

BOWLING, BEER,
A LITTLE BIT OF BANGKOK...

DH, AND DON'T FORGET THE DESIGNERS.

**THE DESIGN DISTRICT HAS
EVOLVED TO BECOME A
DESTINATION FOR THE PUBLIC.**

BY DAWN McMULLAN

THE DESIGN DISTRICT now has its own local brewery and a bowling alley. Translation for those working to transform the area: the Design District now has life.

Things certainly have taken a turn since Trammell Crow opened the Decorative Center in 1955. Five decades later, the area had grown. Almost six decades later, it has transformed.

"The most fascinating part of the Design District now is to watch the area continue to evolve its own ethos as a piece of the Dallas city fabric," says Michael Ablon, principal of PegasusAblon Properties, a pioneer in the

most recent multi-use reinvention of the district. "The evolution of restaurants—the Meddlesome Moth, Oak, FT33, Pakpao, and Ascension—has added a deeper piece of local culture to the Design District fabric, and the ethos now includes the trendiest urban living environment to accompany the authentically Dallas dining scene."

Kevin Carr, who opened Community Beer Company in January, sees Ablon's "fabric" as community.

"As our name implies, we wanted a location that was centrally located to be able to build a community around our brews," Carr says. "[The Design District] was a perfect spot for us to build our brewery. As an extra kicker, we love that our address is on Inspiration Drive. What a great name to build our dream brewery."

Carr and his compadres at Community loved the name of the street so much, they named a beer after it: Inspiration Ale, a dark, strong, Belgian-

style ale, which won a bronze medal at the 2013 U.S. Open Beer Championship.

The Design District, of course, is known for its design experts and showrooms, not necessarily its beer (yet). The number of showrooms that are industry only (meaning you must have a designer do the purchasing for you) is still probably about half. In the majority of showrooms, however, the general public is more than welcome to walk through even if you can't buy without professional assistance.

The mainstays of the district include the International on Turtle Creek, the Decorative Center on Hi Line Drive, Dallas Design Center on North Stemmons Freeway, Dragon Street, Slocum Street, and Hi Line Drive.

The life evolving in and

around these design industry staples—this is where the beer and bowling come in—is what those passionate about the area have been working so hard to obtain.

Last year, the evolution continued, with the opening of 1400 Hi Line and its 26 stories of upscale residences and street-level retail. With 1,000 people expected to move into the district in the next 18 months, the total population will hit about 2,500, Ablon says.

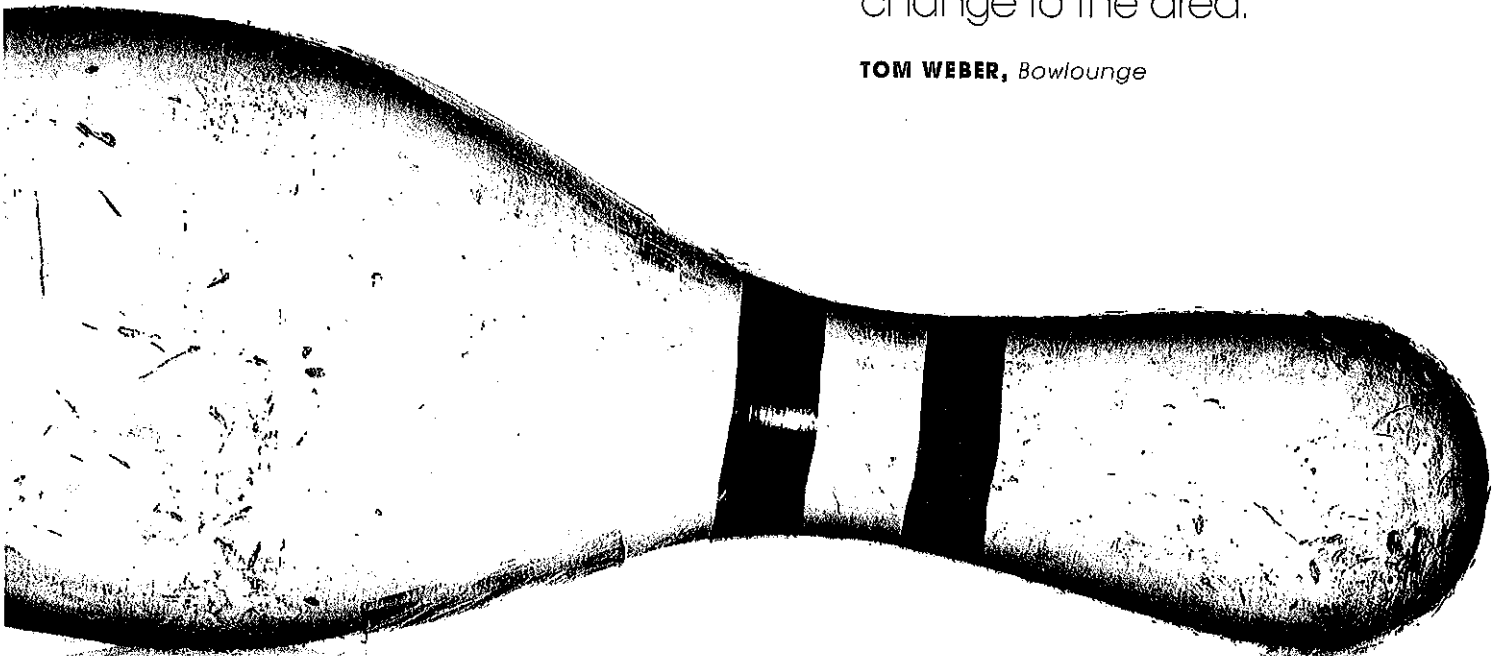
"It really isn't a question of what has changed," he says, "but more a matter of how organically the dining and the living experience has evolved to become such a large complement to the resurgence of the design and creative shops, boutiques, and galleries that make up the heart of the district."



