



S H O

Henry & Hergatt 'SHO' Wall Street a Carefully Intense Collaboration

BY KELLY HUSHIN

When chef Shaun Hergatt and architect/designer Robert Henry met to discuss the Manhattan Setai's fine dining restaurant, SHO, it was immediately clear that the pairing of their passions would result in a meticulously-designed end-product, both in food and atmosphere. The two artists, both intensely engaged in their work, pined over every detail until finding the right balance between their separate approaches.



Above: Custom light fixtures decorate SHO; The wine gallery leading into the lounge area

"Shaun was involved with distinguishing the dining areas and I was happy to share some of the science of what goes into that," said Henry. "Designer and chef must really collaborate to discuss different aspects of the experience."

Henry, known for designing sensuous hospitality spaces, and Hergatt, a partner in the Setai New York development and renowned Australian born chef from the Setai South Beach, came together to create a venue that Wall Street may or may not need in the current economic climate — but no matter. Henry and Hergatt aimed to craft an experiential space that could take people out from under the stigma that Wall Street has been struggling under, and into a dining environment that is both high-end and comfortable. Besides,

when planning for the restaurant began, no one could have predicted what would soon happen to New York's financial district.

"We went up against a lot of criticisms, but something like this doesn't take three months to plan — we had already finished the plan and already started the construction," said Hergatt. "All I can do is cook the best food I can and provide the best service I can. We did a lot of things to make people understand it is fine dining and high level, but the best way we're going to beat this is to give you value, superior service and quality. We're really pushing to make sure people come back."

With a Michelin star already on its books and rave reviews from foodies, SHO is starting to see those repeat customers. And while the food is a big part of the return visit, the restaurant's design deserves equal credit.

"People walk in and they talk about the design, they love the details," said Hergatt. "It was funny, when we built the wine gallery I wanted to put up a decanter wall and Bob wanted lights in there to highlight the decanters. I didn't want them. But ultimately he was right. Ultimately it's about the culmination and collaboration of the minds and it doesn't matter who is right and who is wrong — it's about working together to find solutions."

The 12,000-square-foot restaurant with influences from the Far East, encompasses five distinct environments for those who are interested in a casual lounge experience, wine tasting or fine dining. The first segment of the restaurant is characterized by a 30-foot bar whose custom hanging pendant lights invite patrons

to stop for a drink. To the bar's left, informal lounge seating lines the wall for guests who wish to have a more casual dining experience without the need for reservations.

Beyond this space is a long hallway, lined with glass walls of wine, displaying dozens of exotic wine bottles, as well as a private tasting room, which is neither hidden nor exposed. An elongated infinity pool dotted with candles leads patrons into the fine dining portion of the restaurant, which is segmented into a two-story "dining cube" and a one-story dining area with an exhibition kitchen where patrons sit close to the chefs preparing their meals in the exceedingly pristine cooking space. The "cube" is adorned with continuous wooden lattice walls and ceiling, custom pendant light fixtures and framed artifacts such as stone "Foo Dogs," which are Feng Shui symbols of protection, meant to ward off evil spirits.

"In our case it was to protect the dining cube," said Henry. "To provide security to the patrons and guests. The darker, more mysterious palette of materials — including all the lobby/elevator areas — are weaved together as an episodic journey to enhance your perception as you move through the space."

Both designer and chef attribute the restaurant's success to their seamless melding of ideas and their steadfast work ethic.

"He knows a lot about design and is very articulate and a part of the whole design process," said Henry of Hergatt. "His plating is very architectural — we're mutually very intense. I usually think of myself as an introvert, not very wordy. He's the same way."

"We're very serious about our careers," said Hergatt. "We under-



Above: Dining area
Right: Robert Henry and Shaun Hergatt



stand what we want and that we're not going to drive anything but quality. I'm not going to support mediocre mindsets and opinions — it doesn't blend with me. Bob is the same way. I want to back him up and make sure that what he designed will be matched and superseded and I'm showing off his product at a level it should be done."

"Shaun is acutely sensitive to what his guests experience and the environmental experience," Henry agreed. "[That's] our pre-occupation too." **BD**