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RESTAURANT

HOSPITALITY

Ideas For Full-Service Restaurants

A PENTON PUBLICATION

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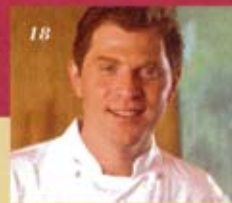
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Observer

INDUSTRY BUZZ & MORE
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TAKE A BITE: What kind of a place can you create if you have a \$15 million budget? Check out T-Rex Café in Kansas City.

Dyno-Mite!

The restaurant industry is home to plenty of visionaries, but few of them ever made the kind of instant impact Steve Schussler did with Rainforest Cafe. So impressive was his jungle-themed family eatery that Schussler was able to take it public in 1994, when just one unit was open. No one else had ever pulled off a trick like that before, nor has anyone done so since. Twelve years later, "Rainforest still ranks as the largest grossing per store chain in the country," its founder notes. "And most of the locations are still comping up quarter-to-quarter."

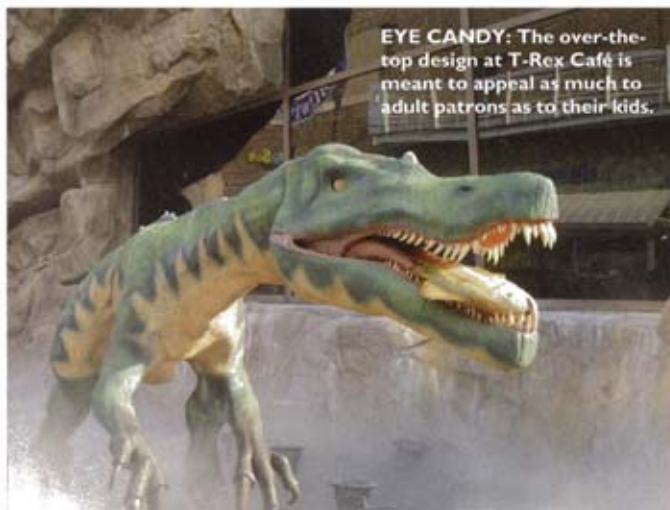
Schussler no longer owns Rainforest Cafe. Landry's Restaurants bought him out back in 2000. But Landry's must have liked what it saw in Schussler, because the company has partnered with him on a new venture: the lengthily named T-Rex Café: A Prehistoric Family Adventure, A Place to Eat, Shop Explore and Discover. This concept's first unit opened eight weeks ago in The Legends at Village West, a 750,000-sq.-ft. outdoor shopping and entertainment lifestyle center in Kansas City.

Is T-Rex Café just another eatertainment restaurant, kind of a Rainforest Café rethemed to feature dinosaurs? Schussler, who's been hatching this project for 10 years, says it's a lot more

PREHISTORIC PARTNERS: Landry's chairman Tilman Fertitta (l.) and T-Rex creator Steve Schussler.



DEBUT ^

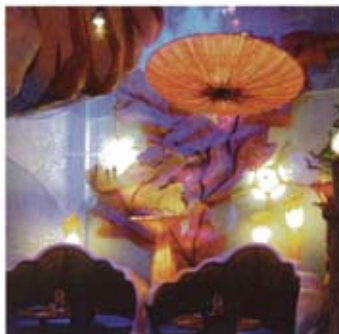


EYE CANDY: The over-the-top design at T-Rex Café is meant to appeal as much to adult patrons as to their kids.

than that. He describes this 375-seat complex as a unique attraction that features dining and retail in an interactive prehistoric environment. Arriving guests are greeted with life-sized animatronic dinosaurs, bubbling geysers, a fossil dig site—you read that right—and plenty more. A meteor shower hits the place every 19 minutes.

All that before guests sit down to eat in one of the equally exotic dining rooms, of which there are several. The options include the Ice Age Room, with its own Woolly Mammoth; the Sequoia Room with a Triceratops and its infants, plus a 2,000-gallon fish tank; and the Fern Forest Room, the Geo-Tech Room and others. Why so many different rooms? To encourage guests to return so they can savor a much-different dining experience in the same venue.

But will they? "If it's too much on the entertainment side, it becomes too much like a theme park," Technomic's Ron Paul says of places like Rainforest Café. The knock on Rainforest and its eatertainment brethren was that their food and service were so-so.



way." Schussler sold Landry's 80 percent of T-Rex, retaining a 20 percent interest for himself.

Landry's has big plans.

"T-Rex will attract visitors of all ages with its mix of great food and unique entertainment," says Tilman Fertitta, chairman/c.e.o. of Landry's. "This is just the first of many locations that we will open in the U.S. and internationally." Next up is a T-Rex unit that will go into Downtown Disney World in Orlando in 2008.

Long-range plans call for 19 T-Rex Cafés, with 10 of them out-

a rural village called Anandapur that evokes the Himalayan foothills of India or Nepal.

Named Ying and Yak, the pan-Asian concept will be "off the charts," Schussler promises. Ying and Yak will have table service for 300 and a 200-customer-capacity quick-service setup. "We've already started construction," Schussler adds.

Big plans, indeed. So how is it going in Kansas City so far? "The numbers are incredible," Schussler says. That's particularly so on the retail side of the restaurant, which accounts for 35 percent of overall volume. At T-Rex, Landry's and Schussler have partnered with Build-A-Bear Workshop to open a Build-A-Dino, Where Best Friendosaurs Are Made store located inside the T-Rex Café. The idea: kids buy one Build-A-Dino, then buy clothing and accessories to dress it up. Give this guy credit. He knows how to create retail-foodservice

"Landry's had the financial muscle and operational experience you need to do big-box restaurants the right way." —Steve Schussler

Kids always wanted to come back. But their parents? Not so much. Paul said adult patrons had a perception that the food wasn't worth what the restaurants were charging—at least by the second or third visit.

That's where Landry's comes in.

"At T-Rex, people will come once for the 'wow' and then come back for the excellent food and service," Schussler says. He recognized that he's great at providing that "wow," but that food and service are best left to experts like Landry's.

"It's hard to create something this enormous and give it up," Schussler says. "I needed \$100 million to build this out and I went with Landry's. They had the financial muscle as well as the operational experience you need to do big-box restaurants the right

side the U.S. Likely U.S. locations include Anaheim, Las Vegas, Times Square in New York City and Mohegan Sun casino in Connecticut. "We need 12-15 million visitors per year to make this work," Schussler says.

T-Rex won't be the last big project from Schussler. In fact, it won't even be his next one to open at Disney in Orlando. July 2007 will see the opening of a new Asian restaurant inside Disney's Animal Kingdom. Plans call for it to be themed as

synergies like no one else.

The lone down side in the early days of T-Rex Café: At 20,000 square feet, it's too small. "We're already tweaking this store to make it better," Schussler says, "and we already know that the next one at Disney has to be 10,000 square feet larger."

It's a nice problem to have. So will Schussler's second big idea be as powerful as his first? We hope so; word is he's signing 20-year leases on the next round of T-Rex locations.