

THE EVOLUTION OF PATIO DINING

Patios are always in fashion, and with our fabulous (most of the time) year-round weather, why wouldn't they be? **BY CAROLE DIXON**

If you have been to any of the top Eastside eateries—from Caboco or Lasita downtown to Alimento in Silver Lake—you have seen the stylishly cool aesthetic from designer Alexis Readinger, founder of Preen Inc. (preeninc.com), based in Chinatown. Recent projects include Hot Tongue Pizza on Glendale Blvd. (imagine Barbie and Salvador Dali open an old-school pizzeria), and soon to be completed Pine & Crane in DTLA, along with a new Howlin' Ray's in Pasadena and a heritage restaurant project at Brantwood in Playhouse Village.

Readinger and the Preen team were busy during the early months of the pandemic, as restaurants rushed to outfit patios in the streets; Preen often worked pro bono.

“The city also had a program to help with smaller mom-and-pop places by connecting them with architects for design,” Readinger says. “At that same time, we were working on Caboco, where there is fixed seating against the wall and we thought, *Is this crazy, doing this during COVID?* But the more

seasoned restauraters were thinking, *This too shall pass.*”

Yet, the pandemic may have had a longer-term effect on restaurants' approach to design.

“There was an old-school industry rule of never having more than a percentage of your restaurant outside,” Readinger says. “There is an energy now of people emphasizing their outdoor spaces. We used to talk about greenbelts in cities but now we have hospitality belts. This is the way we want to shape our city and I think the whole outdoor in nature and patio design relates to that. Everything went haywire, but the one commonality was energetic elements of nature. It started before COVID but now people are craving it.”

Britain- and Switzerland-based Tara Bernerd & Partners (tarabernerd.com), now celebrating the award-winning firm's 20th year, has recently been responsible for the Thompson Hollywood, Four Seasons Fort Lauderdale, and Kimpton Fitzroy in London, as well as the highly anticipated Frank Gehry



Desert 5 Spot



mixed-use development at the Conrad Los Angeles at The Grand L.A.

Large wraparound banquettes in the main José Andrés restaurant and bar overlook the Gehry-designed Music Center (as do many of the rooms and suites), and plenty of outdoor custom furniture on the patio will accommodate summer cocktails and nibbles with the same iconic view.

As for designing during a pandemic, Bernerd says the team just carried on. “We had to take out some tables for social distancing on other projects, but in terms of design, we didn’t have to let that influence us,” she says. “We always have to be conscious, as things ease, but there is a lot of fluid and loose items in this restaurant, so that if we had to do this again, for social distancing, we could reconfigure and add a space-planning exercise to accommodate, and there is a lot of outdoor space.” This includes a massive back patio to seat dinners for a second Andrés restaurant and bar with downtown city views, plus plenty of outdoor nooks with firepits and curved stone seating with cushions for sunset or late-night cocktails with a chic Mediterranean alfresco feel.

Studio Collective Design Director Christian Schulz has worked with industry legends, from Frank Gehry to Kelly Wearstler, while recently constructing some of L.A.’s buzziest places—from the tommie hotel (which includes two outdoor dining-drinking options at Ka’teen and Desert 5 Spot), in Hollywood to The Shay hotel in Culver City.

Studio Collective–designed current European-style hot spot on Sunset, LAVO Ristorante by the TAO group, features a retractable-awning roof system, which was installed when the Studio Collective designed the previous IDG space, Rivabella. “We always wanted to have a big patio like at BOA across the street,” says Schulz. “The big move that we made was to take out the fixed glass and wood window panels in the main

dining room and replace them with a bifold window system that opens completely to the street. The restaurant sits on a plinth, and you have the iconic Sunset Boulevard view when the sun is going down.”

Pandemic planning was not at the forefront of their minds. “We designed this back in July 2021, when everyone was thinking it should be ending soon, and restaurants will be going back to the way we were,” Schulz says.

He adds that, pandemic or not, Studio Collective values outdoor spaces. “Everyone loves to be outside under the twinkling lights and people prefer to sit out there rather than under a tent or inside where it’s dark. I think it lends itself to people’s desire for that charming atmosphere. When you drive around L.A., you see how much restaurant dining rooms have expanded to sidewalk seating and makeshift patios—and most of them are not going away.” 

