

## Saladworks' new look is colorful -- and green

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BY EILEEN SMITH • COURIER-POST STAFF • SEPTEMBER 30, 2009

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**MOUNT LAUREL** — Veggies aren't the only green things at Saladworks.

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At the quick service restaurant on Route 38 here, tables are crafted from reclaimed wood. Laminates are made from paper and residue wood chips collected from lumberyards. The paint complies with LEED (Leadership in Energy Efficient Design) standards established by the U.S. Green Building Council.

The design, bursting with vibrant colors and larger-than-life photos of produce, is the vision of Shirley Hill, founder of InterArch, a Mount Laurel design firm.

Hill is best known for creating the iconic Commerce Bank look, a contemporary blend of glass, glossy white and the bank's signature lollipop red. She is the wife of Vernon W. Hill II, founder and former CEO of Commerce and a major investor in Saladworks, where he chairs the executive committee.

For the restaurant chain, which recently opened its 100th location, Hill designed a sweeping new prototype, down to the streamlined salt and pepper shakers.

"We created an environment combining light wood and walls with bright crisp colors and as always our special lighting effects," she said. "(It's) an environment that is inviting and upscale using the latest in environmentally friendly materials."

Saladworks founder and CEO John Scardapane calls the concept 3G, as in third generation, because it is the company's third rebranding campaign. Crew members are known as fanatics in keeping with the Saladworks tagline, Fanatically Fresh."

Joshua L. Burton, a 27-year-old entrepreneur who owns two Saladworks franchises, was introduced to the concept at a company convention at the Borgata in Atlantic City. He met the Hills and was immediately impressed with what the power couple brought to the restaurant chain's table.

"Commerce was always the best in customer service, with a great brand," said Burton, who grew up in Cherry Hill, birthplace of both the bank and Saladworks. "Vernon and Shirley are a win-win, really focused on the details."

The first restaurant to unwrap the new concept was Burton's location in Bear, Del. He also operates a Saladworks in Hainesport that isn't due for a makeover for another few years.

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There were a few glitches early on. Bamboo floors, while environmentally friendly and visually appealing, didn't stand up to high traffic and frequent mopping. They were replaced with planklike ceramic tiles with a bamboo motif.

Overall, Burton is pleased with the concept.

"Customers are wowed by the color scheme and the skylights," he said. "Even the bathrooms are improved and standardized. Before, they were more of an afterthought."

Saladworks has established a committee to study and refine the new prototype, which currently costs about \$600,000 to install from the ground up.

The company expects the fresh interiors will sprout greenbacks, boosting sales by as much as 20-25 percent. That is based on sales increases in 2002, the last time Saladworks rebranded.

But an analyst said a new look alone is unlikely to spur such a significant jump in volume.

The most successful brand campaigns also include enhancements to catering, which currently accounts for about 20 percent of Saladworks sales, in addition to online ordering and so-called "grab and go" offerings, said Darren Tristano, executive vice president at Technomic, a Chicago-based tracker of industry trends.

"Just changing the ambience won't increase sales at that rate," he said.

Tristano expects the new format will be especially attractive to women ages 18-35, who are partial to both salads and environmentally friendly products.

"They are looking for healthy food that tastes great and Saladworks has that," he said.

Burton said sales at his new prototype store are exceeding his expectations by about 20 percent. Sales at his Hainesport store, which sports the standard look, are down slightly but Burton said that could be attributed to a number of factors, including South Jersey's high density of restaurants.

Along with the decor, expect changes on the menu at Saladworks.

Focaccia fusion grilled sandwiches are replacing wraps and panini sandwiches. New concept stores also will offer more ingredients, including grilled asparagus, edamame, red beets, pine nuts and egg whites. And in order to fit those additional choices in the cases, they will be served from square containers rather than circular crocks.

"With squares, you can get more containers in the same space," Burton said.

The vivid red of Hill's Commerce concept has been supplanted by the emerald green of TD Bank, the Toronto-based financial group that acquired Commerce in 2008. But the Saladworks concept is in growth mode.

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In addition to Mount Laurel and the Delaware store, the new prototype has been rolled out in Clementon and will be featured in new company-owned stores in New York and Virginia.

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Saladworks' new concept, which uses vibrant colors and environmentally friendly material, costs about \$600,000 to install from the ground up. Mount Laurel and Clementon are among the first to get makeovers.