JASON JANIK

“The Design District really is the perfect spot for our modern-retro bowling alley, and now we can't imagine it anywhere else. We are just now seeing the tip of the iceberg in terms of change to the area.”

TOM WEBER, *Bowlounge*



WHAT'S HAPPENING INSIDE?

District insiders who were there when the place rolled up its sidewalks at 5 p.m., back when the public rarely ventured over, are loving its new life.

David Sutherland, who has been in the Design District since 1977, describes it now as a "living community of creative and interesting people." He calls the district a "town at the foot of the city and all around just a nice place to be."

Designer Jan Showers opened her showroom in the district 17 years ago because she enjoys the multiple options within such a concentrated area. And the options continue to grow along with the residential population.

"I remember the days when there was only one restaurant within three miles, The Little Mushroom in the Decorative Center," she says.

Dahlgren Duck, which has been in Dallas for three decades, moved its showroom from North Dallas to the Design District three years ago. With the Margaret Hunt Hill Bridge, American Airlines Center, Klyde Warren Park, the Arts District, new showrooms, restaurants, and apartments within the district, the area has created an

"awakened identity," co-founder Allan Duck says. He calls it "the most vibrant transformation of the city of Dallas."

Designer Bernadette Schaeffler, who grew up in Germany, opened her showroom in the district last year. She describes the area as "the most international part of town." She likes that the Design District is becoming more and more friendly to the public.

"When I moved to Dallas, I remember I could not show up there without a designer at my side," she says. "People gave me looks. This was 15 years ago. Today, more and more showrooms understand that the future does not lend itself to trade only. Some people's incomes do not allow them to have a designer involved, and the Internet changed the world. People teach themselves on Pinterest and Instagram, shaping their own opinions on design."

Designer Alana Villanueva, founder of AVID Associates, calls the district a "Mecca of creative energy." "I love the juxtaposition of finding modern design next to French antique shops, the mix of high/low in terms of pricing, the unexpected

“The most vibrant transformation of the city of Dallas.”

ALLAN DUCK, *Dahlgren Duck*

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finds you stumble upon," she says. "You can really find anything you want here."

And, more and more each year, the public gets that.

"It's definitely beckoning a public audience, which we embrace with open arms," Villanueva says. "I adapted our business model to evolve with the Design District, so that we as a firm can be completely transparent with our clients, which, in turn, creates a successful environment for the district to thrive in."

WHAT'S NEW?

New businesses in the past year have been plentiful: Gracie, Mid2Mod, Ornare, Colección Riviera, Roche Bobois, Adriana Hoyos, and Aria Stone Gallery. And those are just the showrooms. For those with a mind more toward dessert than design, the district is now home to Pakpao Thai, Ascension, FT93, and Off-Site Kitchen. The Jamieson Jewel Salon and grocery store The Food Boutique have also popped up in the past year.

In addition, some showrooms moved around, including Artemide, Brendan Bass, Bright Group, Cory Pope, Waterworks, Empressive GeoDesigns, and Laura Lee Clark. And Tajzoy Rugs changed its name to Ashly Tajzoy Rugs.

While locals slowly pick up on the changes, the national industry is already there. Gracie, a family-run designer of hand-painted and custom wallpaper, opened in 1898 in New York City. The company's only other showroom opened in Dallas' Design District this summer.

