

INTERIOR DESIGN[®]

FEBRUARY
2012

mesmerizing





Left: A porcelain phrenology head, a stethoscope, and Japanese paintbrushes greet diners in the entry.

Opposite: Halogen step lights shine on quotations from the chef, stenciled on the steel risers of the staircase down from the street.

doctor's orders

Glen & Company prescribed medical decor for a neurologist-chef's restaurant, Romera New York

text: *peter webster* photography: *eric laignel*

Even in New York, the breeding ground of hyphenate overachievers, Miguel Sanchez Romera is undoubtedly unique. Until last June, he was the chef-owner of L'Esguard, a Michelin-starred restaurant outside Barcelona, Spain—moonlighting there for 15 years while holding down a day job as head of neurology at a neighboring hospital. The singular cuisine developed by the self-taught Romera is thoroughly informed by his understanding of brain science. Eating, he believes, is as much a matter of the mind, memory, and emotions as of the sense organs. He even coined a term for his theory: *neuro-gastronomy*. Brightly colorful, highly nutritious, and intriguingly quirky, his innovative dishes are as hard to characterize as they are ravishing to look at and delicious to eat.

Romera's food so impressed Sant Chatwal, CEO of Hampshire Hotels & Resorts, that he persuaded the Argentine-born chef-neurologist to shutter L'Esguard and open Romera New York in the basement of the Dream Downtown hotel, the latest Hampshire property. The two men further agreed that Glen & Company's Glen Coben, whose local restaurant interiors include Riingo in the Alex Hotel, had the right sensibility to complement Romera's high-concept cuisine. "I spent a week with Miguel ➤



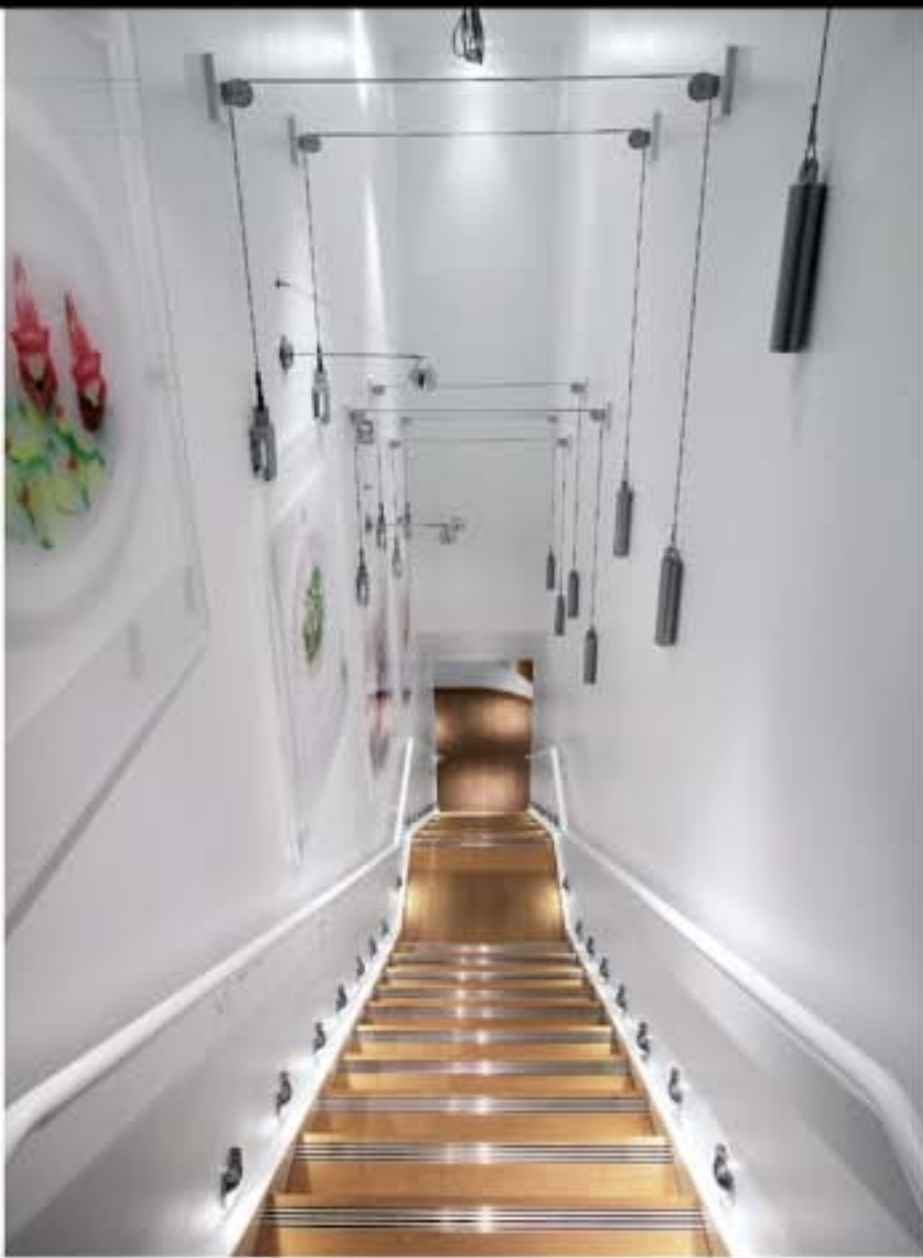
"MY KITCHEN IS MY CONSCIENCE—MY CONSCIENCE OF LIFE AND NATURE."

