

Brennan's®

Something Borrowed, Something New

*Brennan's Perfect Marriage
of Old World Elegance and New Adornments
by New York-based Interior Designer Richard Keith Langham*

There's an unabashed opulence about New Orleans' French Quarter, and the highly anticipated re-opening of **Brennan's** reveals interiors that cheerfully embrace the gilt to the hilt. In presenting the French Quarter institution to the public again, veteran restaurateur **Ralph Brennan** set out to continue in his family footsteps with a new chapter for the old Brennan's. Brennan commissioned a brand new decorative vision from a New York-based Southern gentleman renowned for his tasteful designs and fanciful glamour. One thing that has not changed: the famous address and memorable façade on Royal Street, one of the most polished stretches in all New Orleans.

Richard Keith Langham, in his element, wholeheartedly embraced the historical landmark's original sensibility, one that beams with charm and inherent culture: "What we've done here couldn't be done anywhere else in the world but the French Quarter," states the designer. "We're honoring the history and the richness, the drama and the *savviness* of New Orleans. My intent was to create rooms that recognized the past; full of old-fashioned Southern flourish and, of course, flavored with many European influences."

But the effect is not aged or distressed, antiqued or uptight; it is vibrant and fresh, as if you've stepped back in time a century or two, into elegant rooms recently created for a fashion-forward inhabitant. Each dining room tells a story, engaging you in its own distinctive and colorful personality.

Brennan's signature pink stucco façade retains its original glory; the color has an Old-World distinction, says Langham, and it pops up as a light-hearted accent in a number of the re-designed rooms. The exterior has been freshened up with a new coat of Benjamin Moore's serendipitously named "Tomato Cream Sauce;" the trim is called "Mayonnaise" -- naturally!

Through the original carriageway with its vintage gas lanterns, the flagstone paving extends straight back to the **Courtyard**, an outdoor room lushly planted with palm trees, jasmine, banana trees, and four orange trees, in massive French planter boxes. The refurbished trompe L'oeil fountain restored by Lewis Graeber from Jackson, Mississippi, sits pink stucco columns and shoots cooling jets of water into a huge stone urn. Iron lattice-back chairs and tables topped with Portuguese tiles are shaded by big dark green scalloped umbrellas playfully lined in a pink-and-white stripe. A family of turtles seeking comfort elsewhere during the renovation are back in residence here, adding fauna to the flora -- but that's another story!

Turning right from the entrance, you find yourself in the **Audubon Room**, which has been opened up with bay windows all along its Royal Street side. A tropical fantasy with mango plaster walls and vibrant Cuban cement tile floors, its grand-scale *bouillotte* tole chandeliers and its upholstered Parisian restaurant chairs poised at green-and-white checkered tablecloths are a nod to French style. In an innovative arrangement with the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, Brennan's will display paintings from its collection in this colorful dining room, a tribute to Southern artistry that will rotate annually, giving greater exposure to the Ogden's impressive holdings and bringing another dimension to the dining experience at Brennan's.

The amusing aviary-inspired bar, **The Roost**, faces the opposite the courtyard and brings the outdoors in. Its original flagstone floors are an extension of the patio, whose verdant splendor is reflected in a mural of *verre églomisé*, or reverse-gilded mirror, which artist Alice Ludlow has filled with a cast of flamingos, ostriches, and other exotic birds in an extravagant gilded birdcage. Beneath the mural sits a single 15'-long banquette covered in pomegranate ostrich leather; old-fashioned two-blade ceiling fans provide a gratifying breeze.

