

# restaurant development + design

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# TREND

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## Double-Duty Design

Two concepts under the same roof bring design challenges and serendipitous advantages

Parents of twins know all too well that their children come as a pair but must be treated separately, on their own terms. So, too, do restaurateurs or franchisors that run dual-concept operations with two businesses under one roof. There's of course the ease of

operation, since many such concepts have one staff of cross-trained employees, and management doubles up too. There's paperwork, which is halved for operators, and pre-opening, only one location to scout out.

But dual concepts are more difficult to initially find a home for

since any potential location has to be checked for nearby competition for two concepts, not just one, thus halving the chances of success.

But across the country, restaurateurs and franchisors continue to turn to dual concepts for a variety of reasons, as *rd+d* found out.

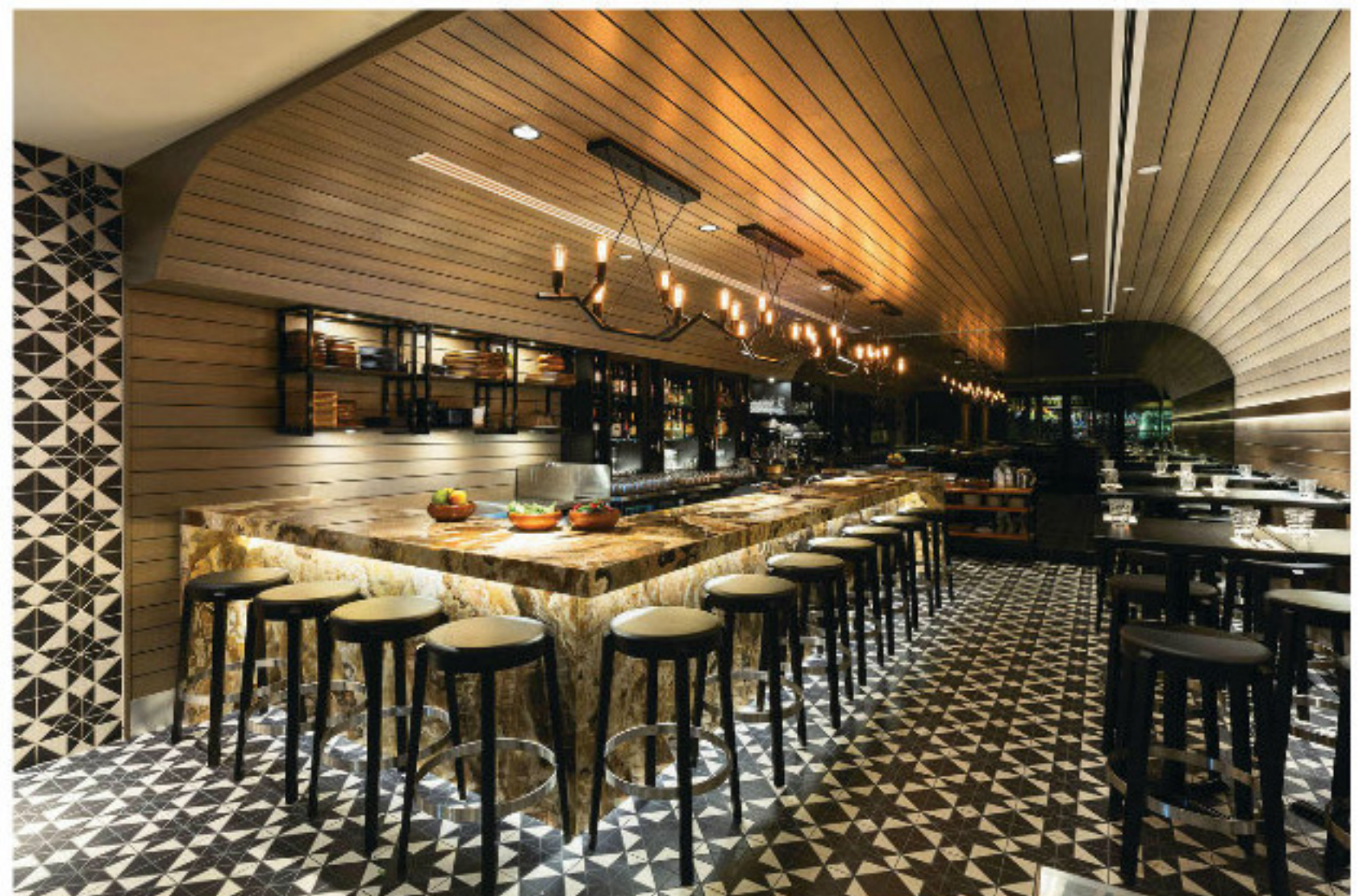
### Bar Oso and The Cellar by Araxi

Whistler, B.C.

Thirty-four years after fine dining restaurant Araxi opened in Whistler Village, B.C., the Vancouver company that owns it, Toptable Group, has opened a dual concept at the opposite end of the building.

At just above street level, there's Bar Oso, serving Spanish-inspired small plates such as lamb meatballs, Spanish anchovies, skewers (pintxos) and charcuterie, as well as a menu heavy on Spanish wines. Downstairs is The Cellar by Araxi, a private dining and event space with an open kitchen that can seat up to 60 but can also be divided into a larger and smaller room. Below ground, there's also a glass-enclosed, climate-controlled wine room. The menus here serve as an extension of Araxi, a farm-to-table restaurant with an emphasis on seafood.

Customers enter both locations through the same door, but two sets of stairs direct patrons to the right space.



Bar Oso is a small, intimate space. By paying attention to aspects like table height and lighting, the room achieves a very social ambiance.

"The entry is interesting," says Cynthia Penner, partner and designer of Vancouver-based BOX Interior Design, which created both venues. "One can see the Bar Oso experience directly from the entry. Even from the approach to the restaurant, one can see into the space and get excited about the offerings. The Cellar is hidden,

