



SHADOW BOX

Ottawa's tree-lined Somerset Street is speckled with upscale restaurants and bistros located in refurbished 19th-century houses, their open terraces extending to the sidewalk. In the middle of the busiest block, a more modest red-brick house is partly obscured by a cube-shaped structure that dominates the street in the evening - a glowing beacon illuminating the shadow puppet patrons within.

When chef Derek Benitz and his wife, Meg McManus - owners of the adjacent Benitz Bistro - decided to open a second restaurant, they turned to New York expatriate Paul Kariouk for a more informal, bar-like establishment. Formerly an interior designer's flamboyant showroom (a ceiling of plate glass mirrors was left behind), the space was narrow, with limited windows. Benitz and McManus asked for an engaging design to enliven the simple interior, along with a strong street-market terrace.

Inside the resto-bar, named b/Side Wine and Small Plates, the dining room is dominated by a wall treatment that gives the impression of a silvery frozen mist. Kariouk recycled the ceiling mirrors to cover the west and front walls. Leaving a 15-centimetre gap, he installed a second envelope of full-height glass panels, laminated with a geometric silver leaf pattern and coated with polyurethane to create a translucent filter. At night, small halogen lights embedded along the floor between the two layers play off the back of the silver leaf, reflecting a pattern of white squares and rectangles on the mirrored surface. The effect is a three-dimensional yet ethereal wall whose components almost seem to float unsupported.

Outside, Kariouk constructed a fragile volume of three-metre-high steel poles and semi-transparent, cream-coloured panels of stretched theatrical scrim. During summer days, the shimmering fabric acts as a sunscreen against hot rays. Day or night, b/Side offers intimate cocoons in which to linger over Benitz's charcuterie platter or risotto primavera.

RHYS PHILLIPS

Above: Kariouk stretched theatrical scrim across steel posts to create a semi-private terrace. Intimate details include lucite frames attached to the poles that hold wine-glass candleholders. Right: A double envelope of mirror and glass on the dining room walls looks like a frenzied Tetris game. At the restaurant's rear, glass panels with scrim screens delineate a small event space.