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RESTAURANTS

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INSIDE LITTLE ITALY'S LATEST HIGH-END HOTSPOT



An artist's rendering of the walnut-lined dining room at Born & Raised in Little Italy shows art deco-esque curved booths and tall "blooms" that cover the restaurant's support beams. (Courtesy BASILE Studio)

San Diego ready to rediscover the fine art of fine dining? The trio behind Born & Raised — Little Italy's next splashy, big-ticket restaurant — sure hope so.

On Monday, restaurateur Arsalun Tafazoli, designer Paul Basile and executive chef Jason McLeod gave us a sneak peek of the still-under-construction, \$6.5 million, two-story steakhouse in the old Nelson Photo Supplies space at 1909 India St.

Behind schedule, over budget — it was originally supposed to cost \$2.5 million — and plagued with development headaches that have driven Tafazoli to visible distraction, the stakes are high, so to speak, for this steakhouse.

Here are 5 things you need to know about Born & Raised, which is slated to open in late summer.

IT'S A SIMPLE CONCEPT

Some of the first restaurants in America were steakhouses — think New York's Old Homestead and Peter Luger, which opened in 1868 and 1887 respectively. "This is our interpretation of that classic and in this iconic location," Tafazoli said, adding that the original plan was to just open a spot for smoked meats and whiskey. "But then we thought, 'You know, this corner is owed more.' How do we live up to that?"



The team behind Born & Raised: (from left) designer Paul Basile, CH Projects co-founder Aرسالun Tafazoli and executive chef Jason McLeod. (K.C. Alfred/San Diego Union-Tribune)

IT'S THE EXECUTION THAT'LL BE COMPLICATED

McLeod and his crew will be dry-aging primo quality beef, as well as duck, pork lamb and even meatballs, in an in-house 40-square-foot dry-aging room. Even more labor intensive will be the five tableside service carts roaming the dining room with everything from freshly prepared Caesar salad to beef tartare, yakitori skewers,

American and Japanese wagyu over fancy white Binchotan charcoal and private label caviar, drinks and dessert.

“We wanted to return to the glory of dining out,” Tafazoli said. Still to be worked out — who’s going to do it? Will personable servers with limited cooking skills be trained to prepare/finish dishes tableside or will chefs with kitchen chops but not necessarily service panache? Either way, the training countdown clock is ticking.

PEOPLE ARE WATCHING

Born & Raised is one of the most anticipated openings of 2017. Not only is it from the always buzzy and decidedly hip CH Projects — they have Ironside Fish & Oyster, Craft & Commerce, Underbelly, Polite Provisions and False Idol in their portfolio — but the high-profile location adds to the level of scrutiny. Little Italy is the big leagues, home to showcase restaurants like Juniper & Ivy, Herb & Wood and Kettner Exchange. The kitchen is going to have to rise to the occasion, Tafazoli said, because their main product is “excruciatingly expensive” and “you can’t hide behind a lot with steak.”



The second floor of Born & Raised, which used to be a parking lot, will combine dining, a bar and a lounge area book-ended by two copper fireplaces. (Courtesy rendering)

THE DESIGN WILL IMPRESS

Basile is responsible for some of the most gorgeous locales in town, including Ironside and Polite Provisions. Here, he has painstakingly created a space that combines mid-century with art deco, with a side of clubby, glam chophouse. A forest-full of sleek walnut covers the first-floor dining room, ceiling and all, with brass inlays placed just so. Camel-hued leather will cover the snug booths. Upstairs on the semi-covered roof deck, where parking

for Nelson's once was, it's all teak and copper. Basile's stamp is everywhere, from the tiling and stone work to the focal point beams encased in wood shaped like blooming flowers to the façade-defining exterior scrim. "There is not an inch that hasn't been custom-built," Basile said. To that, Tafazoli added, "It would have been cheaper to tear it down and start over."

THERE WILL BE VODKA

The always polarizing CH group has moved away from its failed social engineering attempts and will serve the once-banned dreaded vodka. An admittedly pretentious move, Tafazoli good-naturedly said "we were young and had a chip on our shoulder." Born & Raised will serve classic cocktails, a steakhouse-worthy wine list curated by the restaurant group's first sommelier as well as small production grower champagne to pair with the caviar service. Sure to be the highlight of the extensive martini program will be the tableside cart equipped with liquid nitrogen to chill the glasses. Some filled with vodka, no doubt.



Located across from Piazza Basilone on India Street in Little Italy, the \$6.5 million Born & Raised restaurant project will make an impact when it opens in late summer. (Courtesy rendering)
