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The voice of RESTAURANT people

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The Tao of Restaurant Design

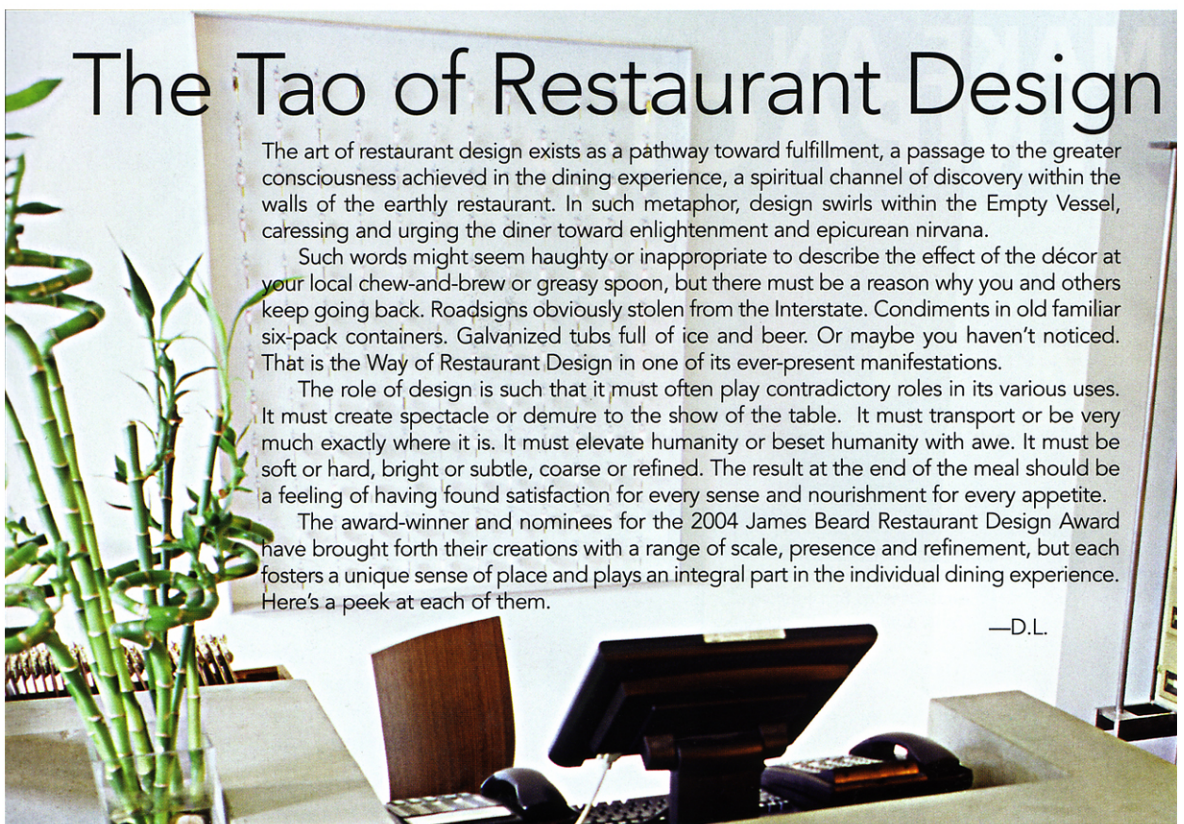
The art of restaurant design exists as a pathway toward fulfillment, a passage to the greater consciousness achieved in the dining experience, a spiritual channel of discovery within the walls of the earthly restaurant. In such metaphor, design swirls within the Empty Vessel, caressing and urging the diner toward enlightenment and epicurean nirvana.

Such words might seem haughty or inappropriate to describe the effect of the décor at your local chew-and-brew or greasy spoon, but there must be a reason why you and others keep going back. Roadsigns obviously stolen from the Interstate. Condiments in old familiar six-pack containers. Galvanized tubs full of ice and beer. Or maybe you haven't noticed. That is the Way of Restaurant Design in one of its ever-present manifestations.

The role of design is such that it must often play contradictory roles in its various uses. It must create spectacle or demure to the show of the table. It must transport or be very much exactly where it is. It must elevate humanity or beset humanity with awe. It must be soft or hard, bright or subtle, coarse or refined. The result at the end of the meal should be a feeling of having found satisfaction for every sense and nourishment for every appetite.

The award-winner and nominees for the 2004 James Beard Restaurant Design Award have brought forth their creations with a range of scale, presence and refinement, but each fosters a unique sense of place and plays an integral part in the individual dining experience. Here's a peek at each of them.

—D.L.



Public, 210 Elizabeth St., NYC

Design Firm: Avro Ko

The name "Public" informed the entire interior of the Beard award-winner. Greg Bradshaw and his co-designers Adam Farmerie, Kristina O'Neal and William Harris visited countless public places—post offices, police stations, public libraries, schools, train stations—and plucked design elements from our "public" consciousness to create a welcoming, open-to-all atmosphere for the Lower East Side restaurant. Public serves "unpretentious, accessible" food in a setting that blends nostalgic elements with abstract and modernist touches.

