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VISUAL MERCHANDISING + STORE DESIGN

# GRAND AVENUE

Mexico City's historic El Palacio de Hierro department store undertakes a massive redesign





Merging vintage and modern design elements, Mabel's BBQ serves up an elevated backyard cookout aesthetic for Cleveland's downtown diners.

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MARK STEELE, COLUMBUS, OHIO

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**ON THE COVER** Sculptural ceiling elements in El Palacio de Hierro introduce whimsy to visual displays and add to the department store's opulence.

PHOTOGRAPHY:  
PAUL RIVERA, SALT LAKE CITY

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# HELLO, CLEVELAND!

Michael Symon's latest culinary venture is a nostalgic tribute to the celebrity chef's Midwestern hometown.

*By Kaileigh Peyton, Associate Editor*

**KNOWN INTERNATIONALLY FOR HIS APPEARANCES ON THE FOOD Network, his title as Iron Chef and one of the hosts of ABC's "The Chew,"** Chef Michael Symon opened the doors to his premiere restaurant concept, Lola Bistro, on his home turf back in 1997. Nineteen years later, his latest project, Mabel's BBQ, is the new kid on the block (literally, right next door) on Cleveland's East Fourth Street.

Proud of his culinary roots in the birthplace of rock 'n' roll, the restaurateur seeks to put Cleveland-style barbecue on the map, emphasizing the bold Eastern European flavors beloved by the city's Polish-American heritage. For such a departure from more popularized barbecue staples, it was essential that Mabel's represented not only the cuisine of growing up in Cleveland but, just as importantly, the feeling.

To achieve this, Symon partnered with Cleveland-based Richardson Design – a firm the chef has worked with on several of his other

restaurant designs – to create a truly authentic backyard barbecue experience.

"In terms of the design concept, we worked to develop what barbecue means to the context of Cleveland, so everything from the backyard to the union halls ... We combined these influences to give people a sense of what it means to barbecue in Cleveland," says Scott Richardson, design principal, Richardson Design.

Hosting this downtown barbecue is the man himself: A large, backlit photo of Symon and his family sits above the main floor on the restaurant's mezzanine, welcoming diners. To elevate the picnic aesthetic for Mabel's urban locale, familiar vintage cookout elements were adapted in an understated way: a custom bar resembling a retro Coleman cooler; folding wooden chairs reminiscent of those pulled out of the garage just for gatherings; and a long communal table for guests to gather 'round and dig in.



*Exterior branding was kept minimal to resemble vintage signage, befitting of its '30s-era frontage. A warm red glow from an entrance neon sign lures guests in from the busy street.*



*RIGHT An oversized menu board displays the restaurant's straightforward menu offerings in a simple typeface, harkening back to drive-in theater signage. Custom pendants above the bar conceptually resemble matchsticks.*

