



ROOM SERVICE

One underlying theme of Alinea's new design is the mixing of modern and ancient, along with intriguing art such as the sculpture by Ann Rosen made of film negatives over a wire structure. "It would be an understatement to say Grant's food is multilayered," says designer Tom Stringer, "so we wanted these rooms to be beautiful and multilayered as well."



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

For chef Grant Achatz (left) and designer Tom Stringer (right), "food is design and design is food," explains Stringer. "And while this restaurant is a complete rethinking of Alinea, it's a conversation we've been having for a decade," he adds.

PROGRESSIVE PARTNERS

RECONSTRUCTING ALINEA

Not content to rest on its laurels, the team behind Chicago's award-winning restaurant has reinvented the dining experience—again.

By Lisa Shames | Photography by Matthew Gilson

Not many restaurants would follow up their most profitable year with a top-to-bottom rehab. But Alinea (alinearestaurant.com) isn't just any restaurant, with a recent James Beard Award for Outstanding Restaurant that only adds to its lengthy list of accolades.

As one of Chicago's—and the world's, really—best, this three-Michelin-star, two-story spot and its acclaimed chef Grant Achatz are known for thinking outside the box and, after 10 years, Achatz and his business partner, Nick Kokonas, decided it was time to shake things up. "The Alinea identity, entire philosophy and definition of the name called for change," says Achatz. "We also had

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...CONTINUED more ideas to bring to fruition and knew we wanted to remain relevant and, in some ways, had to uphold what the team—past, present and future—had poured all their passion into.”

Not surprisingly, the new menus demanded a new space, and they knew just the guys to make it happen: Tom Stringer (tomstringer.com) and Steve Rugo (rugoraff.com), the original interior designer and architect, respectively, of Alinea, as well as their other spots, The Aviary and Next.

“It’s a bit of a challenge designing a space that needs to evolve, for a menu that needs to evolve in order to be successful,” says Stringer of the stunning seven-figure renovation. “It’s been a hallmark of our relationship to design a space for something I can’t identify,” he adds.

Ample room for movement of the staff and guests is another area where this restaurant design differs from others. For Alinea 2.0, the original concept of smaller, intimate rooms carried over, but Stringer now had three separate areas to work with. On the first floor, just to the right of the relocated staircase, is the oval-shaped Gallery Room. Here, the 16 guests experience simultaneously a 16- to 18-course multisensory meal (\$295 to \$345). The resin-topped tables, used in all the spaces, give the illusion of the plates floating on them. “This room is the least ornamental,” says Stringer, “to accommodate the multifunctional demands being placed on it”—that includes ceiling hooks that can hold 150 pounds of suspended artwork.

Down a short hallway is the glassed-in kitchen table, where six guests are seated for a lavish, cutting-edge dining experience (\$385) where a



NEW PARAGRAPH

Clockwise from above: “In my relationship with Grant, he’s been famously afraid of color,” says Stringer. He had more freedom with Alinea 2.0—magenta, citron, sapphire and teal are incorporated into banquettes, upholstered walls and throw pillows. Thomas Masters curated all of the art, and these mixed mediums on canvas are by Adrian Leverkuhn; the custom chandelier is made of organic light-emitting diodes configured to look like a traditional chandelier: “The shape and historical inference are only visible from a distance,” explains Stringer.



SECOND STAGE “In the salon downstairs, there is a uniquely enhanced sense of performance going on every night,” says Stringer. “We intentionally left the end use of it vague, so it can be many things.”



mirror on one of the walls ensures no one misses out on any of the kitchen action. The dining space upstairs offers a 10- to 14-course tasting menu called The Salon Experience (\$175 to \$225).

Chicago gallery owner Thomas Masters curated the avant-garde artwork on the ivory walls, which are offset with tones of yellow and sapphire blue. Beautifully detailed plasterwork and geometric stepped ceilings reinforce the idea of inserting something modern into something ancient.

“The first time around, people likened Alinea to an Armani suit,” says Stringer. “This time, [Achatz and Kokonas] were willing to take some risks and let me throw some jewelry on that outfit.” ■