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SURFACE

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HOW IT'S MADE



Piet Boon restores an abandoned church, creating a stunning setting for an Antwerp eatery.

BY ROXY KIRSHENBAUM

When Dutch designer Piet Boon and restaurateur Sergio Herman went scouting locations for a new restaurant, they discovered an abandoned building that was in less-than-glamorous shape but held vast potential. Located in Antwerp's Green Quarter, the structure was once a chapel for a military hospital, a dramatic space Boon and Herman agreed would be the perfect backdrop for Herman's latest venture with partner Nick Bril. The duo had formerly operated the Michelin-starred Oud Sluis, a mecca for destination diners that closed last December. Though the chapel was significantly damaged, the chance to open a restaurant in a religious setting, with all its symbolic resonance, was too good to pass up. Over a three-year renovation, Boon created a setting that acknowledges the structure's history and updates it with a modern look. This approach meant keeping many original details intact: "We left a lot of the church untouched," he says. "For the ceiling, we did restorations, but we didn't repaint it because I love the cracks."

The design creates a dialogue between preserved elements and new ones that reflect the chefs' artistic sensibility, including playful riffs on religious themes. Boon describes Herman as a "rock 'n' roll guy," and the architect and his design collaborators wanted to capture that edginess. The space's eye-catching centerpiece is a starlike chandelier designed by

Beirut-based design studio Pslab. The steel fixture, measuring 40 by 30 feet, boasts more than 150 glass bulbs. A large-scale image of a skull, rendered through neon lighting, peers at diners from the ceiling of the apse. In the venue's upper bar, on a second level that seats 40, images of vintage tattoos adorn the walls. Newly crafted stained glass windows by Studio Job continue the theme with 500 panels that humorously depict iconography relating to food, ethics, life, death, and religion.

Leather, oak, and stone add masculine elements throughout the space, tempered by softer touches provided by dining chairs and bar stools from Danish furniture company Fredericia and green velvet chairs by Flexform. Pslab selected all the lights in the space: In the dining area, brass table lamps generate visual warmth, as do cylindrical lights with brass interiors installed at the restaurant's entrance.

Boon's architectural approach mirrors Herman and Bril's culinary aesthetic, in which intricate platings take on a painterly effect. Framed by a glass partition that allows diners to look in from the main dining space, the kitchen occupies a space where an altar was previously located. Harnessing sound was one of Boon's greatest challenges in designing the layout. "Sergio and Nick are always very loud," he says, "and we didn't want people to hear the noise from the kitchen." In an effort to reduce the echo-chamber effect created by the building's vaulted ceilings, British loudspeaker specialists Bowers & Wilkins collaborated with acoustics consultancy Mutrox to eliminate echoes and ensure sound levels were comfortable for diners. Fire-repellant fabric was also affixed to quilted wall panels to help absorb background noise.

Since opening, the space has been anything but quiet: Boon says he can rarely get a table, and finds himself enjoying the experience vicariously. "Every day I get a text message from somebody who is having lunch or dinner over there," he says, "And all the chefs that have been there say they love it. For me, that's a big compliment."





Dish by Seamus Mullen

INSPIRED BY THE JANE

Olive oil–poached wild salmon with saffron tomatoes and a simple sauce vierge, served with pickled onions, fresh herbs, and crispy fingerling potatoes

The Jane is a space that immediately speaks to me. The raw material is extraordinary. Set against the vaulted ceilings and the original altar, the overall composition is a mash-up of traditional and modern materials. The stained glass cleverly depicts tales of whimsy, while religious frescos are transformed into line drawings of classic tattoos. Both underscore a playful sensibility. Neon skulls and upholstered walls blend effortlessly into the space, their content deftly defying their context. Just as Piet Boon brings a refined rebelliousness to a conservative space, I wanted to create a vibrantly bold and colorful dish that refers to tradition but is wholly contemporary. Salmon, a boring fish, can be one of the most magical if handled well. I love to cook it in olive oil, which maintains its natural moisture. In the restaurant, the muted colors of the dining room are offset by the vibrancy of the stained glass. Something in the vermilion and chartreuse of tomatoes gently cooked with saffron reminds me of those picaresque windowpanes. Continually I find myself—both in cooking and in design—drawn to things that are simultaneously old and new.

Serves Four

- 4 portions of wild salmon, about 3 ounces each, skins removed
- 2 cups mixed cherry tomatoes
- ½ cup seafood stock
- 1 clove garlic, cut into threads
- 1 tablespoon pickled white onion petals
- 6 threads saffron
- ≈ fino sherry vinegar
- 1 lemon thyme leaf
- ≈ basil leaves
- 1 tablespoon Niçoise olives, pitted and cut in half
- 1 teaspoon sauce vierge
- ≈ fingerling potato crisps to garnish

For the sauce vierge

- ¼ cup cherry tomatoes, chopped
- 1 tablespoon caper berries, chopped
- 1 tablespoon shallot, minced
- ½ filet salted anchovy, minced
- 1 tablespoon flat parsley, minced
- 1 tablespoon basil, minced
- ≈ zest and juice of one lemon
- 4 tablespoons arbequina olive oil
- ≈ freshly ground pepper to taste

Process

Season each portion of salmon with salt, pepper, and lemon zest, and set aside. Add the thyme leaf to 2 cups of olive oil and heat to 140°F. Add the seasoned salmon to the oil and gently poach until cooked through, about 4 to 5 minutes. Transfer the fish to a plate lined with a paper towel.

In a medium saucepan, sweat the cherry tomatoes with butter and olive oil. Add the garlic, pickled onion, and saffron, and deglaze with the fino sherry vinegar. Add seafood stock and simmer for 1 to 2 minutes. The tomatoes should be soft, but not cooked down. Add the Niçoise olives and herbs, then season with salt and pepper.

Spoon the tomatoes into the bottom of a shallow bowl, and place salmon in the middle. Combine all the ingredients for the sauce vierge and pour over the fish. Garnish with fingerling crisps, fresh herbs, and a drizzle of arbequina olive oil.