

TREND FOCUS: SAFEGUARDING CREATIVITY IN BOOM TIMES...

F&B design: Trends versus budgets and choosing the right build contractor

By Gabrielle F. Mather, CEO & Founder, Restaurant Secrets Inc.

The battle between building a restaurant that can feature and compete in design awards while ensuring Capex is capped at a reasonable ROI for eager investors and finding the right build partner to bring it to life on a budget has been a challenge for the booming 'designer' F&B industry.

I coined the phrase 'designer restaurants' with full awareness of myself having advocated design over budgets numerous times to certain brands. I believe concept is king, followed by everything else serving its brilliant execution and operation. Wisdom is in ensuring we bring design and concept to life in interiors, well executed with quality build, delivered on time within budgets to operate profitably.

Synergising design

The cost of design and build takes up the highest percentage of budget allocation to Capex. Around 60% could be assigned to this crucial part of launching a restaurant. As designs become more fluid and creative, with multiple 'designers' mushrooming up, promising trendy designs at rock bottom prices, the struggle is not just to safeguard true creativity and architectural genius but to stop this over duplication of similar look and feel concepts.

It's extremely important to choose your build partner and contractors with caution and wisdom as multiple companies claim to be able to deliver expectations. While we have some extremely capable contracting forms that are bringing large venues to life brilliantly, the real crunch is the mid-level casual dining sector. Due to budget restraints, choices are few

and most contractors that take on such projects do not synergise quality with prices as effectively as one would hope.

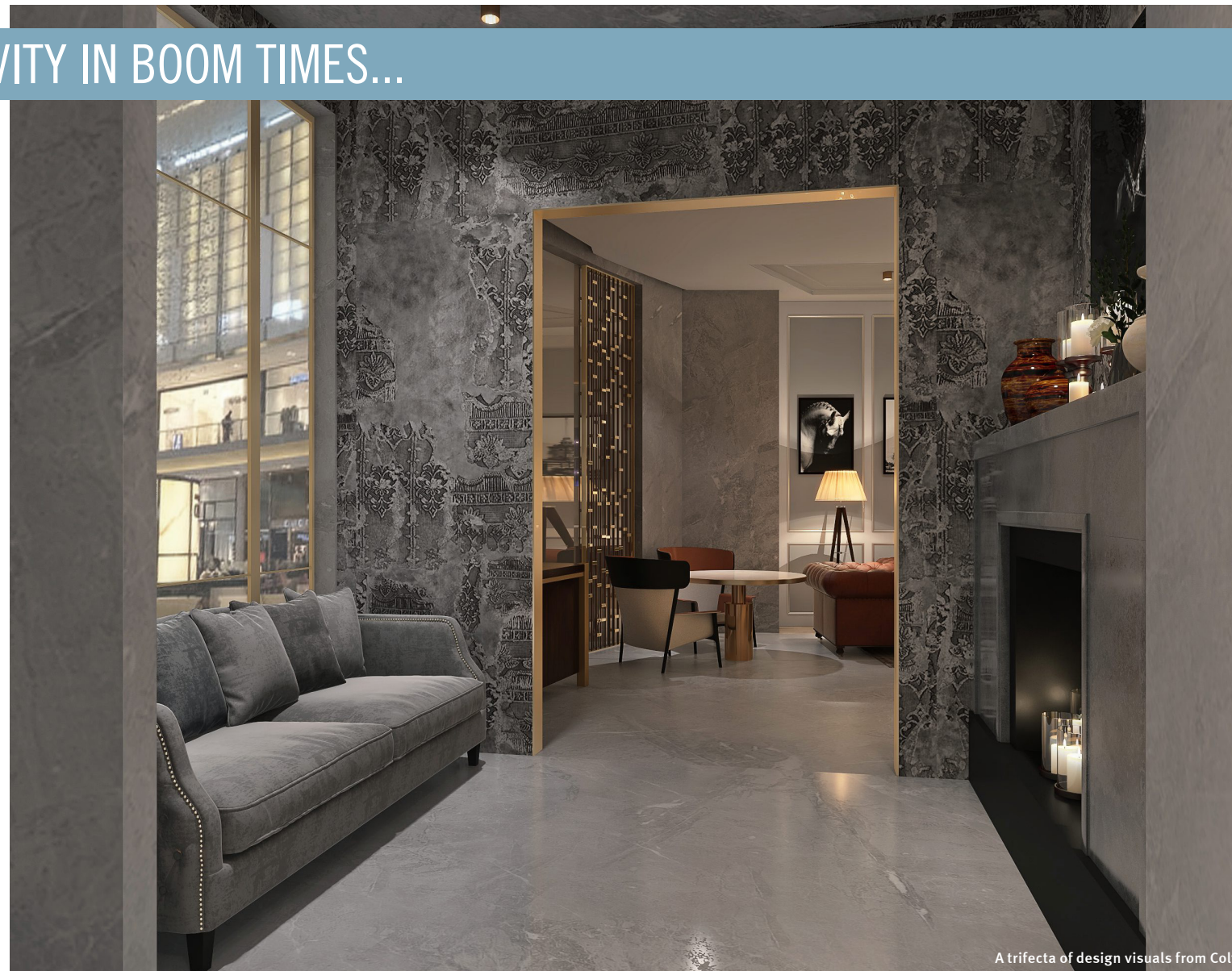
I recommend BOQs be thoroughly examined for apple-to-apple comparisons as most errors happen in expectations not being met when price meets material choices. Also, ensure that your chosen build contractor has experience in restaurant construction as this is a unique industry with multiple technical requirements, as well as commercial approvals, for safety that goes beyond architectural approvals.

Inspirations and trends

I've always been inspired by history, architecture and building art into brick and mortar. Most creative designs I have directed over the last decade have been influenced by historical and artistic DNA. We see many designs emerging from age-old inspirations of natural elements and historical references.

My personal portfolio of favourites from our own turn-key projects and brands we have designed has been Colt Café in Dubai Fashion Avenue. I was inspired by the strength and nobility of the Arabian stallion, equestrian lifestyle, Dubai's unique blend of luxury and hospitality and all of this was brought to life in a resort-style dining space, accessorised with Hermès and built with the materials of a luxury ranch.

My earlier project Hamptons Café was inspired by Long Island landscapes and architecture and this is reflected in its wooden beams, nautical textures and expansive large living spaces that one can imagine overlooking crashing waves and sandy shores.



A trifecta of design visuals from Colt



Gabrielle Mather

In our latest project Oii Abu Dhabi, a Southern-European restaurant, we took inspiration from Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain. Materials and textures reflect the rugged landscape of this region and for the culinary impact, we built a gold-clad Santorini-style mocktail bar that depicts the watering hole and social gathering aspect of this region.

I believe it's the desire of human expression to give glory to higher awareness and most successful artists will continue to bring their talents to life while remaining commercially viable.

Restaurant Secrets Inc.

Restaurant Secrets Inc. (RSI) is a team of expert restaurant consultants and business Incubators in the UAE that has served over 300 brands since its inception in 2001 by founder Gabrielle Mather, who has lived across the UK, Singapore and now the UAE.