The biggest architectural change to the original restaurant, and Langham's most breathtaking tour de force, is the **Chanteclair Room**, parallel to the courtyard patio. Four smaller rooms, "a real rabbit's warren," according to the designer, were opened up to become the sweeping 60' by 40' French *orangerie*. A wall of windows looks out to the courtyard, and three large panels are graced with fanciful hand painted gouache murals depicting 19th-century Mardi Gras scenes by Graham Rust, in tribute to the rich fanfare of the city's Mardi Gras culture [Founded in 1882, the Krewe of Proteus is the second oldest krewe in Carnival history.] All the remaining wall space is clad in classic trélliage, painted a soft French green. The floor is a dark green-and-white checkerboard pattern, inset with pink cabochons. Six crescent-shaped banquettes along the wall facing the windows are covered in dark green tufted leather. Wicker-wrapped rattan garden chairs have seats of coral colored leather. The stunning light fixtures overhead, created by local Julie Neill Designs, are Pagoda inspired octagonal tole fixtures with panels of pink marbled glass and gilded tassels. Salmon silk shaded sconces cast a flattering glow from the walls. It wouldn't be an *orangerie* without oranges, so, naturally, Langham has equipped the space with grand potted citrus trees.

Upstairs, the private dining areas are more intimate but no less spectacular with modern whimsical notes tiptoeing through the design. The pair of "Rex Rooms," the King's and the Queen's, were originally double parlors. Now, they reflect each other with similarly regal furnishings in rich color schemes. The **King's Room**, all cream, gold, and purple, seats 48 at the custom purple velvet chairs copied from [what else?!] the coronation seating in Westminster Abbey. Cream and gold damask paper covers the walls; each pelmet above the purple and ivory curtains is embroidered with a golden Rex coronet; and the crystal chandelier of kingly proportions is a glittering statement of royal authority.

The adjacent **Queen's Room** is bedecked in feminine hues: aquamarine wallpaper embellished with golden fleur-de-lis; elaborately festooned curtains composed of pieced stripes of teal, pink, rose, aqua, and lavender taffeta; and 32 coronation chairs covered in deep aqua velvet; all illuminated by a period French iron and crystal chandelier, with lavender shades.

The **Havana Room**, across the hall, combines another former double parlor into a single grand dining room. A 1920's pineapple patterned wallpaper in mocha, salmon, ivory, and green is playfully complemented by a pair of gilt-wood chandeliers from London, in the shape of pineapples -- of course!

Paul Morphy, who inhabited the house from 1837 to 1884, was a renowned chess prodigy, and in his honor the **Morphy Room** was created. A small parlor seating up to eight people, it is a quiet, cozy respite before or after dinner, in a tailored but comforting style of an English study. The walls are lacquered a deep wine red, inset with panels of Scottish tartan in salmon, burgundy, and dark green. A red velvet sofa and a chess table sit on a salmon-and-dark-brown checkerboard rug, under the watchful eye of a portrait of Mr. Morphy himself.

Anchoring the end of the upstairs gallery and commanding a dramatic view overlooking the courtyard is the delightful **Porch Dining Room**. Up to twelve can be seated here, on French bistro chairs under the canopy of a green-and-white-stripe tented ceiling, hung with garden-fresh wicker chandeliers.

The **Wine Room**, in the cool of the cellar, is a destination all its own. Masculine and strong, with deliberately dimmed lighting, it retains its original arches of handmade brick, and rough timber beams. A merlot-colored stone floor is graced by an Oriental rug, on which sits a massive table: 16' long by 3' wide, milled from a single sinker cypress found in a Mississippi bayou. Sixteen tall-back black leather chairs stand at the ready for a meal of epic scale, with vintages to match.

Also downstairs, the **Restrooms** are distinctly masculine and feminine retreats. The Ladies' Room floor is a charming mosaic of pink, green, and white marble; the walls are stenciled in shades of salmon pink and green in an elegant 19th-century scrolling pattern; pretty wrought iron details remind you, even here below ground

level, that you are in New Orleans. The black-and-white Men's Room features vintage photographs of the French Quarter, and of Brennan's, in days of yore.

As Langham notes, "We've reimagined rooms with real 'New Orleans verve and charm', but we're also paying homage to the history of the city and Brennan's, itself, a place that has meant so much to so many locals and friendly visitors." So whether you're a nostalgic devotee of Brennan's, or are experiencing it for the first time, it is spiffed and polished and ready to welcome you with warmth, wit, history, and style – not to mention an unforgettable meal.

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