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Acoustic Ceiling for Reunion Restaurant
for Chef Art Smith, Chicago

CASE STUDY: CHEF ART SMITH'S REUNION RESTAURANT

Custom Wood-Printed Acoustic Ceiling

Client: Reunion/TAG Restaurants
Designed by: Knauer

REIMAGINING AN ICON

Chicago's Navy Pier has long been known as an iconic lakefront destination, offering dining, shopping, and entertainment for locals and tourists alike. As it's evolved, one of the top priorities has been to create authentic experiences based on the local communities and people.

When it came to reimagining the dining experience, Navy Pier partnered with Chicago native and internationally celebrated Chef Art Smith, who dreamed of a restaurant inspired by his local roots that encouraged simple, healthy community dining.



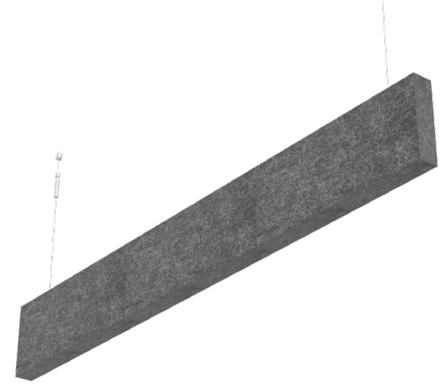
DEFINING THE VISION

In creating the space, Chef Art Smith teamed up with TAG Restaurants on the management side, Knauer for the design, and Chas Bender for the full build-out. The vision called for a homestyle aesthetic – a comfortable, casual place that makes you feel like you're eating with the closest of friends, inspired by Chef Art's home kitchen in Chicago where he started his culinary journey.

One of the key elements of this design was the ceiling treatment. The team at Knauer reached out to Fi™ Interiors, aware of our work with acoustical PET felt, to see if we could create a rustic wood grain ceiling that would match the theme while also helping to reduce noise levels in the dining area. The concept was well defined, comprised of a series of crossing beams and nested panels that resembled reclaimed wood.

VALUE ENGINEERING

Once the design was approved, we worked hand-in-hand with each team to bring life to their vision. We produced prototypes of both the beam and panels that were reviewed and approved. We met with the General Contractor to introduce them to our Acusti-fi™ PET felt and engineer an installation approach that met their budget and time constraints. Initially, the ceiling cost came in higher than expected, but through some collaborative troubleshooting with the GC and minor adjustments, we were able to reduce the cost by roughly 30% without sacrificing the original design.



CREATING AUTHENTICITY

Printing a wood grain ceiling may sound easy, but there are challenges with utilizing repeating textures or patterns over a large surface area. If each panel was printed with the same layout, the repetition would be noticeable from below and disrupt the illusion. To avoid that potential outcome, our graphics team worked with a range of wood tones to create a series of panels that could be placed throughout the space. From any perspective in the restaurant, each panel looks unique as would be the case with real wood.

INSTALLATION

Our GC had never worked with PET felt, but there were immediately clear benefits. This highly-versatile material is also extremely lightweight and easy to work with. With each piece weighing no more than a few pounds, the process of raising and securing each to the ceiling was a complete contrast to the experience of working with real wood. Where measurements were given for HVAC, panels were precut to avoid time spent on site, but for smaller electrical needs, pieces could be quickly cut in place in a matter of seconds.

THE OUTCOME

Every project we contribute to is a labor of love. Each new challenge brings opportunities to push the limits of the materials and processes in order to exceed customer expectations and deliver on a shared vision.

As Reunion opened to the public, the success of the project is abundantly clear. Furthermore, the case for Acusti-fi™ PET felt has been reinforced. The highly-versatile material not only benefits spaces from a sound quality perspective but also provides designers with the ability to create one-of-a-kind environments that add to the overall customer experience.

Two months after opening, we spoke to TAG Restaurants owner Manolis Alpogianis who had this to say...

"The fact is, we were looking for a ceiling that added to our look and feel while being effective in absorbing sound to help create the atmosphere we were working so hard to achieve. And all was achieved! But what I'm most surprised by is how many people comment on how great the ceiling looks. It's impressive both in design and functionality."



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