so we upgraded the finishes and added evocative light effects to intrigue and offer comfort to the guest that their lower-level experience will be potentially even better than what they see upon entry."

Bar Oso is small — 600 square feet including the kitchen — and that proved challenging from a design





**The Cellar's design features a European/Spanish influence paired with a local vibe. Design elements contributing to this include boldly patterned tiles for the floor and walls, featuring a snowflake-inspired pattern.**

perspective. "We were able to achieve a great social feel through thinking about table heights, how the room was lit, softening hard edges and other tiny details," Penner says.

Downstairs, The Cellar measures 1,500 square feet, of which dining constitutes about 1,000 square feet and the kitchen another 300 square feet. Storage and the wine room consume the balance of the space. All prep and mise en place for both locations take place downstairs. The storage space

also resides downstairs.

Penner strove to make the design feel local with a European/Spanish influence, she explains. Elements helping accomplish this goal include boldly patterned tiles for the floor and walls featuring a snowflake-inspired design. "We also took a more European approach and installed a wildly patterned stone bar," Penner says. "In North America, we tend to not mix patterns, so this deliberate bold mix gives the space a unique vibe. We think the

intimate scale of Bar Oso also contributes to a European feel, which we have played up by mirroring the back wall and writing the menu on it."

While the spaces had to have their own separate identities, they also needed to blend so moving between them would feel natural. "We accomplished this through the materiality coloration and lighting levels," Penner says. "The goal was to have Bar Oso self-sufficient during service. That said, every effort was made to offer the largest possible kitchen and back-of-house area in The Cellar to support the two businesses."

A dual concept was ideal for the Bar Oso/The Cellar blend. "These two spaces are unique in the Whistler market, and each offers a special experience that if combined would not be as good," Penner says. "To have a tiny wine bar that feels like an amazing step into another world is perfect. It would not be improved by having another floor — its charm and authenticity comes from the intimacy.

"The Cellar feels private and elite," she adds. "The discrete entry adds to its mystique and again would not be improved by being bigger. So, having two distinct and evocative locations under one roof allows this operator to take advantage of two potentially difficult spaces."