"MI COCINA ES MI CONCIENCIA—MI CONCIENCIA DE LA VIDA Y DE LA NATURALEZA."

"EATING IS THE FIRST MEDICINE. EATING DOESN'T CURE, BUT WHAT YOU EAT CAN PREVENT SICKNESS."

"EL ALIMENTO ES EL PRIMER MEDICAMENTO. COMER NO CURA, PERO LO QUE COMES PUEDE EVITAR QUE ENFERMES."

"I AM A DOCTOR WHO COOKS FOOD, NOT A COOK WHO DOCTORS FOOD."



at L'Esguard, which was in a 17th-century building. Eating there was like being a guest in someone's home," Coben begins. "We took some of the elements of that dinner-party feeling, of being transported to a private world, and reformulated them here."

A carefully planned journey away from the hustle of the street begins with descending a staircase like a ship's companionway. Past a group of museum-style vitrines is an intimate library—the restaurant may be 5,000 square feet, but it has no bar, per se. The library, where guests can relax with a predinner drink while perusing the chef's cookbooks lining the shelves, is the last stop before entering the hushed serenity of the 48-seat dining room.

The descent into calm and remove is a gradual immersion in the world of the soft-spoken neurologist-chef, who furthermore studied fine art on the side. Artistic photographs of signature dishes hang in the stairwell, suspended on a system of pulleys and counterweights that introduces the motif of science and technology. At the foot of the stairs, a vitrine contains objects of personal significance to Romera: a porcelain phrenology head, a stethoscope, Japanese paintbrushes. Around the corner is a laboratorylike office where, against the white-tiled walls, shelves display jars containing spices and vegetable powders in every shade of the rainbow.

"Just as Miguel has done in his life, the restaurant brings together the realms of cooking, medicine, and art," Coben explains. The juxtapositions reach a climax in the dining room, where the circular pendant fixtures above every table evoke surgical lights in an operating theater. But these fixtures' role is atmospheric, not clinical. Dimmed until the first course is brought to the table, the halogens then power up ➤



Dr. Miguel Sanchez Romera
Neurologist





Opposite top: Stair treads are reclaimed Siberian white oak, as is flooring throughout. **Opposite bottom, from left:** A lab coat hanging in the office offers a reminder that, in Spain, the chef was also a practicing clinical neurologist. Acrylic portholes enliven a wall in the library, which houses his cookbooks.

Top: Custom vitrines with polished chrome frames separate the private dining room from the library. **Bottom:** The restaurant has a secondary entrance via the basement of the Dream Downtown hotel.

to throw a spot on each place setting. The effect is both intimate and dramatic, focusing attention on the artful food while creating animated reflections off the gleaming flatware, gold-banded china, and sparkling crystal. Keen-eyed diners who look upward will notice small butterfly decals dotting the pendant fixtures themselves. For Romera, these decorative insects, which change seasonally, are culinary symbols: "They're multi-colored, fragile, and short-lived, just like the delicate flavors and subtle aromas in good cooking."

