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 expansion spread across two floors with 12-foot-high ceilings and views of Bryant Park—includes 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 sketches that seem to be etched in black tape guests at the 42nd Street entrance.
area and dining room thanks to a large architectural screen made from reclaimed timber from an 1850s 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 hustler 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 Cohen.

The result is an eatery filled with myriad references to the chef’s homeland: Earth tones and metaliccs 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 stools—an Alsatian symbol of rebirth—appear on wall coverings and were crafted in crystal and hang from the ceiling like sparkling chandelier-mobile hybrids.

As individual design elements go, Cohen 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.’”

**Gabriel Kreuther**

**New York**

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Glen & Company, New York
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**ENTRANCE**
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Flooring
Architectural Systems, Inc.
Etched Glass
Fabricated by Accura Glass Bending
BAR AND LOUNGE
Seating
Munrod and ISA International
Bartop and Backbar Shelves
Superior M+W
Green Tiles
SAI Galleria
Tables
Stainless Metals (custom copper tabletops); and Seating Expert (table bases)
Ceiling
Emerson Mareca Special Finish Work
Copper Relief Panels
Make it Metal
Elevator Door
Furniture Design by Knossos

**Upholstery**
Architect
Lighting
Preciosa, WAC Lighting, and Primus Lighting
Wallcoverings
Design Point
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
Architect
Carpet
Nourison Hospitality
Lighting
Lum-Tech Lighting, Primus Lighting, and Preciosa
Mobile/Chandelier
Designed by Glen & Company; fabricated by Windfall
Surfacing Materials
Storied Boards
Wallcoverings
Wolf-Gordon and York
Wallcoverings
Seating
ISA International and Munrod
Tables
Seating Expert and Atlas Custom Design
Shelving
Atlas Custom Design and Superior M+W