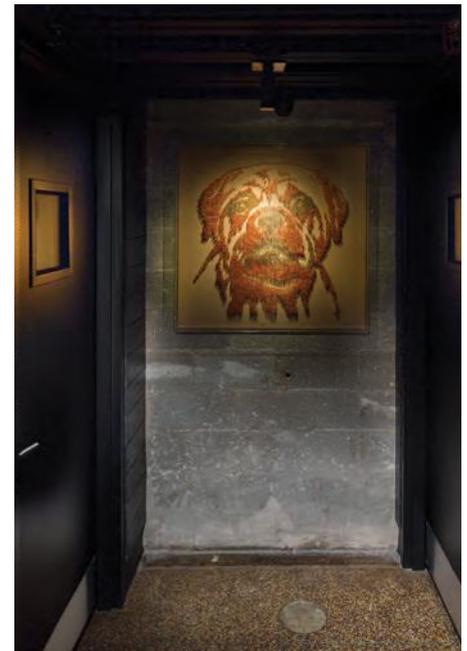
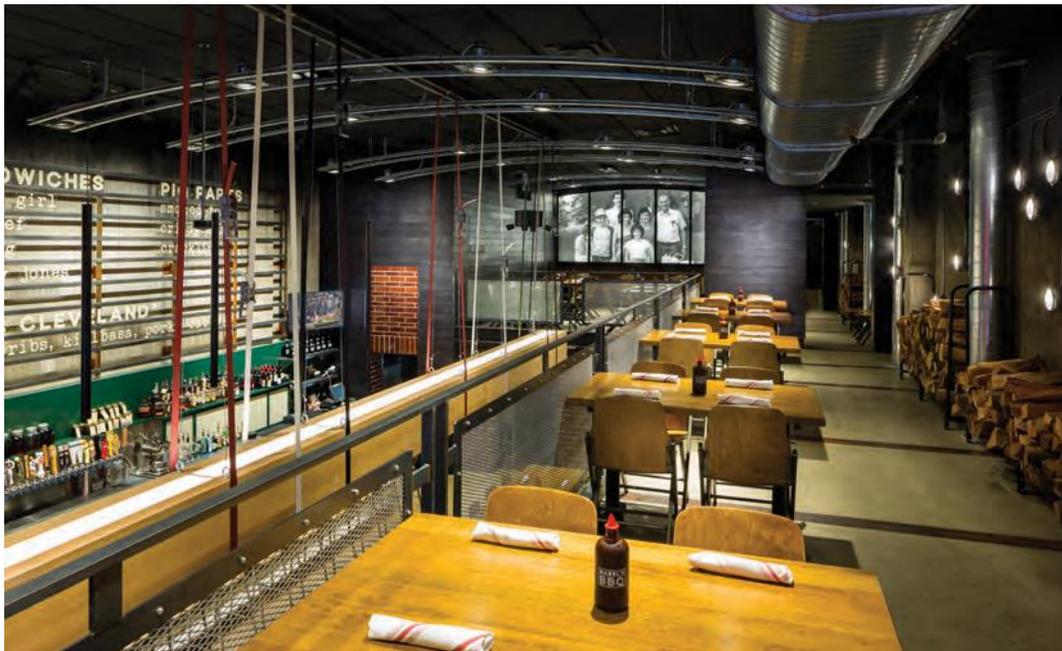


Conceptual influences, such as vertical lines that reference matchsticks, a mustard and smoke-inspired color palette, an oversized neon sign the color of red-hot embers, and interspersed automotive-style lights evocative of summer nights barbecuing by headlights, pull together Mabel's overarching spirit of nostalgia.

The building itself – now nestled in a trendy residential and entertainment district – dates back to the turn of the 20th Century, when it originated as an F.W. Woolworth five-and-dime store. Accommodating the kitchen and dining area within its long, narrow space presented a challenge: “We could only fit a few rows of tables,” explains Richardson. “From a culinary standpoint, if we were to build the entire kitchen on the first floor, the dining room would have been very small.” To make more room for first-floor seating without eliminating cooking space, the barbecue smokers were tucked away on the second floor, and the mezzanine level was utilized to provide additional seating.

Inserted throughout are discreet references to Symon himself, signifying just how close this new concept is to his heart. The entrance's neon sign

BELOW A mezzanine level accommodates diners on the second floor, where tables are situated near the railing so guests still feel like part of the action on the main floor below.



proclaiming “EAT MORE MEAT” is the same catchphrase Symon has tattooed on his body. Behind the antique workbench hostess table sits a custom leather panel fabricated from vintage belts, meant to symbolize his love of motorcycles. Hanging on a wall, a piece of 3-D artwork comprising multicolored matchsticks depicts his late bullmastiff, Mabel, after

whom the restaurant was named.

“At one point, he said it was his gift to the city, creating this Cleveland barbecue,” says Richardson. And not only have sales far exceeded expectations since opening, he says, but the real joy has been in seeing the city revel in the nostalgia of the food and the restaurant’s Cleveland-inspired design. ▴

#### PROJECT SUPPLIERS

RESTAURANT  
Mabel’s BBQ, Cleveland

DESIGN  
Richardson Design,  
Cleveland

ARCHITECTURE  
David A. Levy &  
Associates, Akron, Ohio

GENERAL CONTRACTOR  
Fortney & Weygandt Inc.,  
Cleveland

FLOORING  
Hardwood Solutions,  
Wilmot, Ohio

SIGNAGE/GRAPHICS  
Richardson Design,  
Cleveland

Signature Signage Co.,  
Cleveland

FIXTURES  
Mio Metals, Petaluma, Calif.  
Rino’s Working Shop,  
Cleveland  
Classic Metal Studios,  
Cleveland  
Alu, New York

PROPS/DECORATIVES  
Fount Leather, Cleveland

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