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DOLLARS AND SENSORY



Ornate eye candy in the form of hanging bird cages and sumptuous reds and purples at Side Bar

Who and What are Defining San Diego's Two Polar Opposite Design Movements

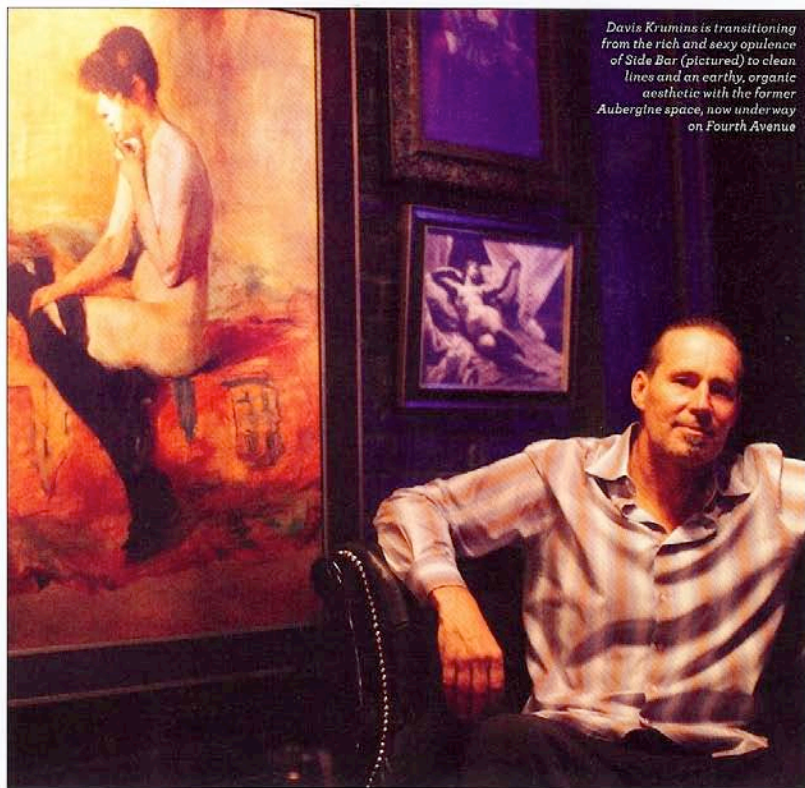
by DEREK SHAW photography by MIKE BROWN

San Diego, by design, is a hodgepodge of boom and bust — a pastiche of Mediterranean and Mission traditions, rustic craftsman homes and grand Victorian estates. The urban redevelopment of the Gaslamp and its surrounding communities fostered an architectural surge, but gentrification's honeymoon was brief. By the time the bubble burst on developers a few years ago, it was already too late for most corporate investors and local entrepreneurs. High-rise condos remain largely unoccupied as the albatross of a mounting skyline continues to cast its shadow over downtown.

The sluggish market is just beginning to recover; meanwhile, vacant buildings and dirt lots are staying empty, leases are still being lost, and businesses are shutting down. In response, San Diego is becoming more environmentally conscious and economically sound. Sustainable growth is the social responsibility of designers, developers, urban planners and consumers alike. It can also mean the difference between timeless art and trendy theme parks.

Two distinct movements are concurrently shaping the regional architectural landscape, propelled by a number of civic-minded design firms and visionary architects. First is the mid-century meets modern styling of the Gaslamp where grandiose layouts, glamorous interiors and plush accommodations reign. Posh, tricked-out nightspots such as Voyeur, Side Bar and Vin de Syrah pamper patrons while inciting the senses. In contrast, other design firms are responding with less frills and more function. Places like Hotel Indigo, Station Tavern & Burgers and Cucina Urbana are resourceful and streamlined — scaling back the drama in favor of clean, open, unpretentious spaces that feel warm and welcoming.

To get to the bottom of the “opulent eye candy vs. understated modern/casual simplicity” debate, 944 picked the brains of four local designers leading the charge in their respective domain. Each offers a taste of what makes San Diego beautiful, with plenty to say about the ugly parts, too.



Davis Krumins is transitioning from the rich and sexy opulence of Side Bar (pictured) to clean lines and an earthy, organic aesthetic with the former Aubergine space, now under way on Fourth Avenue

Davis Krumins, Davis Ink

Occupation: Interior Designer

Craft: Ornate furnishings employing organic, often recycled materials

Projects: Side Bar, Bar Ninety (formerly Lucky D's), Stingaree, the new Aubergine space

944: Coming from Orange County and LA, what design perspective do you offer San Diego?

DAVIS KRUMINS: Ten years ago, there was nothing downtown in the way of mid-century design or contemporary architecture. When I designed Side Bar the first time around, it stood out for being so minimal. By the time I did Stingaree, the modern movement had caught on, and now it seems like people are finding comfort in a casual environment. That creates the opportunity to do something refined again.

944: How do you create a space that is both classy and cozy?

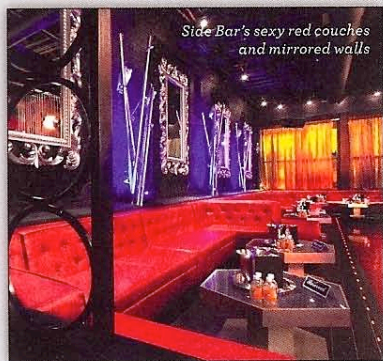
DK: I love dive bars, so I like to create micro-spaces in clubs — bringing the ceiling down and making sprawling spaces feel more intimate. Although I normally don't do very decorative projects, Side Bar and Lucky D's combine layers of tile, wallpaper and upholstery with funky accents. I think the formula of feng shui is bullshit, but there is something to be said for balance.

944: How do you procure these lavish resources on a reasonable budget?

DK: You have to be creative. It involves pooling together antiques, vintage replicas, recycled materials and natural elements like rocks and driftwood.

944: Where is design heading in San Diego?

DK: The green movement paired with modern design: clean lines and earthy components that make people feel good. I'm renovating the former Aubergine space into a dance club with an organic experience — candles, water features and random subtleties you'd find in a thrift store.



Side Bar's sexy red couches and mirrored walls

944'S TOP FOUR "OPULENT EYE CANDY" HOTSPOTS:

1. **VIN DE SYRAH:** The hidden entrance feels like Manhattan, but once inside, it may as well be Wonderland.

2. **VOYEUR:** A goth fun house featuring secret chambers, transparent floors, skulls aplenty and a 25-foot LED light wall.

3. **SIDE BAR:** This throwback to a '20s bordello is chock full of chandeliers, dangling birdcages and nude paintings of voluptuous maidens.

4. **BAR NINETY:** A chic lounge that feels like a modern opium den with cheap cocktails and tribal masks.



The overhauled and re-branded Lucky D's space is now Bar Ninety