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Alsatian elements mingle in Manhattan

By NORA ZELEVANSKY
Photography by ERIC LAIGNEL



For New York-based architect and designer Glen Coben, spaces are inspired by soul. So, he and his team at Glen & Company approached the potential creation of Manhattan's new Michelin-starred, eponymous Gabriel Kreuther restaurant by learning about the chef's life—from his native Alsace, France to his journey to the States and stints at several prominent restaurants. "We knew that we really needed to understand his process," says Coben. That intuitive strategy worked. In late 2013, the designer presented a floorplan that won the firm the gig.

The team had only a month to conceive the overall layout of the restaurant, and then 18 months to complete it. This particular space—a 14,000-square-foot expanse spread across two floors with 19-foot-high ceilings and views of Bryant Park—included additional challenges with two opposite entrances, one off 42nd Street and one via the adjoining W.R. Grace Building. Fortunately, the peculiarity inspired innovation: To avoid dueling hostess stands, Coben created a town square (inspired by open areas in chef Kreuther's small hometown near Strasbourg, France), which divides but still visually connects the bar

1. A reclaimed timber screen divides Gabriel Kreuther's main dining room from the bar area.

2. A glass wall covered in storks that seem to be etched in black greets guests at the 42nd Street entrance.



area and dining room thanks to a large architectural screen made from reclaimed timber from an 1880s Vermont barn (some of the beams are Y shaped, referencing the upper reaches of wooden buildings around Alsace). "It's a place where service can happen but also is a busier thoroughfare," Coben describes, adding that he placed only one hostess stand closer to 42nd Street. "You feel protected but you're still a part of the bigger story." It also speaks to Coben's No. 1 rule: "A restaurant has to function," he says, stressing the importance of pinpointing the anticipated level and style of service as well as logistical details, like server routes, during planning. "If that's not all figured out, it doesn't matter what it looks like." In fact, one of his proudest elements is a hidden mezzanine above the kitchen that houses mechanical elements.

Overall, the Alsace region—interpreted through a modern lens—was a main inspiration. The designers created a private collaborative Pinterest board, where they,





the chef, and his team could contribute relevant images of food, historic buildings, and contemporary references. “That became the dialogue, and we had chef, the best tour guide,” says Coben.

The result is an eatery filled with myriad references to the chef’s homeland: Earth tones and metallics recall a regional copper pottery technique, while the elevator shaft swathed in custom green tiles evokes those of similar hues used on traditional ovens in the area. Lights are interpreted from street lamps, and the front door handle—a brass casting of a duck—was made from a late 19th-century horse’s bridle. From regional textiles, the designers pulled patterns for carpets, ceilings, and wall panels. And storks—an Alsatian symbol of rebirth—appear on wallcoverings and were crafted in crystal and hang from the ceiling like sparkling chandelier-mobile hybrids.

As individual design elements go, Coben points out the barstools with hearts cut out at their backs—a regional hospitality symbol—that are at once subtle and powerful (and were one of the last two design elements added). “We fell in love with Alsatian shutters,” he explains. “When they’re open, you see a heart. When closed, you don’t. The heart became a way for the chef to say, ‘Welcome to my restaurant.’” **hd**

glenandcompany.com; gknyc.com

3. The elevator shaft in the bar area is swathed in custom green tiles that mimic those used on traditional Alsatian ovens.

4. Tufted cream-colored banquettes wind their way around the edge of the main dining room.

5. A traditional regional floral print has a new life as a wallcovering that covers “where the restaurant ‘touches’ Bryant Park,” Coben says.

6. A chandelier-mobile hybrid made from sparkling crystal storks—an Alsatian symbol for rebirth—hangs from the ceiling in the dining room.

Gabriel Kreuther New York

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SAI Gallerium
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Ceiling
Emerson Mareca Special Finish Work
Copper Relief Panels
Make It Metal
Elevator Door
Furniture Design by Knossos

Upholstery
Architex
Lighting
Preciosa, WAC Lighting, and Primus Lighting
Wallcoverings
Designtex
Hard Flooring
Walker Zanger
Rugs
Nourison Hospitality
Surfacing Materials
Atlantic Exterior Wall Systems
Window Treatment
ShimmerScreen (ball and chain); and Hunter Douglas Hospitality (roller shade)

MAIN DINING ROOM
Millwork and Wood
Atlas Custom Design
Ceiling
Emerson Mareca Special Finish Work
Upholstery
Architex
Carpet
Nourison Hospitality
Lighting
Lum-Tech Lighting, Primus Lighting, and Preciosa
Mobile/Chandelier
Designed by Glen & Company; fabricated by Windfall
Surfacing Materials
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