INTERIORS
Stylish New Restaurants
Apartment Makeover
Teatro
177 Tremont St., Boston (617-778-6841)
Opening date: January 2003
Cuisine: Rustic Italian
Square footage: 2,000 (total)
Seats: 98

Teatro opened earlier this year in an extensively renovated space, formerly Galleria Italiana, on Tremont Street. The restaurant's name reflects the establishment's proximity to both the Theater District and the Loews cinema next door. Chef/owner Jamie Mammano's goal was to create a restaurant where patrons can have a casual yet delicious Italian meal before catching a nearby show. Helping him achieve this goal were New York-based designer Celeste Cooper of Repertoire and general manager Jeffrey Lovino.

Jeffrey Lovino, general manager
This space has seen several renovations. Can you describe its past lives?
Before it was Teatro, it was another restaurant. But before that, it was a synagogue, and now it looks more like the synagogue than it does the previous restaurant, particularly with the ceiling. We even matched the original gold leaf on the ceiling with gold-leaf paint.

What did you spend the most money on?
Restoring the ceiling. A drop ceiling had been installed below the original, and when we took it down, we discovered all the utilities were there between the drop ceiling and the original. So we exposed the original, we had to move all the utilities back behind the walls.

Were there any improvised solutions that came up during the restoration?
We extended the floor about three feet at the front of the room, where we installed the big arched window. But since we kept the original floor tiles, we couldn't go and buy more tiles for the new area. So we hired an artist to hand-paint the floor in that three-foot area to match the pattern of the stones in the tiles. You don't notice unless you look carefully, and it's holding up pretty well.

Jamie Mammano, chef/owner
Why did you select Celeste Cooper as your designer?
I've been working with Celeste for years. She did XV Beacon and Mistral, so it was natural that she'd do this.

How did you work out the design concept with her?
We brought her in early on and told her about our concept—this is a place to eat that's casual, comfortable and cool. She made suggestions, and we either went with them or didn't, but I'd say we went with 95 percent of them. You don't question the queen.

How does the design work with your concept for the restaurant?
The basic idea was to take the antiquity of the place and combine it with the new and exciting. The black granite table tops and bar, for instance, are very modern, but the ceiling, walls and floor were kept original. It's a nice contrast.

What do you like most about the design?
The whole thing. It must've been gorgeous when they first built it. But like the whole look. It's very unique in Boston. The idea was to have the stuff on the walls match the blue neon ceiling lighting.
That was actually a coincidence. The uniforms were designed by Nicole Romano of Rhode Island, and the first time we turned on the neon, it happened to match the shirts.

Celeste Cooper, designer
Can you describe your concept for the space and the feeling you are trying to evoke?
The concept was a casual restaurant but very much in the European manner—not straining to be hip—and inspired by the existing architecture we discovered upon "excavating" the space: the terrazzo floor, the limestone walls and that incredible ceiling. The concept is also related to the cinemas, theaters and clubs that surround it and whose patrons would be our patrons...sort of a combination of Renaissance painting and commedia dell'arte?
What was the biggest design challenge?
The long, narrow axis with nowhere else to go.

What's your favorite design aspect of the space, and is it different from other restaurants in Boston?
The juxtaposition of old and new—the arch that's within it. It doesn't look like any other in Boston.

What other restaurants have you designed, and how do experiences influence your work here?
L'Epailier, Mistral, the Federalist. Each project has its own story to tell, and I am always looking for new ways to explore what I'm feeling at the moment. The colors you see here are atypical for restaurants.

The blue ceiling came from the color of the sixteenth-century painting, the green (ubiquity) because fabric and that was the best color with the blue. It had a swankier answer for you!

The walls are stark, with no art. What made you decide, and how does it affect the feel of the space? I am a big believer in the necessity of art in a space—XV Beacon, for example. But here it's a strict budget, and if you can't do it right, I have to make it look right. Having been there recently, the hustle and bustle and restaurant leads me to think that it was a go after all. With so much going on, the art could have been fully appreciated.
It's Show Time...Teatro, the latest addition to Tremont Street's bevy of bistros, was a bit of a pressure cooker on a recent Wednesday night. A veritable who's-who of the food critics' circle converged on the restaurant in one coincidental swoop, as five food critics/writers happened to dine on the same evening. Annie Copps and Corby Kummer of Boston Magazine, Sheryl Julian of the Boston Globe, Mat Schaffer of the Boston Herald and an unidentified New York Times critic were all present. Teatro's incredulous management reports that while it was certainly a stressful situation, it was fun to see some of the city's top foodies present at the same time.