



An Artful Interior

café NOMA is modern design at its most delicious

It's not what you'd expect, from the classical façade that makes New Orleans' beloved art museum look like an ancient Greek temple. But Ralph Brennan's recently expanded **café NOMA** is a fresh interpretation of another cool classic, now enjoying a stylish revival: mid-century modern.

The crisp white café interior is a cheerful and welcoming space that opens up on to the court yard. Around the corner, another wall of windows connects it to the outside, inviting those in City Park beyond [who may or may not intend to venture further in to the museum] to come hang out -- on hip, architect-designed lounge furniture fashionably upholstered in nubby wools and smooth leathers.

These broad expanses of window linking the interior to the lovely historic park are articulated in a modern bronze grid. The Bauhaus-inspired pattern of open rectangles is the chief decoration of the café's restrained design, and is repeated in the dramatic openings through to the service area; the doors of the cabinetry; the black polished floor; the square surfaces of the four-top tables; and even the grid layout of the flush-to-the-ceiling lighting. This strictly linear geometry is relieved by Arne Jacobsen's curvy dining chairs and a row of low white circular coffee tables – whose tops lift off to become trays, allowing patrons the flexibility to lounge and sip and nibble and mingle wherever they choose.

Yet, for all its geometry, the space is anything but cold and severe: bright shots of color make it lively and playful. A turquoise sofa in the mid-century modern style looks out over the park. Facing it, in front of the windows, is a perky grass-green upholstered bench. Along another wall is a lengthy clean-lined banquette in the color of deep-raspberry. The tables served by this dramatic seating sport green Chilewich woven vinyl placemats. Above it hangs a monumental abstract painting by a local artist, mostly white, but with subtle swirls of color that unite all the others in the interior. Paintings by local artists are rotated through out the restaurant seasonally, and tables are topped with a jaunty Gerbera daisy or two.

The atmosphere is calm and cool, striking and chic, bright and energetic -- and refuses to compete with the rich art works in the museum's collections.

If you're looking for ornate and historic New Orleans style, you'll find it elsewhere in the museum – and all over town. But visually and deliciously, Ralph Brennan's **café NOMA** offers a clean slate in which to recharge after a stimulating spell in the treasure trove that is the New Orleans Museum of Art.

For more information:

Simone Rathlé - 703.534.8100

www.simonesez.com

twitter.com/simoneink

Bayou St John 1 Collins Diboll Circle New Orleans, Louisiana 70119
504.482.1264 www.cafenoma.com