



IN ASSOCIATION WITH NEW YORK DELI

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# EMPIRE state of mind

A Christchurch fast-casual franchise, New York Deli, has learnt the importance of attention to detail from hospitality fit-outs. *Jessica-Belle Greer* learns more.

In Addington, Christchurch, 11 men dangle frozen in time, enjoying their lunch on a steel beam suspended 69 floors up. The iconic photograph of construction workers at 30 Rockefeller Plaza in 1930s New York features in the New York Deli's Lincoln Road store, and signals the franchise's love of another time and place.

A second, and newly opened, New York Deli at the Bush Inn Centre, Upper Riccarton, showcases a similar black and white image of New York construction workers, this time having a smoko on the edge of the Chrysler Building. The fit-out looks as if it's straight out of the skyscraper city itself.

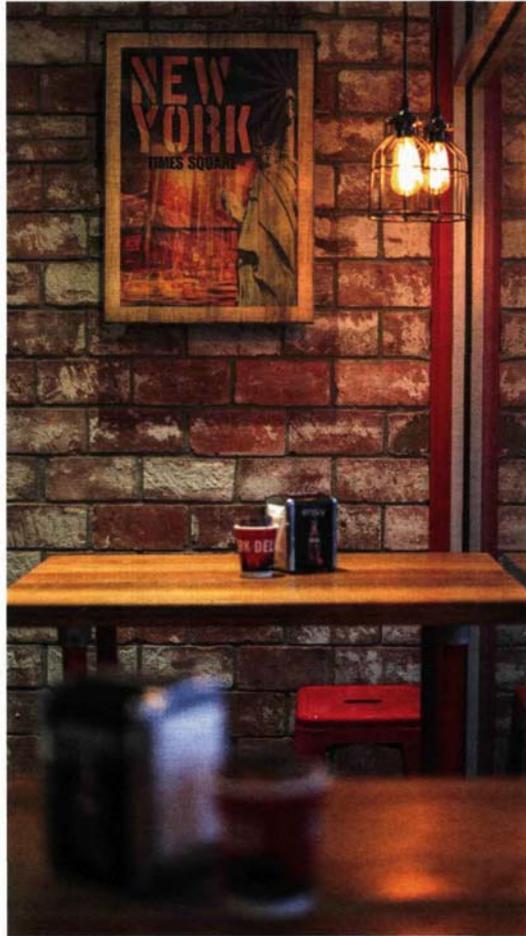
Although it is a Kiwi-owned store, New York Deli relies on its namesake city's charm to make guests feel comfortable. Frank Sinatra and Dean Martin croon from a Spotify playlist

as customers enjoy long 'Hero' sandwiches and hearty bagels, with names like 'Brooklyn Short Rib' and 'Midtown BLT'.

"The thing about food these days, is you can promote all the healthy food you like, people still like to feel full," says new owner Mike Parkinson. "It's a visual thing."

He recently purchased New York Deli with business partner Jack Meertens. They are both directors of Food Concepts, the food retail arm of infrastructure consultancy company Retail Focus.

The business partners worked with American-themed diner Burger King for 15 years as they opened 75 stores across New Zealand from 1995 onwards. They also introduced American burger chain Carl's Jr to New Zealand with a brand that is "all about the burger". »



"The fundamentals in food that don't change, like in retail, are good product and good service," says Parkinson.

New York Deli stores each have around six staff members working at a time and have a maximum seating capacity of 40. The Upper Riccarton store can sit up to 15 outside.

With dreams of increasing franchises for the New Zealand-born deli, Parkinson notes: "You've got to have a point of difference".

Although Burger King and Carl's Jr have an American twang, New York Deli is special because of its focus on design and menu make-up. The store's basic theming is the industrial era of the Empire State Building, which was constructed in the 1930s.

"If you're going to go with the name New York Deli you really have to reflect some of that lifestyle within your theming because people have an expectation," says Parkinson.

The Addington deli was opened in 2011, when the brand relocated from its Victoria St premises in central Christchurch after the earthquake struck. Architect Chris Wheeler of Hierarchy Group used salvaged materials, such as timber and seats, for the reborn store.

Natural and authentic materials were a focus point for the Upper Riccarton store as well, which opened last year and won a 2016 ADNZ Resene Architectural Design Awards for its clever attention to detail.

