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RESTAURANT BUSINESS

Inside the Hidden World of Restaurant Design

Great food and service are key to the success of Dallas eateries, sure. But so too are the under-the-radar companies that build and brand the concepts from the ground up.

BY TARA NIEUWESTEEG | PUBLISHED IN D CEO JULY-AUGUST 2017 | PHOTOS COURTESY OF VENDORS

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Fast-growing Coevál Studio was responsible for the look of Nikkei restaurant, which is renowned for the glowing, ancient-style Japanese art on its walls.

It's Saturday night at Happiest Hour, and front-door security can't check IDs fast enough. A Dallas Stars game just ended, and fans are streaming in from the American Airlines Center in search of the closest after-party spot—which, not coincidentally, is Happiest Hour.

The people coming in wear sneakers and sparkly jewelry and polos and even suits. In the yard, two couples take turns throwing beanbags against cornhole boards emblazoned with the "HH" logo. At a patio table, a mother rocks her baby while her husband finishes his burger. Women in floral dresses fight over the fruit floating in their Endless Summer Sangria, a $110 fishbowl-sized shareable cocktail. On the upstairs patio, people talk closely, sway to the music, and snap selfies with the Dallas skyline glowing brightly behind them.

Coevál Studio did The Rustic and Happiest Hour.

This bar-and-restaurant megalith, 12,000 square feet in size, offers up a variety of experiences and puts them all in one place. You can watch sports, play giant Jenga, enjoy a family meal, or pop champagne on the upstairs patio. And whatever you choose, you won't be alone. On a weekend night, thousands of people will pass through Happiest Hour's doors. According to a bar manager in a bright blue miniskirt, 3,700 patrons visited Happiest Hour one recent Friday.

"That was just at the tables," she says, watching customers spill in and servers dart past with trays full of food. "That doesn't account for people who only sat at the bar."

But, don't think the success at this popular spot, or any other in Dallas, is a coincidence. From its tidy industrial vibe to its small touches—like the indoor fire pit and the party games, which have a tendency to end up on Instagram—Happiest Hour was meticulously designed with the bottom line in mind.