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RESTAURATEUR



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*One Restaurant
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Growing an Art Garden

Finding a way to increase business and support charity



The crew of Toast's innovative garden raise their glasses to a job well done.

By Jennifer Vishnevsky

When the management of Toast, a Birmingham, MI restaurant, learned about upcoming construction in front of their restaurant, it was time to brainstorm.

“Every year, there is some sort of construction project, whether it’s a new park, road or parking deck,” says Thom Bloom, co-owner of Toast. “When this project came up to tear up the roads and sidewalk in front of the restaurant, we went to the city to ask them to do the work in phases. We wanted to come up with some way to make lemonade out of lemons.”

The seed of an idea

With support from the Bank of Birmingham, Toast developed an art garden in front of the property to block street construction.

“The city built a four-foot plywood wall to block the foot traffic down the sidewalk,” says Paul Fradeneck, manager of Toast. “We were trying to think of ways to encourage traffic. We decided to commission some local graffiti artists to come out and tag the walls. That’s how the art garden came about.”

Toast reached out to a well-known local graffiti artist about the project.

“This is an opportunity for people in the

community to be exposed to a different type of artwork that isn’t necessarily on display in the city,” says Fradeneck.

The art is on 60 feet of construction panels, divided into six-by-four-foot sections in front of the restaurant. Each artist completed two panels, plus Toast had eight local graffiti artists paint murals, which were unveiled every Thursday night during the construction. Each unveiling was followed by a cocktail party in the restaurant.

Cultivating community

One set of panels was completed by a group of students selected from local high schools. These students had an opportunity to meet with the professional artists to learn more about graffiti and public art.

“They ran a contest for students to submit a drawing that would eventually get made into the mural. We’ve had one winner from each school,” explains Fradeneck.

At the completion of the program, the art pieces will be auctioned off to raise money for programs like art and music in the Birmingham School District through the Birmingham Education Fund, an organization that raises private funds from the community.

“We have a good relationship with graffiti artists who have done different projects

This is an opportunity for people in the community to be exposed to a different type of artwork.

over the years,” says Bloom. “This project benefits local neighborhoods and schools. We’re a big advocate for arts and music. We do at least one project every year to benefit BEF.”

Response to the charity work and art garden has been positive for business and the community.

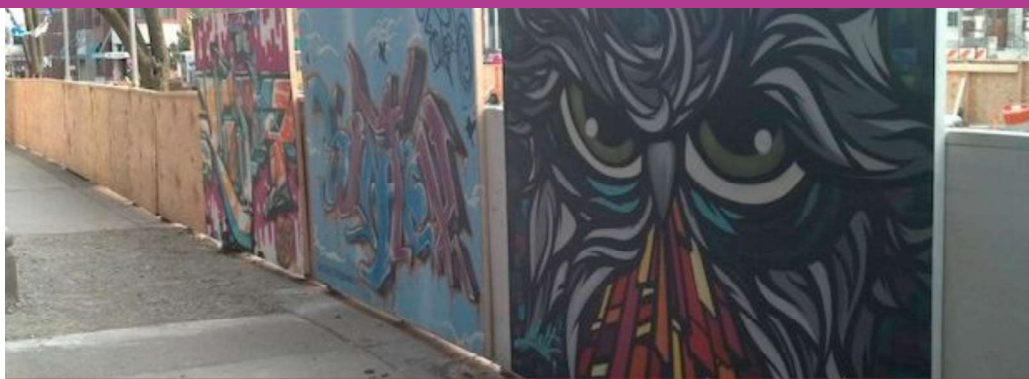
“We’ve gotten a lot of press,” says Bloom. “A lot of folks in the neighborhood are interested in it, especially with kids in the schools. Plus, the customers have really liked it. The art has been really cool.”

“We already have had a great response to and support for this idea from our diners, other businesses and the city,” agrees Fradeneck.

Stay fresh

While many are familiar with Toast as a breakfast and lunch establishment, Fradeneck is hoping that the new cocktail menu will also help introduce people to the new options at the restaurant. The unveiling of the art garden coincided with the release of a new chef at Toast, Myles McVay. In conjunction with the art garden, Toast worked on a new menu.

McVay rolled out a brand new dinner menu and put out 31 new menu items. He also used the art garden and cocktail reception as an opportunity to



The art garden project gives diners something more appealing to look at while they eat rather than a harsh construction scene

showcase the new menu items.

“We’re proud with the work he’s done. It’s been really well received,” says Fradeneck. “I think Miles is taking the food to a whole new level that we haven’t seen before.”

McVay tries to incorporate seasonal ingredients as much as possible. He’s also incorporating food that is compatible with vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free diets.

“We have some wonderful specials that we change up weekly as far as different proteins,” says Fradeneck. “He’s doing everything from tomato flatbread to faro risotto.”

Keeping the excitement alive

Toast has also scheduled special events during the summer to entice customers during the construction.

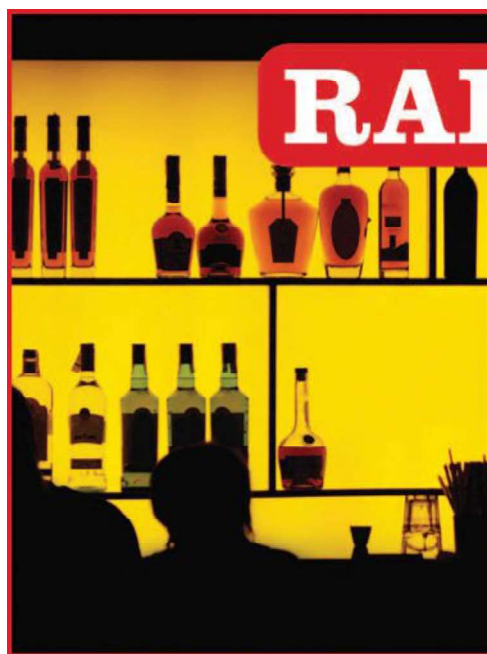
“We did a beer dinner, which was a five-course dinner paired with specialty beers. Tickets had to be purchased for \$55 each. The last one was a huge success—we sold out,” says Fradeneck.

Even with the construction, Bloom has seen an uptick in business.

“We’re a really comfortable neighborhood joint,” says Bloom. “The outdoor dining really adds that extra element in the summer of comfort and relaxation. Enjoy the weather, watch life go by down the street... and it obviously expands restaurant capacity as well!”



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