

Mama mia! It's LEED-certified

Hot Italian will be Sacto's first LEED-certified retail building

By [Sena Christian](#)

Inside the white, dimly lit space—powered by generators—I can tell I'm going to start acting inappropriately.

Luckily, for me, that doesn't mean delivering bad “your mom” jokes or unskilled flirting, but only a relatively tame string of uncontrollable giggles. Not sure what causes these little episodes but, generally speaking, I'm not too concerned.

I'm at Hot Italian for a private tour and feel compelled to act somewhat professional, because a freelance writer is tagging along for the ride, and I know how much he admires me. I intend to set a good example.

It doesn't help the giggles when a familiar face starts telling me the rules for Settlers of Catan, a German board game I would describe as obscure, except that millions of copies of the game have been sold worldwide, and it's become so popular people are reciting its rules at tours of green buildings in Sacramento on a Thursday night in January. I want to remember what he's saying, but he talks too fast. Smiling, I suggest we plan a game night.



Hot Italian chefs bake up a pizza!
Photo By Ted Cox

Hot Italian, a restaurant and retail space in the works on the corner of 16th and Q streets in Midtown, had been chosen as one of 75 participants in a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) pilot program for new commercial buildings. The business will be the first LEED-certified retail establishment in Sacramento when it's completed in February.

“I always like to be the first,” says managing partner Andrea Lepore to the group of about 30 people.

“My first task in this project was to find out if we're going to be the first [green retail space],” jokes Katy Nicholls, a consultant from GreenBuilt Construction and Consulting.

The first step in building or renovating green is site selection. The building's location is ideal, with

several other services—restaurants, bars, Fremont Park, Safeway—within walking distance. The site already had a small parking lot, but Hot Italian eliminated some parking spaces and converted front-street parking to scooter parking and installed a bike rack with space for 23 bicycles.

They also greened the inside of the 6,000-square-foot building. There are low-flow toilets and waterless urinals in the bathroom, and low-flow faucets in the kitchen. A solar thermal water-heating system will supply the dishwashers, showers and sinks. Tables come from reclaimed wood; the bar stools for the gelato and espresso bar were made from post-industrial recycled material.

I listen intently as Lepore and Nicholls describe the project, nodding my head and scribbling in my notebook (just in case the freelancer is watching me). Through my stifled giggles, I have enough clarity of mind to see that Hot Italian will be an awesome modern eatery. And I'm a big fan of gelato. In fact, that dessert was responsible for packing 13 pounds onto my body during the fateful spring of 2001 I spent gallivanting around Italy, so if a few months from now you see me around town a bit chunkier, you'll know why.

For Hot Italian, going green doesn't end when construction wraps up; operations will be environmentally responsible as well. For instance, the menus are printed on 100 percent recycled paper and use vegetable dyes from a company in Berkeley. The pizza boxes and gelato cups are biodegradable. Food scraps (except meat) will be composted in a large bin outside, and compost will supply community and urban gardens in town.

About an hour into the tour, I begin to feel a sense of failure. You see, last spring, I challenged Hot Italian to a duel, a *competizione*, if you will, to determine which green-building project would finish first: this eatery or the office building SN&R is renovating on Del Paso Boulevard.

I'm sorry to report that SN&R is *way* behind. We haven't even begun construction yet. *Che imbarazzante!* That translates to: "Oh my goodness, how incredibly embarrassing!"