The butterflies and the food are the only sources of bright color in the dining room, which has a palette ranging from the tawny tone of the white-oak floor to the chrome of more vitrines, acting as



- 1 ENTRY
- 2 OFFICE
- 3 LIBRARY
- 4 DINING ROOM
- 5 KITCHEN

In the dining room, a custom pendant fixture in stainless steel and acrylic hangs over each table. Vinyl covers the custom chairs.







serving stations, and the off-white of the open-weave curtains. Fishermen's nets that Coben saw in Barcelona's celebrated Boqueria market inspired the curtains, which snake around the tables. Beyond the curtains, a dash of green is supplied by herbs in oak planters, again suspended on pulleys and counterweights. The plaster walls are white, a nod to the hospital where Romero used to work, but they're saved from looking antiseptic by an all-over bas-relief of ivy vines, an homage to the abundant vegetation at L'Esguard.

Coben did use stronger color in the library, where food is not served. Pale green leather covers the sofa and armchairs, and the wall behind the sofa is punctuated by rows of porthole windows in multicolored translucent acrylic. The composition may look like a Damian Hirst spot painting writ large, but it's actually based on... what else? A Romera dish featuring a medallion of venison surrounded by spiced mayonnaise polka dots. ➔

PROJECT TEAM

SACHI MASAKI, ALLYX SEEMAN, NATALIA TODOROVA: GLEN & COMPANY. **PATRICIA SPENCER:** DESIGN GRAPHICS CONSULTANT. **JACOBS DOLAND:** FOOD SERVICE DESIGN CONSULTANT. **THOMAS POLISE:** CONSULTING ENGINEER. MEP. **STUDIO HOON KIM:** PLASTERWORK. **CA SENECA CONSTRUCTION:** GENERAL CONTRACTOR.

PRODUCT SOURCES

FROM FRONT LIGHTOLIER: STEP LIGHTS (STAIRWELL). **FABDIAN ILLUMINAZIONE:** PENDANT FIXTURES (STAIRWELL, LIBRARY, OFFICE). **SCONCES (HOTEL).** **CELADON GROUP:** CUSTOM PULLEY SYSTEM (STAIRWELL, HALL). CUSTOM PENDANT FIXTURES (DINING ROOM). **3FORM:** PORTHOLE MATERIAL (LIBRARY). **MUNROD:** CUSTOM SEATING. **DEMAR LEATHER COMPANY:** SEATING UPHOLSTERY. **ISA INTERNATIONAL:** CUSTOM TABLES (LIBRARY). CUSTOM TABLES, CHAIRS (DINING ROOM). **DALTILE:** WALL TILE (HOTEL). **PINEHURST:** CUSTOM SIGNAGE (HOTEL). CUSTOM PLANTERS (DINING ROOM). CUSTOM VITRINES. **MAHARAM:** CHAIR UPHOLSTERY. CURTAIN FABRIC (DINING ROOM). **ELITE DECOR:** CUSTOM CURTAINS. **VERSACE:** PLATES. **CAPPELLINI:** CHAIRS (OFFICE). **LIBBEY GLASS:** JARS. **RPI INDUSTRIES:** CUSTOM WINE REFRIGERATORS (HALL). **THROUGHOUT BENJAMIN MOORE & CO.:** PAINT.





Opposite top: Suspended on pulleys with counterweights, the dining room's custom planters are white oak and steel.

Opposite bottom, from left: The planters grow seasonal herbs for cooking as well as decorative purposes. Jars holding spices and vegetable powders line glass shelves in the office, furnished with chairs by Adam Goodrum.

Top: A glass wall gives the sidewalk a view down to the dining room. **Bottom:** Carrara marble surrounds the burners used to prepare the flavor-infused waters that accompany some dishes.



CAROL CAMBIANICA

"L.A. Story," page 176

PRINCIPAL:

Carol Cambianica.

COMPLETED PROJECTS:

Warner Constructors in Glendale, California; Santa Monica College library in Los Angeles; San Bernardino Valley College classroom and science building in California; Motion Picture and Television Fund health center in Toluca Lake, California.

CURRENT PROJECTS:

Beverly Hills Public Library and Manhattan Beach Library in L.A.

HONORS: AIA Merit Awards.

SUBJECT: *Cambianica is reading The Crying of Lot 49 by Thomas Pynchon.*

FORMAT: *She still prefers an old-school hardcover.*

1606 Ben Lomond Drive,
Glendale, CA 91202;
818-546-1763.

JORDI GARCÉS ARCHITECTS

"Home Sweet Home," page 134

PRINCIPAL:

Jordi Garcés.

