the stove had to be relocated to an outside wall and . . . you know, six months later a whole new room is born.

"I didn't want a voluminous kitchen. The kids have fledged, but I have friends coming in. And when the kids come home we all enjoy cooking together. We all end up in the kitchen."

When did all this transformation into tranquility start at Hair's secluded cottage just up from the boulevard that weaves around Magnolia?

She doesn't even have to think about it: "May 9, 2005. That was destruction day. The reason I remember it is because I thought, 'What the hell was I thinking? I must be completely mad.'"

No. It just feels that way.

"I moved to the basement and cooked on a hot plate in the laundry room," she says. On Thanksgiving Day 2005 Hair's kitchen was finished. The room made its debut at the holiday feast.

And now?

"It's such a serene place, and everybody notices that. They walk in and go, 'Ahhh.'"

It's raining. Another cup of tea sounds good. 

Rebecca Teagarden is assistant editor of Pacific Northwest magazine. Benjamin Bensneider is a magazine staff photographer.