

ART ADVENTURE | SAM DALKILIC-MIESTOWSKI



## Art, history join food on eatery's menu

Several months ago, I was invited to attend a VIP opening at the Industrial Revolution Eatery & Grille in Valparaiso, along with several Steeple Gallery patrons who are also steel enthusiasts. They included the president of a local machine shop, a structural engineer, and a collector of industrial art.

We were treated to samplings of many delicious entrees. My favorite was the name given to some of the industrial-themed dishes including molten cheese dip, architect salad, manufacturer mostaccioli, and the red, white and blue cheesecake.

I was thrilled that finally an individual with foresight opened up a restaurant that celebrated the heritage and importance of steel and incorporated every element of it from the floor to the cuisine to the salt and pepper shakers to the rooftop.

Mike Leeson, the owner and president of the restaurant, shares his original dream. I posed these questions to him. His answers are very enlightening.

**What was the concept of the Industrial Revolution Eatery & Grille?** "The concept was to create a place upscale yet industrial, completely custom and hand-built with only steel, wood, and clinker brick materials. A place to tribute the people that have built and protected this country from past and present. A place that becomes an experience along with outstanding flavorful gourmet food.

"The concept of the exterior was to be a building that was 'frozen in time' just before completion of construction during the early 1900s with the working men frozen in place.

"The conceptual goal was to be a place that would inspire and motivate patrons instead of the typical feeling of indigestion they may feel at other places."

**Why do you feel the concept is so important to the history of Northwest Indiana?** "Industry has been our base since the early days of steel production and has played a large role in the building of our nation. Northwest Indiana is filled with hard working people that take risks everyday to move themselves or others forward."

**How important do you feel is the artistic and aesthetic value of the Industrial Revolution E&G?** "Very important! This is a labor of love for America that is expressed through all the details of our aesthetics as well as the artistic elements."

**Can you name anything specific about the artwork you think the readers would appreciate?** "We would need more time... but I will share some. The most recognizable are the 17 total life-sized working statues sculpted by world-renowned artisan Sergio Furnari. Aside from that, I feel there is artistic value in the steelwork, hand-carved woodwork, hand-painted quotes, and the miniature statues."

**Describe the interior steel structures and who designed them.** "The interior steel structures are part art and part steel fabricated the old way. It is very labor-intensive fabrication that we 'bloomed' out the rust over several weeks and then sealed. The steel was all fabricated by Synergy Steel Structures out of our East Chicago facility. I designed the interior along with my construction consultant, Bryan Siewin."

**Who was the artist who hand painted all of the quotes in the restaurant?** "A local Crown Point artist/muralist, Jason Reinheart, painted every letter to our specific font to complete

the hand painted quotes."

**Can you share anything about the food with us?** "We have outstanding Chefs or 'Engineers of Flavor' and have developed a great line of brick oven pizzas, pot roast, specialty sandwiches, seafoods, burgers, entrees, steaks, salads, appetizers and desserts."

**Would you describe the reproductions of the miniature sculptures available that are for sale at the restaurant?** "They are miniature replicas of the famous photograph 'Lunch Atop a Skyscraper' of iron workers eating lunch 800 feet from the ground. They are on sale through us while initial supplies last for half the price of any retail cost available in two sizes, including a steel hanging beam and artist-signed certificate of authenticity.

"The restaurant will be having our official grand opening in two to three weeks and will have the artist sculptor Sergio Furnari there to sign pictures and meet the industrial enthusiasts."

**What is your favorite quote painted in the Industrial Revolution Eatery and Grille?** "If we did all the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astonish ourselves," Thomas Edison."

Coming soon in Art Adventure: A feature on sculptor Sergio Furnari.

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A statue salutes military, police and fire emblems.



The life-sized sculpture "The Concrete Finisher" by Sergio Furnari, outside the Industrial Revolution Eatery and Grille.



A partial view of the dining area, with vintage black and white poster reproductions of steel-themed photographs.