Mike Gracie enjoys the concentration of talent and product, of course. But he also likes that he can pick up a coffee at Ascension or take a client to lunch at the Meddlesome Moth: "It's nothing like fighting for a cab to get to lunch or a meeting in Manhattan!" he says.

Joe Eggleston moved his midcentury design firm Mid2Mod from Deep Ellum to the Design District because he wanted a place to grow.

"Not only did we need the space, but we wanted a space to put some roots in," he says. "The district has really opened up to the normal consumer. It used to be very exclusive to the trade, and it seems that lately it's becoming a shopping destination for all people. This is important for long-term growth."

Eggleston's favorite part of the district is its diversity.

"I love the mix," he says. "Contemporary art galleries are next to showrooms with ancient relics. Antique galleries open across from independent fashion boutiques. Architects, modern furniture dealers, eateries, a bowling alley, everything for the home. It's the only place I know where I can try on apparel from Switzerland then walk a block and buy a 4-foot dinosaur skeleton from the Pliocene era. It's fun over here!"

"I adapted our business model to evolve with the Design District...which, in turn, creates a successful environment for the district to thrive in."

ALANA VILLANUEVA,
AVID Associates



MATT MCCALLISTER,
FT33



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Tiffanee Ellman isn't a new convert to the Design District. She and her husband, Richard, opened Oak in the district at the end of 2011 and Pakpao Thai this summer.

Ellman's father was born in Bangkok, Thailand, and the country's food and culture have always been a part of her heritage. The Design District seemed the perfect place to explore that with another restaurant.

"When Oak arrived, we were the second restaurant to have a presence in the area," Ellman says. "Despite the rapid growth in the past year, it is still relatively unknown. With the shops and restaurant additions at 1400 Hi Line and the addition of District 1444 [an urban, mixed-use space to open next year] with more shops and restaurants, it's going to be a buzzing area."

Last October, FT33 opened its doors in the district. Like others, the owners were drawn by the district's potential.

"It seems like apartments are going up everywhere, as well as retail shops and restaurants," says Brigid Finley, executive director of Wagstaff Worldwide, which handles FT33's public relations. "It's a young, sort of edgy neighborhood."

Russell Hayward—the man behind Tom Tom Noodle House in the West Village and TABC on Travis Street—

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opened his coffee shop, Ascension, in the Design District last December. The Sydney, Australia, native opened his shop in the district because he thought other areas of Dallas, specifically Uptown, were too crowded.

The infusion of designers and design-based businesses in these wider-open spaces will continue, Hayward says, describing the Design District as the “thinking man’s Uptown: “It’s great to look around my shop and see designers, film producers, artists, gallery owners, writers, spiritual leaders, advertising types, real estate moguls, Dallas’ leading restaurant owners and chefs—basically the creative minds of Dallas congregating at Ascension. I can’t think of anywhere else in Dallas such a great group of minds would meet.”

“It’s really shaping up to be a hub of commerce, and we want to be right in the middle of it.”

JOE EGGLESTON, *Mid2Mod*

David Forsyth, owner and master stylist at Jamieson Jewel Salon, chose the Design District partly because it’s a good destination for his clientele and partly because it has a good vibe: “We really see the area as a destination to experience and enjoy.”

And, of course, to bowl.

Tom Weber and his partner, Craig Spivey, opened Bowlounge in a vacant warehouse space in June. “The Design District really is the perfect spot for our modern-retro bowling alley, and now we can’t imagine it anywhere else,” Weber says. “We are just now seeing the tip of the iceberg in terms of change to the area.”

WHAT’S NEXT?

Eggleston predicts an explosion of the Design District’s popularity in the near future.

“The district is becoming a great place to hang out,” he says. “That was the component that was missing before. You always felt like it was all business. You’d stop, shop, and leave. There was no inclination to stay for the day. Now you can have dinner and drinks. It’s really shaping up to be a hub of commerce, and we want to be right in the middle of it.”

Gracie predicts that the extension of the Katy Trail through the Design District, a section called the Trinity Strand Trail currently under construction, will be his favorite place to run, and Villanueva is excited to try the new bowling alley as well as the trail.

“Imagine leaving the office for a run and missing all the traffic,” she says. “Little things like this really add to our everyday quality of life.”

Ablon takes it all in, thrilled that his vision of what the Design District could become continues to play out.

“The resurgence of the Design District has created the opportunity for this piece of Dallas fabric to last for at least another generation or two and enjoy the patronage of a much larger cross section of the region than when it was predominantly visited by a design industry-centric group,” he says. “Part of what makes a city special is having places that are nowhere else. I hope the Design District stays this way.” ■

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