

December 2009

More Cupcakes

Chicago / David Woodhouse Architects

By: Katie Gerfen

When Chicago architect David Woodhouse signed on to design a local high-end cupcake store, he had to reach far beyond his skills as a planner and designer to prepare for perhaps the best fine-print role on a project, ever: taste-tester. The self-described “odd man out in the control group,” Woodhouse, who dislikes chocolate, gravitated toward some of More Cupcakes’ unusual offerings—of which BLT, foie gras, and lemon meringue are only a few. Despite the long and motley menu, one thing all of the varieties have in common is their basic ingredients, and it is those that ultimately served as the inspiration for the 550-square-foot flagship store’s minimalist interior design. “We wanted to get the feeling of what the cupcakes were made of,” says Woodhouse, “the purity of the white flour, the creamy feeling of the butter.”

The interior is made up of a few simple materials, detailed meticulously to compose a restrained design. In the main retail space, bamboo plywood forms the counter and custom cabinets, designed to conceal boxes, bags, and other packaging from view. The back wall is a custom installation of neon tubes behind a sheet of 3form resin designed by local artist Greg Mowery.

But without a doubt, the main focus of the space is the cupcake display stand—formed from stainless steel, routed resin, and glass, the custom installation hails each cupcake as an individual work of art. It is this element above all that drives home the point that “we didn’t want to design a bakery,” says Woodhouse. “We didn’t want the imagery of a bakery. We didn’t want to bend over and have cases in the counter. We wanted the cupcakes at eye level, like a museum, or a jewelry store.”

If the lines out the door are any indication, the team has hit upon a formula that works. Plans for other locations are in the works, as is Mobile More, a BMW van with an interior designed by Woodhouse’s firm to carry cupcakes to the masses. There might have to be a special delivery run of his favorite flavor, salted caramel.

Project Credits

Project More Cupcakes, Chicago

Client More Cupcakes

Architect David Woodhouse Architects, Chicago—David Woodhouse (principal); Andy Tinucci (project architect); Brian Foote, Rea Koukiou (project team)

Architect of Record Huron Design Group, Chicago—Peter Erdelyi

Lighting Molly McKnight

Graphic Design Concrete Inc.

Neon Design Greg Mowery

General Contractor Tip Top Builders

Size 550 square feet (retail space)

Cost \$250,000

Toolbox

Bamboo Panels

Teragren

teragren.com

The millwork in the retail space is made from 3/4"-thick panels of Teragren Bamboo plywood. The vertical-grain surface has a caramelized finish that brings warmth to a space otherwise dominated by metal, concrete, and glass. And because the core of each panel is made up of short pieces of bamboo that are stacked perpendicular to the surface's vertical grain, the bored holes in the front-most panel have a beautifully detailed, exposed cross-section.

Chroma Panels

3form

3-form.com

Used throughout the space as a matte finish, 3form Chroma allowed the architects to play with light and introduce the aesthetic of frosted glass without being constrained by the weight or rigidity of the more traditional material. In front of the neon lighting installation along the back wall, floor-to-ceiling formed Chroma panels help to diffuse the light, and panels of a different thickness hold the cupcakes in the retail display. Circles are routed into the surface of those smaller panels to keep the cupcakes from sliding around and to separate each cupcake in the case, ensuring an even display.

15mm Neon Tubes

Tecnolux

www.tecnolux.com

The neon installation at the rear of the store was intended to evoke the idea of swirls of rich butter, one of the key ingredients in the store's gourmet cupcakes. Working with local artist Greg Mowery, the team realized that to achieve the desired effect, they would need to combine the proper color temperature of neon tubing, a specially painted surface (with a

series of colors in a variegated pattern), and a diffusing material. The final solution includes 15mm-diameter neon-filled tubes from Tecnolux, which are available in myriad colors.

Float Glass

Oldcastle Glass

oldcastleglass.com

For the countertops and the pivot door between the retail space and the kitchen, the architects chose to use 3/8" -thick float glass with an acid-etched back face by Oldcastle Glass. The choice for the kitchen door was a calculated one—both the client and the architects recognized that they did not want to create a typical bakery. The acid-etched glass allows customers to see chefs moving around in the kitchen space and allows the sounds and smells of baking to pass through, all while concealing the mess and clutter of a working bakery kitchen.