



## Hot Italian serves up high style sustainability

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Sustainable and green construction has been popular for quite some time in residential, industrial and office buildings, but it is not often the case that LEED certification is awarded to a restaurant.

Hot Italian "fast bar" pizzeria in Sacramento, Calif., was awarded LEED Certification Silver in September 2010, making it the only certified restaurant in the Sacramento region, and only the third in the state. There are about 55 registered restaurants in the country, with only 25 of those that have completed certification, according to the U.S. Green Building Council.

"We read a lot of information early on that said urban buildings are one of the biggest contributors to greenhouse gases, and we knew we wanted an urban location," said Hot Italian's owner Andrea Lepore. "We found this particular building, which needed a major rehab, and we wanted to do it the right way."

Lepore and executive chef Fabrizio Cercatore collaborated to open Hot Italian in February 2009. The concept is the brainchild of Lepore, a 17-year marketing and public relations specialist, who knew she wanted a green building from the very beginning.

Lepore met Cercatore through a mutual friend and eventually convinced him to move to Sacramento from his home in the Italian Riviera, where he operated a full-service restaurant called La Tavernetta for 11 years.

It also was important to Lepore to have a restaurant that exuded European style and sophistication, while still incorporating green characteristics.

"We really wanted to show that 'green' didn't have to mean brown and green colors, because at the time we started designing this, everything we saw that was 'green' was wood and bamboo," Lepore said. "We wanted everyone to see that fashionable, high Italian design could still be green."

Determining the level of LEED certification is based on a 100 point scale that takes into consideration several categories, including sustainable sites, water efficiency, energy and atmosphere, materials and resources, and indoor environmental quality. A Silver rating means the building earned between 50 and 59 points.

### LEED elements provide ROI

Solar thermal water heating, provided by Aztec Solar, was an \$8,000 investment and heats the water used in all the sinks and dishwashers. Seventeen Solatubes, optical daylight systems that collect and redirect natural light, allow natural light in during the day, eliminating the need to turn the lights on until sundown.

"Our utility bills are very low, especially for a space that is basically 6,000 square feet," Lepore said. "And I think, too, our employees feel better about working in this environment, and our customers enjoy coming here."

Other LEED features include LED track lighting, which reduces the amount of heat introduced in the space, and contains no mercury. The lighting lasts for thousands of hours and does not need to be replaced for seven to eight years. Additionally, most of the kitchen equipment, including the TVs, are Energy Star products.

The gelato and espresso bar stools are made from reclaimed bicycles, tiles on the front of both bars are made out of recycled rubber and cork, and the tables are constructed out of steel (95 percent recycled material) and PaperStone, a sustainable composite material made from 100 percent post-consumer recycled paper.

No-VOC paint from Sherwin-Williams was used on the interior walls. Finally, the onsite "Earth Tub" is used to compost food waste generated from the restaurant, as well as from 10 other restaurants in close proximity.

The menu also reflects the green model, with fresh, organic, and in many cases, local ingredients.

### Restaurant, retail slowest to go green

While going green and becoming LEED certified has more obvious benefits for residential, office and industrial buildings in terms of ROI and added property value, quantifying numbers to offset initial investment costs for restaurants can be a bit trickier.

"National restaurants probably look strictly at the dollar amount, with the energy savings contributing to a return. It wouldn't necessarily be measured by increased sales or increased brand value," said Nick Shaffer, manager, Commercial Real Estate Sector, U.S. Green Building Council.

Shaffer attributes the reluctance of owners, operators and franchisees in making the LEED certified transition to three factors. The first of which is the lengthy decision-making process involved for such a project within national chains.

"A lot of the retailers and restaurants out there are large national chains, and they are going to make decisions on a very high level, and those decisions take time because they want to test equipment and make sure it all works properly before rolling it out countrywide," Shaffer said.

The second factor, according to Shaffer, is the competing interests that accompany green building and remodeling, such as changing menus to reflect the same green image.

"A fast food restaurant may do the green building, but then people may say 'well, you're not really green because you get your beef from here, or you do this with your tomatoes,' so I think they are just a very cautious group when it comes to this," Shaffer said.

Shaffer said the third factor is the initial investment for smaller restaurant owners or franchisees, citing that he doesn't think LEED building costs all that much more, but that it is an extra step and takes time that perhaps they can't invest.

"I will say that many of the restaurateurs and restaurant chains that I'm in contact with are exploring the LEED opportunity. In the kitchen alone, there are a lot of opportunities to save energy and costs," Shaffer said. "The most promising thing I'm seeing out there is the fact that consumers seem to be latching onto the concept of going green. I think eventually it will trickle down."