

**LIFOCUS**

# ROYAL FLUSH

Some LI restaurants put their money where their restroom is

By **JENNA MACRI**

When discussing their latest dining endeavor, what are restaurant customers most likely to criticize? The food? The atmosphere? The service?

Or is it the restroom?

For some Long Island restaurants, “excessive” is the key word when reimagining a formerly mundane trip to the loo. From flashing lights to decorative faucets, the line between lavish interior design and bathroom practicality are blurred.

Jewel of Melville might just take the cake when it comes to Long Island’s most outrageous restroom experience. Any local fan of the New American restaurant is familiar with the towering glass staircase, elegant bulb ceiling accents and soft cyan glow of the bar that characterize Chef Tom Schaudel’s posh venue.

The dining room’s overwhelming elegance, however, is dwarfed by the attention drawn to the men’s restroom. A simple YouTube search will conjure a handful of videos depicting the startling scenario that awaits male patrons answering nature’s call: Upon the backsplash of the urinal section is a wall-to-wall mural of paparazzi with cameras pointed at the patron. When one approaches the wall, a motion sensor triggers two startling responses – a flurry of lights from the “lenses” of the cameras and an echo of flash shutters, crude comments and whistles.

Conducive to normal restroom activity: Perhaps not? Regardless, the bathroom is such a hit even females are waiting in line.

Sharon Dallago-Genden of East Rockaway-based Dallago Associates, interior designer responsible for Jewel, said the bathroom was the most outrageous project she’s ever conceived.

“I think the bathroom is one of the top reasons people go to Jewel,” she said. “We wanted it to be a little quirky. It’s remarkable how ideas come out of firms based on the clients. The owners of Jewel have a witty, whimsical sense of self; the bathroom reflects that.”

Jokes aside, Dallago-Genden stated she’s noticed that in the restaurant industry the focus on bathrooms “has elevated itself in the last few years. It used to be that you just wiped your hands on a towel, and now

we have these fancy hand dryers. So much operation goes into a bathroom. We just want to make it pretty and a part of your experience at the restaurant.”

Jewel isn’t the only business to focus heavily on its loo; Scotto Brothers, which has been in the restaurant and catering industry on Long Island since the 1960s, invested millions in renovations to the Watermill in Smithtown, including \$100,000 in restroom upgrades.

“At the Watermill, we wanted the bathroom to match the rest of the décor of the 2015 renovation,” said Vicki Colacicco, marketing director of Scotto Brothers. The renovation included an all-new backsplash, hanging circular mirrors and new toilets and sinks.

In addition to the renovations, the Watermill’s restrooms feature such amenities as attendants (to ensure the restroom is consistently clean), perfume and cologne, mints and various grooming tools.

Colacicco said the family is working to upgrade the bathrooms at many of its other locations. To patrons, she said, the restroom is just as important as any other visible location.

“[The bathroom] is part of the front of the house,” she said, “Owners should complete the story for the guests by making sure the bathroom is up to par.”

While businesses aren’t looking to exceed standards in terms of number of stalls or sinks, Ray Caliendo, founding principal of Art-of-Form Architectural Services in Amityville, also noticed a growing interest in cosmetic renovations of restrooms.

“I see a lot of money being spent on tile work, finishes, hardware and light,” he said.

Some trends can run business owners a high bill. Dyson’s Airblade high-speed hand dryer, for instance, goes for more than \$1,300 a unit, compared to as low as \$150 for traditional hand dryers. Similarly, touch-free fixtures can be two to three times more expensive than traditional fixtures. While traditional toilet partitions can run between \$1,000 and \$3,000 depending on number of stalls, going for a custom partition will inflate that cost. Tack on ambient lighting, stylish tile work and minor decorations, and owners may find the cost of their restroom renovation closer to the dining room than one would expect.

The danger in this trend, says the architect, is when restaurants plan their restroom’s facelift without giving consideration to the Americans with Disabilities Act. Signed into law in 1990, the ADA issued guidelines concerning accessibility in public restrooms that all restaurants must comply with when remodeling. In the worst-case scenario, renovations might need renovating.

“So many of the bathrooms that even attempt handicapped compliance fall short,” Caliendo said. ADA regulations vary locally on Long Island, and restaurant owners that don’t do their research before redesigning may find themselves out of compliance in their township. The regulations can range from the tilt of restroom mirrors to height of fixtures. For restaurants that fail to adjust stall partitions to accommodate for the ADA-recommended 60-inch-wide and 59-inch-



Photo by Claude Solnik

**‘Paparazzi’ await patrons who venture into the men’s room at Jewel.**

deep handicap stall, a complete reformatting of stall layout may be in order.

Caliendo said he has clients that have had lawsuits filed against them despite having recently renovated their facilities.

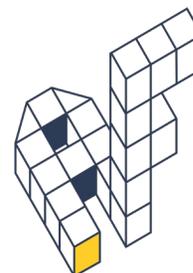
“It’s very common for people who redesign to have to redesign again,” he said. “I have a couple clients who are trying to defend themselves against legal actions. People going out and suing businesses due to a lack of ADA compliance have become a cottage industry.”

Dallago-Genden has also experienced the struggle of ADA compliance, noting that architects are in charge of guiding designers like her in compliance regulation. Architects are expected to double-check designs before renovations begin.

“There’s so much in compliancy,” she said. “When restaurants go in and redesign, they only need one complaint to be shut down.”

Lawsuits aside, Caliendo feels the move toward attractive restrooms is a trend that more restaurants should pick up on.

“Unfortunately, restrooms tend to be the least considered item for the overwhelming majority,” he said. “When I walk into a well-designed bathroom in a restaurant, that is indicative of attention to detail and cleanliness.”



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