

OPPOSITE: A cozy corner in San Francisco's new Del Popolo restaurant, designed by Portland-based Jessica Helgerson Interior Design. Vintage portraits hang salon-style on the walls, a nod to the restaurant's name (*del popolo* means "of the people" in Italian). **THIS PAGE:** The semi-circular bar is clad in Pratt & Larson tile in custom Kelly green, which glows against the board-formed concrete walls, painted in Down Pipe by Farrow & Ball. "That's our one strong color move," says Helgerson. »



DINNER THEATER

Portland interior designer Jessica Helgerson gets moody with San Francisco's new Del Popolo restaurant.

Written by JAIME GILLIN • Photographed by DREW KELLY





to call Del Popolo's previous iteration—a tricked-out semi with handsome glass-and-steel doors, a 5,000-pound pizza oven, and a \$180,000 price tag—a food truck would be a massive understatement. Clearly, owner Jon Darsky appreciates a sense of drama and scale. So when the San Francisco-based *pizzaiolo* went searching for a space to build out into a permanent restaurant, he knew he'd found something good in 855 Bush Street. A former theater, "it had been stripped down to nothing, just an empty, boarded-up shoebox," says Jessica Helgerson, the Portland-based interior designer Darsky tapped to revamp the space. But it has 14-foot-high ceilings and two skylights that filter sunshine into the cavernous room in an appealingly cinematic, light-from-the-heavens way—a setting well suited to Darsky's vision, which is, according to Helgerson, to "elevate pizza to a fine theatrical art."

Helgerson took inspiration from the meaning of *del popolo*—"of the people" in Italian—for the restaurant's interiors, scouring eBay, antique shops, and flea markets for vintage portraits to populate the walls. "I'd text Jon photos at all hours," says Helgerson. "This one is \$35; do you like it, should I buy it?" Continuing the democratic theme, she placed two 8-foot-long oak communal tables by Hudson Goods in the center of the room, encouraging chance meetings and a sense of community among diners. Stools built into the industrial steel table base swing out to accommodate guests and tuck back in when they're not needed.

The first thing diners see as they enter the space is the Acunto Napoli wood-fired pizza oven anchoring Del Popolo's far end. It's installed directly below the skylights and in front of a domed steel alcove stockpiled with logs. When the chef works the dough, flour dust sparkles in the sunlight like a celestial cloud. "It felt right that the hearth should be the focal point," says Helgerson. After all, she reminds us, "this place is a shrine to pizza." ❄

FROM TOP: Helgerson redesigned the façade of the building—formerly a boarded-up theater—with wood-framed Marvin windows and herb-filled window boxes. Helgerson sits at a communal table; chef-owner Jon Darsky reached out to her to design the space after his wife, Sara, saw Helgerson's work on a blog. Pendants from Barn Light Electric pepper the room, defining a variety of dining areas. The Douglas fir floors are original to the space.

