

23 | miami real estate; waiting tables

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Cool, trendy eatery Michael's heats up the Design District

BY JULIA HEYMAN

Some restaurants are good. Other restaurants are hot.

Michael's Genuine Food & Drink in Miami's Design District is decisively the latter. The menu is cool, the clientele is trendy and the location is hip.

Whether it's the marketing, the well-connected owner or just happy coincidence, longtime restaurateur Michael Schwartz's newest eatery is on the tip of everyone's tongue.

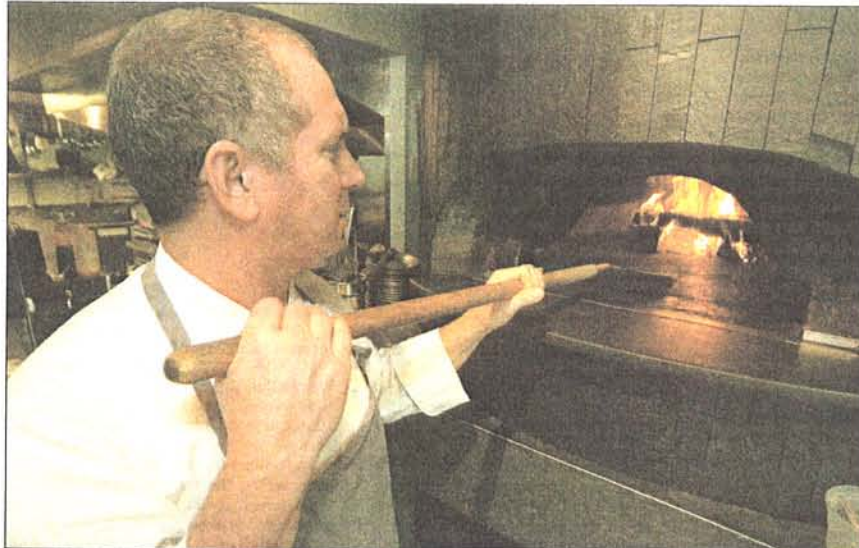
"I had an eye on the Design District for three or four years, but about a year ago is when I got really hot on the deal," said

"I FELT like the beach was changing, and people who lived on Miami Beach – and even in Miami – wanted an alternative to the beach. I liked the energy in the Design District."

Michael Schwartz | Restaurateur

Schwartz, best known for creating South Beach's Nemo restaurant. "I felt like the beach was changing, and people who lived on Miami Beach – and even in Miami – wanted an alternative to the beach. I liked the energy in the Design District."

Schwartz certainly isn't the only one drawn to the rapidly emerging district,



"The food is American, but I guess it's a chef's interpretation of a great neighborhood menu," owner Michael Schwartz says.

PHOTOS BY MARK FREERKS

MICHAEL'S GENUINE FOOD & DRINK
Web site: www.michaelsgenuine.com
Address: 130 N.E. 40th St., Miami 33137
Phone: (305) 573-5550
E-mail: inquiry@michaelsgenuine.com

which lies just north of downtown, west of Biscayne Boulevard.

December's Design Miami drew record crowds of art lovers to galleries, design studios and showrooms that now seem to be sprouting from every vacant building developer Craig Robins bought there in the 1990s.

But of the upscale, trendy food establishments that are just now starting to venture into the neighborhood, Michael's was among the first.

The restaurant reflects the Design District culture. Humungous, luminous red cubes hang from the vaulted ceilings, representing the kind of edgy, extravagant fixtures that can be found at any of the dozen design shops within a mile radius. A spiral staircase leads upward from the restaurant floor. Pixelated portraits, likely procured from a local artist, adorn the walls. The food reflects the surroundings, as well, with high priority placed on presentation.

PORTIONS OF MANY SIZES

"The food is American, but I guess it's a chef's interpretation of a great neighborhood menu," Schwartz said.

In this neighborhood, that's crispy pork belly with kimchi and crushed peanuts, rillat savarin cheese with black pepper marmalade and licorice, and Buffalo frog legs.

Dishes are arranged into small, medium, large and extra-large portions, and creativity is inversely proportional to plate size. Predictably, Schwartz's favorites are the smaller, riskier selections: octopus salad, beef cheek and duck confit. Those wishing for a tamer selection might go for Michael's signature wood-oven-roasted pizza and fish selections.

Schwartz said he aims for a local audience, but Michael's has

grown popular among tourists, as well.

Lunch patrons are mostly businesspeople from downtown, artists and designers who are in the neighborhood to shop for their clients.

Nighttime crowds vary: The early shift is an older set. As the night progresses, it's the younger, trendier patrons that crowd the restaurant's outdoor courtyard and bar.

The success of Michael's has opened the door for two more high-end restaurants, Domo Japones and Brosia, to enter the Design District dining scene. Brosia owner Scott Engelman said restaurants like Michael's are key to turning the district into a bona fide destination.

"Restaurants are really what anchors a neighborhood," Engelman said. "Michael's opened in March, and he's drawing people from all over the place."

While some Michael's' patrons are design district hipsters, many are power players in Miami's government and business community. For example, Hank Klein, chairman of the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, said he's dined at Michael's several times – and loves it.

"It's become a destination place, and it's done well from the day it opened," he said. "I think if you deliver a good-quality product and good service, people will come."

jheyman@bizjournals.com | (554) 949-7511