COMPLETED PROJECTS:

Picasso Museum addition, Petit Palace Opera Garden Ramblas, Hotel Catalonia Barcelona Plaza, office buildings, and residences, all in Barcelona, Spain.

CURRENT PROJECTS:

Arranz-Bravo Foundation office and a gallery in Barcelona; a science museum in Tenerife, Spain; a competition for the Palais de Justice in Strasbourg, France.

OLD: *Garcés is Barcelona's go-to guy for the adaptive reuse of industrial buildings.*

ANCIENT: *He designed sets for Sophocles and Euripedes dramas at the Greek theater in Siracusa, Italy.*

4 Carrer d'en Quintana,
2nd Floor, 08002 Barcelona,
Spain; 34-93-317-31-88;
jordigarcés.com.



JOHNSON FAVARO

"L.A. Story," page 176

PRINCIPAL:

Steve Johnson.

PRINCIPAL:

Jim Favaro, AIA.

COMPLETED PROJECTS: Los Angeles Trade Technical College South Campus; Pasadena Museum of California Art.

CURRENT PROJECTS: Beverly Hills Public Library, Manhattan Beach Library, and a house, all in L.A.

HONORS: AIA Los Angeles Honor and Merit Awards; Los Angeles Business Council Los Angeles Architectural Awards.

INDOOR: *Johnson favors 1970's furniture and art at home.*

OUTDOOR: *Favaro turns to the Culver City Municipal Plunge swimming pool for sound body and mind.*

5898 Blackwelder Street, Culver City, CA 90232; 310-559-5720;
johnsonfavaro.com.



GLEN & COMPANY

"Doctor's Orders," page 160

PRINCIPAL:

Glen Coben.

COMPLETED PROJECTS:

Fashion 26 hotel and Edison Ballroom in New York; Ursino restaurant in Union, New Jersey.

CURRENT PROJECTS:

Tryp New York City Times Square South hotel; Four Points by Sheraton Financial District in New York; Madison Beach Hotel in Connecticut.

GOOD DEED: *Coben serves on the board of advisers of Culinto, a trade organization for networking and training.*

GOOD FOOD: *His latest culinary discovery in New York is Dovetail restaurant chef-owner John Fraser's "meatless Monday" menu, "like a walk through the garden."*

276 Fifth Avenue, Suite 204,
New York, NY 10001;
212-689-2779;
glenandcompany.com.

HIGHLAND ASSOCIATES

"A Blushing Beauty," page 142

PRINCIPAL,

DESIGN DIRECTOR:

Glenn Leitch, AIA.

COMPLETED PROJECTS:

Bloomingdale's, New York Fire Department operations and command center, New York Public Library branch, and apartments, all in New York; Center for Discovery in Monticello, New York.

CURRENT PROJECTS:

Ellis Island Immigration Museum and a penthouse in New York; an Elizabeth Arden store in Toronto.

HONORS: AIA Northeastern Pennsylvania Honor Award; Association for Retail Environments Design Awards.

AMERICAN DREAM: *Leitch is renovating his own farmhouse in Amagansett, New York.*

DREAM ON: *He roots for the Knicks, who haven't won an NBA championship since 1973.*

228 East 45th Street, New York, NY 10017; 212-681-0200;
highlandassociates.com.



OFFICE OF THIERRY W. DESPONT

"Museum of the Imagination," page 150

PRESIDENT:

Thierry W. Despont.

COMPLETED PROJECTS:

Statue of Liberty centennial restoration, Carlyle hotel, and Chatwal Hotel, all in New York; Claridge's and Dorchester hotels and Polo Ralph Lauren, all in London; a house for Bill and Melinda Gates in Medina, Washington.

COMPLETED PROJECTS:

Ritz Paris hotel; residences in the U.S. and Europe.

HONORS: Chevalier de l'Ordre National de la Légion d'Honneur; Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.

COLLECTOR: *Despont has amassed moon atlases dating from Galileo to the manned missions.*

COLLECTED: *The Denver Art Museum owns an assemblage by Despont.*

10 Harrison Street, New York, NY 10013; 212-334-9444;
despont.com. ➔

headliners