Wheeler used his experience from other hospitality fit-outs to create various spaces that are able to maintain overall warmth in an open plan restaurant.

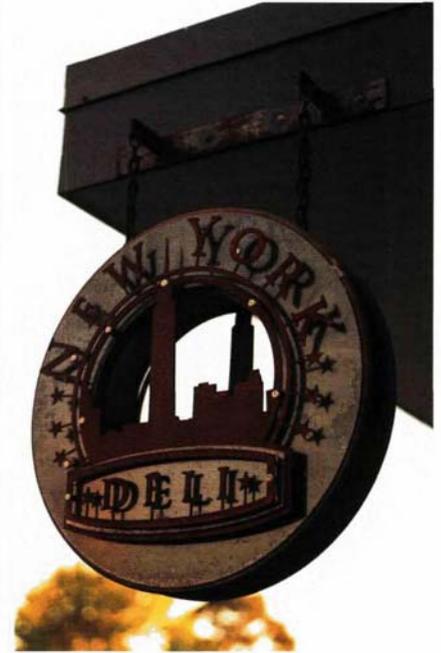
"It's really just trying to be clever about how you approach different areas," he says. "You need spatial design to maintain intimacy for customers dining in and some kind of division for an ergonomic flow for the counter line."

Three different seating areas use three different height levels, from the low booths for long catch-ups, to casual and comfortable banquet seats and a high lean-to bar for those short on time. All break up the space and give customers a choice of dining options.

A range of materials and textures were also used to further this smart use of open space. Various steel and timber were put to use in the divisions and seating areas.

Real, recycled red brick and timber, which was brought back to life with linseed oil, were used to add authenticity and detail. The polished concrete floor ticks all the boxes by being cost-effective, serviceable and honest looking.

"The idea was to use really authentic materials for an integrated industry feel without being too cold," says Wheeler, who enjoyed researching New York's style in the 30s and 40s for the delis.



The design point of difference is this use of raw and recycled materials in a way that maintains a level of quality.

"It was about organic, natural and honest material and the balance of it," says Wheeler.

But the best part of the design for Wheeler is the "high level of detail in bric-a-brac that makes it authentic and reflects the quality of the brand".

Bric-a-brac, such as suspended street signs and freestanding calendars, were sourced both internationally and nationally and are an ode to downtown New York eateries. From vintage pickle jars to pot plants, each detail is staged specifically by Hierarchy Group to surprise the customer each visit and help with the flow of the restaurant.

"That level of detail makes it feel like it's been there a long time," says Wheeler. "The customer can notice something new every time."

The resulting industrial fit-out feels like it has been there for years. Handcrafted custom

signage went through several processes, including sand blasting, to give an older, rusting look that stands out immediately.

Signage is most important to Parkinson given the current competition in food retail.

"There's multiple choices for food these days so people have to see you quickly. Signage is critical," Parkinson says that overall ambience is the key to ensuring customers enjoy their surroundings across both retail and food outlets.

The stores are "designed for people to feel comfortable and relaxed and take whatever time they need."

The delis offer affordable and high-quality meals that are made in front of customers within five minutes. They appeal to workers with disposable incomes as well as students seeking value.

The rich colour theme of red and black is even more striking under the industrial-style, imported lights kept dim.

"Lighting has a lot of effect, in fact it's one of those things people tend to overlook these days," he says. "Lighting is critical to ambience because you can spoil the whole design structure if you don't put the right lighting in."

This reflects the philosophy of the delis, which treat customers like old friends and ensures a space for customers to relax.

The new owners of New York Deli are finalising some changes to their menu and putting systems in place.

"It's a quick way to lose money if you don't have systems in food," says Parkinson. "It's too easy not to portion control."

They have installed computer systems to measure all ingredient usage as they add new products to the menu and prepare for regular specials. Over the next six months they hope to fully implement this and ensure current franchisees are as comfortable as their customers are with the new owners.

Parkinson says the main pitfalls people make in owning a store is not doing their homework and letting emotions rule their decisions.

"Emotions are killer to any decisions in business because you buy what you like and you tend to overlook the bad points," he says.

Although the design of the store has an emotive effect on customers, a strategic spatial design that takes its cues from hospitality fit-outs has created a successful franchise and comfortable space to enjoy a sandwich. **■**